Making the Connection to a Diverse, Qualified Workforce

CEWD Member Showcase
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Introduction

We all know the importance of having a diverse workforce, and the importance is founded in some fundamental beliefs:

• Everyone benefits when our workforce mirrors the communities we serve.
• Diversity of thought broadens our problem solving, creative thinking, and innovative capabilities, all of which help our companies prosper.
• Real progress in improving diversity, like quality and safety, must start at the top and be reinforced company-wide.

Research and more than a decade of experience by the Center for Energy Workforce Development (CEWD) has taught us that the strategic linking of workforce development strategies improves results and strengthens the overall impact of a company’s approach in creating a diverse, qualified pipeline. We also know there are integrated strategies we can take to build diversity into every step of the energy education pathway and retain diverse, qualified individuals once they’re through the door.

Those strategies begin with understanding the Get Into Energy (GIE) Career Pathways Model, a roadmap for entry into careers in the Electric and Natural Gas energy industry. Successful implementation is dependent on partnerships between energy companies, educators, and other training providers to ensure that youth, women, military, and transitioning workers can successfully enter energy careers.

Equally important is the work that happens internally as companies search for qualified talent. Applicant tracking systems and recruiters screen thousands of applicants to find those who can meet company requirements, while management searches for ways to keep employees engaged and retained.

The creation of a diverse, qualified workforce requires focus in every phase of the talent pipeline to ensure diversity and quality of those coming in, and retention of those already employed. It’s about making the connection between internal and external efforts to achieve the full impact of all initiatives and strategically linking all initiatives to diversity objectives.
CEWD members are seeing results all along this energy education pathway by making strategic linkages, and thinking about the process in phases:

- **Starting Early** by specifically engaging diverse populations in elementary and middle school initiatives.
- **Keeping Up the Momentum** with diverse populations in high school by building energy competencies that lead to postsecondary success and a career.
- **Providing Support in Postsecondary** with career navigation, scholarships, mentoring, and internships.
- **Retaining Diverse Talent**, in part by creating an environment that supports, promotes, and rewards diversity.

This booklet highlights a number of best practices CEWD members are using today to maximize the power of strategically linked initiatives as they work to build and retain a diverse, qualified workforce.

For more in-depth information about how your company can implement successful diversity strategies, see CEWD’s new booklet, *Making the Connection to a Diverse, Qualified Workforce*. 
Starting Early

These best practices highlight programs in middle and high school that build awareness of energy careers and develop energy competencies among diverse student populations, specifically females and people of color.

SEEKing Ways to Energize Diverse Youth
San Diego Gas & Electric

Ten years ago, the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) created a camp they hoped would generate greater interest in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields among diverse youth. The Summer Engineering Experience for Kids (SEEK)—a free three-week program run by NSBE college students—quickly took off on the East Coast and is now offered at 17 sites in 16 cities across the United States, serving more than 15,000 students in grades 3-12.

In 2011, San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E) led the effort to bring the first SEEK camp to the West Coast, said Nancy Smith-Taylor, Director of Diversity & Workforce Management for SDG&E. “As an employer, we were concerned there wouldn’t be enough engineers in the pipeline to fill the future workforce needs,” she said. “Programs like SEEK engage students in STEM education at a young age and teach them it can be fun and rewarding.”

The camp is run by NSBE members who are college students, who serve as mentors and receive a stipend for their participation. Each week, the students participate in a different hands-on design project that requires them to work in teams to develop a product while utilizing fundamental math and science principles.

In 2012, SDG&E’s Chief Operating Officer challenged three of the company’s electrical engineers who were NSBE members to come up with an activity that focused on renewable energy and could be implemented through the SEEK camp curriculum.

The trio collaborated and built a mini-solar car, developing a lesson plan and construction directions, as well.

“Our engineers taught the module to the mentors, who then educated the students and challenged the students to design their own cars,” said Smith-Taylor. “The kids built the models. They learned basic math and power engineering concepts, and then they raced their customized cars. Now that solar is so big, this project really helps NSBE keep the camp up to date.”

The camp runs Monday-Friday for three weeks, with a portion of each Friday set aside for the students to present what they’ve learned to their friends and family, Smith-Taylor said. “We feel that involving the parents will help the child stay with that STEM learning after the camp is over.”
In addition to the hands-on activities, students learn STEM terminology and basic engineering concepts. Students are assessed at the beginning and end of camp to see how much they’ve learned. “A large percentage increased their vocabulary and knowledge of engineering concepts,” Smith-Taylor said. Camps are available to students in grades 3-5 and grades 5-7, with activities geared toward each age group.

The camps are a great way to get kids interested in careers that are vital to SDG&E, Smith-Taylor said. “We are an engineering company,” she said. “We’re always going to need engineers and we want an inclusive group of engineers. By getting kids started so young, we are helping to build this pipeline.

“Diversity is imbedded in our company’s DNA, so supporting inclusive programs in the K-12 population—specifically those involving science, technology, engineering, and math—helps to contribute to the development of a diverse future workforce with skills that many in our region will need,” she said.

iCan: Sparking Interest in STEM Among Middle School Girls  
Southern Company, Alabama Power

In 2017, women make up approximately 13% of the workforce for engineering occupations—a percentage utilities have been striving to change by introducing girls to engineering careers in the energy industry in a variety of fun and engaging ways. One such program—iCan—was created in 2008, by Southern Company subsidiary Alabama Power.

iCan creates a fun, girls-only environment for learning while sparking an interest in engineering. The program’s primary goal is to empower and encourage young women through focusing on the rewards and benefits of being an engineer.

“The utility piloted the program with a pizza party for 7th graders and had them build towers with toothpicks and marshmallows, asking them to compete to see whose tower would be tallest and stand the longest. The idea was to provide a fun and competitive project that demonstrated engineering skills in a way they could relate to. Additional projects have been added since then to match each of the engineering disciplines.

“Girls are more likely to be interested in a career if they feel it will have an impact on the world, she said. “They had no idea that when an earthquake occurs, engineers are there to help rebuild.”

Through the iCan program, Southern Company created partnerships with the schools that involve informal mentoring. The program includes hands-on activities and field trips, as well as a girls’ engineering conference. Female engineers from the company lead the activities, and also provide a workshop for parents. Other activities have included designing fashion shoes (civil engineering) and making lip gloss (chemical engineering).
Once a year, they take the girls to a generating plant where they are retrofitting and cleaning the air. “They see female leadership all over the place,” Blakley said, adding that the program now includes 200 volunteers from the utility. Southern Company also holds a demonstration event to which parents are invited, so that they can see what the girls are learning.

A CEWD toolkit for implementing an iCan Engineering Program can be found at http://cewd.org/toolkits/icanengineering.php.

**Inspiring Girls Through Camp GADgET**

*Southern Company, Nicor Gas*

Most young girls don’t grow up thinking, “One day, I’m going to be a natural gas utility worker!” But they might, if only they knew about the great career opportunities available to them. Nicor Gas is trying to make sure that they do.

Members of its Women’s Employee Resource Group—which goes by the name Inspire—got together five years ago and developed a half-day presentation showcasing all the jobs women can do in the natural gas industry. Then they incorporated that presentation into a two-week summer camp put on by Triton Community College for female students ages 12-16.

The camp, Girls Adventuring in Design, Engineering, and Technology (GADgET), focuses on math, science, and robotics activities for young girls and exposes them to a wide range of STEM careers and activities. The team from Nicor Gas that presents to the girls includes a diverse group of women who work as industrial and mechanical engineers, in environmental, health, safety, and construction.

After first talking with campers about how they came to choose a STEM career, the team explains the underground distribution system (including a “show and tell” of the components of the system), demonstrates how gas is stored underground, and shares the importance of safety precautions such as facility locating and knowing what to do if someone smells gas, among other activities.

At this year’s camp, Women in Construction—a subgroup of Inspire—sent seven women from Nicor Gas to speak to the girls about nontraditional jobs in engineering, field operations, instructional design (training), and other fields. They brought “on the job” pictures of themselves—on backhoes, boring machines, and other equipment—and asked the girls to see if they could guess their jobs.

“The presentation morphed into these women talking about the cool jobs you don’t necessarily think of in the natural gas industry, which pay well and are really dynamic positions for women,” said Margi Schiemann, Director of Infrastructure Programs and Support for Nicor Gas.
Schiemann said Nicor Gas had also expanded its commitment to the camp with a $5,000 unrestricted grant. Funds can be used to provide scholarships for girls whose families lack the means to send them or for further development of camp activities.

The team’s presentation, now refined to two hours, has also been adapted for use in other venues and for other audiences. For example, it has been used as part of the STEM Career Expo at Fermi National Laboratory (a particle accelerator), during which both male and female students visit tables dedicated to a variety of STEM careers, and also at the Museum of Science and Industry’s “Science Works” STEM Career Day. Last year, Nicor Gas employees participated in more than 50 STEM career awareness events reaching nearly 40,000 students.

Schiemann said presentations such as these, targeted at young girls, are critical for helping the company reach its goal of developing a diverse workforce pipeline.

“We’re trying to plant the seed earlier in young people that the energy industry, the natural gas company in particular, is not your grandpa’s company; it’s your daughter’s company, your sister’s company, your company. We want to expose them to the fact that there is a career path in energy and specifically at Nicor Gas,” she said.

**Reaching Out to Young Women and Men of Color: Energy Career Days**

**Nebraska Energy Workforce Consortium**

Raising awareness of energy careers and attracting more diverse, qualified candidates to them are two of the biggest challenges faced by utilities today. Targeted career days offer energy companies a way to address both of these issues head on.

Based on a successful model used by the Oregon Tradeswomen for more than 20 years, the Nebraska Energy Workforce Consortium (NEWC) created a Women in Trades Career Day four years ago to spark interest in the energy field among middle school and high school girls in the Omaha area. The one-day event, featuring hands-on demonstrations and activities, was so successful the consortium has now expanded it to include a second day of events geared toward young men of color.

“In general, the make-up of the workforce at our companies is predominantly male and white,” said Joyce Cooper, Workforce Development Manager of Omaha Public Power District (OPPD), “even though Omaha is the most diverse community in this state. Even with that going for us, our employees are only 21 percent female and for people of color, we’re at 11 percent.”

Cooper said the Energy Career Days give them an opportunity to increase awareness of opportunities within the energy industry among the diverse population of young people who live within their service territory. OPPD and others in the consortium are striving to generate a more representative pool of job candidates down the line.

“We’re finding that students are not even aware of what we do,” she said. “We want to immerse them in our world, so they can remember who we are and what we do when they’re beginning to think of potential careers.”
The Energy Career Days for young men and women are held back-to-back in October at an OPPD service center and now include workshops focused on the types of jobs in greatest demand, based on an analysis conducted by the consortium, said Cooper. Some of those high-demand jobs include engineering, field technicians, plant operators, and cyber security specialists. Each member of the consortium—which includes OPPD, Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD), Lincoln Electric System (LES), Black Hills Energy (BHE), and the Metropolitan Utilities District (MUD)—conducts hands-on activities for students, specific to these high-demand jobs. The workshops also include participation from the utilities’ educational partners, who talk to students about the degree programs they offer that can help prepare them for these jobs.

“This provides a really nice way of connecting the dots for students,” said Cooper.

OPPD decided to host the Career Days at one of its training centers so students could see for themselves what’s required—such as climbing a utility pole—to actually do the jobs they’re learning about, said Cooper. “They can see everything in operation.”

Recruiting for both Career Days is done through the Omaha Public School (OPS) system, where the student population is 72 percent people of color. Besides working directly with the administrators at OPS, students are recruited from other local school districts, said Cooper. “We also partner with organizations such as the Urban League of Nebraska, Partnership 4 Kids, and Avenue Scholars to help to recruit students for the two Career Days,” she said.

Roughly 100 young women attended the Careers in Energy Day last year and 30 young men attended the first Careers in Energy Day for males. Cooper said she expects the number of boys to double this year and hopes to attract about 120 girls.

In addition to the Career Days, OPPD sends career ambassadors to schools in the service territory to engage students in classes throughout the year. The 24-member employee outreach team includes women and people of color who are also involved in the company’s Employee Resource Groups. OPPD also hopes to develop an after-school program for students.

“We are committed to better reflect the customers that we serve, and little by little, we are making progress.”

Joyce Cooper
Co-Chair, NEWC
Keeping Up the Momentum

These best practices highlight programs that connect high school and postsecondary education, providing a seamless transition. They enable students to confirm their fit for an energy career through work-based experiences, build relationships with energy company employees, accelerate earning credentials through dual-enrollment, and support students through scholarships.

Energy Tech High School: Creating a School from the Ground Up to Keep the Talent Pipeline Filled

Consolidated Edison and National Grid

As anyone in the utility industry knows, some jobs are harder to fill than others, and positions for skilled, technical workers are some of the toughest. So, when the City University of New York and NYC Department of Education sought partners six years ago for a new school for students interested in STEM careers, Con Edison and National Grid were eager to jump on board. The grades 9-14 Early College and Career School model garnered so much interest from the utility industry, in fact, that the utility companies joined with secondary and postsecondary partners to create a school of their own.

And so began plans for Energy Tech High School, a school designed to guide students down technical career pathways and straight into the utility labor force. Launched in 2013 through a partnership between Con Edison, National Grid, LaGuardia Community College, and the NYC Department of Education, Energy Tech is a six-year, early college career and technical high school in New York City that prepares students from all five boroughs for high-demand STEM careers.

With a student body that has 85 percent diverse representation, the school will also help its utility partners achieve another goal: Creating a workforce that better represents the communities they serve.

“Our goal is to create a diversified talent pipeline as well as to increase representation of women pursuing STEM careers in the utility sector,” said Tom Aloisi, Section Manager for Recruitment at Con Edison. “We’re creating a presence right there in the neighborhood with this school. We’ll be getting a continuous pipeline of talent, students who understand our business and understand our company. It's going to provide graduating students with viable opportunities to fill technical positions. It will also give students an opportunity to learn about our industry and be positioned to be successful in pursuing technical careers in the utility industry.”

Energy Tech’s student body is 54 percent Hispanic, 18 percent Asian, 10 percent African American, 25 percent female, and 77 percent economically disadvantaged, according to data provided by the school.

Energy Tech also includes a substantially revamped curriculum, developed with input from the utilities, said Energy Tech High School Principal Hope Barter.
“The partnership with Con Edison and National Grid is really unique in the scope of school partnerships,” she said. “They’ve helped us create the school from the ground up.”

That meant creating 60 percent new coursework, after determining that what students had been learning at the community college didn’t align with what the utilities needed them to know, said Aloisi. He believes that misalignment in the curriculum contributed to the high failure rate of associate’s degree graduates taking the company’s pre-hiring aptitude tests.

“To meet our operating needs, we had to hire students with four-year engineering degrees for technical positions that really only require a two-year associate’s degree,” he said. “However, they don’t stay in those jobs very long, they move on within the corporation to positions with greater responsibility. While that’s great, it creates a revolving door.”

Energy Tech students can follow one of five different utility-tailored pathways leading to either an AAS degree in energy technology (either electric or mechanical) or an AS degree in electrical, mechanical, or civil engineering. They are not required to pay tuition for any of the postsecondary classes, which are offered through LaGuardia Community College. Slightly more than 100 students are accepted each year, out of 1,700 who apply, said Barter.

Barter said Energy Tech students take general education classes in the 9th grade, but can begin to take college classes as early as 10th grade. By the 12th year, they are beginning to specialize in either mechanical or electrical courses. When the first class completed 12th grade this year, 99 percent of them had earned at least three college credits and 15 students had earned 31-40 college credits during their high school years. The last two years of school are spent on the college campus and in internships.

Con Edison provides paid summer internships for Energy Tech students as well as spring co-op programs, said Aloisi. After completing their junior year, seven students were hired for summer internships in 2016. The following spring, another seven were given internships. Five of those stayed on for the summer, along with another 16 new interns. The students worked across a wide range of departments, including construction services, design engineering, gas engineering, transmission, steam operations, and substation operations.

“All of these areas have needs for technical positions,” said Aloisi. Giving the students experience through internships and co-ops not only helps the students, he explained, “it helps us continue to get a more robust workforce pipeline.”

“I learned that there are a lot of ways to be an engineer—you can sit at a desk and design or you can go out to sites to see how projects are going in the field and report back,” said Maya Mohamed, a current 12th grade student and summer intern who worked for six weeks in the Gas Engineering department at Con Edison’s Van Nest facility in the Bronx. “I met the chief engineer and he was willing to consider my opinion as he would with any full-time employee. Not only did I gain transferable experience, but I felt like I fit in.”
When students complete their six years at Energy Tech, they’ll graduate ready to take Con Edison’s aptitude tests and apply for jobs as Junior Designers or Junior Electric Technicians, Aloisi said. The first class is expected to graduate in 2019.

“They will be eligible for immediate hire,” he said. “These students are getting exactly the training that they need. Part of this whole concept is that these students, upon hire, will progress with on-the-job training and move from Junior Electric Technician to Electric Technician to Senior Electric Technician. There is a prescribed job family for advancement. It also stabilizes the company, so it’s a win all around.”

In addition to curriculum development and internships, the school’s utility partners have provided a wide range of assistance, said Barter, including externships for teachers to get to know the industry better, field trips to company worksites, and mentoring students on a regular basis.

Con Edison and National Grid together provide 63 mentors who spend one day each month meeting with students in small groups, talking about career readiness, what it’s like to work at a utility, their personal career pathways, and other topics. “It has had a great impact on the students’ non-academic growth,” said Barter.

Barter added that the utilities have also helped with student recruitment, particularly in trying to attract more young women.

“Con Edison and National Grid have sent female employees to help us with recruiting,” she said. “They helped us design print media and talking points for open houses and create mentoring groups for young women. It has had a tremendous impact,” she said, boosting female enrollment from 15 percent of the student body to 24 percent in the current freshman class.

And, she said, Con Edison has provided financial assistance that allowed the school to open a brand new engineering lab this fall. “This is providing an incredible opportunity for students to have access to more sophisticated tools as they advance,” she said.

Con Edison has committed more than $250,000 in capital and programmatic funding for the school, providing for the construction and outfitting of the new engineering lab, a math support program, and the school’s FIRST Robotics team. In addition, employees dedicate substantial in-kind hours volunteering as mentors, serving on the school’s planning committee, reviewing curricula, and more.
Fast Track to a Skilled Trade Career Pathway for Diverse Students

DTE Energy

William Palmer was always a good student, particularly in math, but never really enjoyed being in school. So, when he learned about an internship program at DTE Energy that could put him on a fast track to a STEM career, he didn’t hesitate to apply.

“What appealed to me was that I could spend about a year and a half in school and come out with a career that I could rely on, not just a job,” said Palmer, 18, a recent high school graduate from Detroit.

Palmer is one of 24 students who recently completed DTE’s Skilled Trades Training and Preparation Program, an eight-week paid summer internship with the utility that, when combined with follow-up courses at Henry Ford College, prepares students for an apprentice position in one of five skilled trades. Students earn up to 24 credits as well as the Energy Industry Fundamentals (EIF) certificate.

The program, part of a larger DTE program that employs about 500 students each summer, recruits students from two Detroit schools with high minority populations. The program generates greater opportunities for those otherwise unexposed to the energy industry, while also helping to create a more diverse candidate pool, said Deborah Majeski, Manager of DTE’s Center of Excellence and project owner for the internship program.

“When you look at the city of Detroit, we have a lot of new growth taking place,” Majeski said. “As companies perform work within the city, there is a requirement to hire Detroit residents or the companies can be fined. The challenge is finding qualified applicants. To improve the overall workforce pipeline, it is critical to focus on increasing the opportunities for those individuals that did not have that opportunity otherwise.”

“We recognize the need to fill the gap of skilled workers and technicians in Michigan industry and the need to prepare them for the good, quality jobs we have that will help support a vibrant city and state,” said Diane Antishin, Vice President of Human Resources Operations at DTE. Introducing students who lack exposure to energy careers to these pathways “gives them a mental map for what kind of jobs are out there, how to get the right training and the right degrees.”

Along with 20 other students, Palmer is now enrolled in a three-semester program at Henry Ford that will provide him with stackable credentials in the energy field. The program includes two semesters of general coursework and one in a specific trade, either in gas, construction, or electric. The program is funded through a combination of federal student aid and Detroit Promise dollars, available to students as long as they remain in school full-time and earn good grades.

During the internship at DTE, the students (15 high school graduates and nine rising seniors) are assigned mentors who talk to them about energy career opportunities and what they need to do to pursue those careers. They are also given assistance preparing for the placement test for Henry Ford College, as well as training in soft skills such as resume writing and how to make oral presentations in a professional setting.
Malik Phillips, 17, said he appreciated the soft skills portion of the training because it filled a gap in his experience. "I never had a job before and this helped prepare me for real life," he said. "Every day I have to talk to people here and change how I talk in the workplace. What I learned was how to connect with people in the real world."

Majeski said interns are assigned to a skilled trade in one of many areas of the company—gas, electrical, and distribution services, for example—and work with mentors in that field on a weekly basis. They take assessments in math and English at the beginning of the program and are given academic assistance as needed each Friday. “The rest of the week is spent learning the trade,” she said.

“We provide them with the proper equipment, with uniforms and boots and transportation,” she said, for example by providing city bus passes. They are also provided with lunch and snacks.

“This is a great way for them to see if this is a career path they want and provides them with the motivation to do well at school so they can follow these pathways,” she said. “These students are really grabbing hold of this. We know that some have more challenges than others, but even those with challenges really want to do the work. They see an opportunity to be with a large company and make really good money. Once they get an apprenticeship, they can make six digits.”

Part of the program’s goal is to help students transition from “a high school mentality to a corporate mentality,” Majeski said. “For example, when they meet the company CEO, they learn that they cannot be in there slouching or chatting with their friends, they can’t be on their phones.”

Tracy DiSanto, co-chair of the Michigan Energy Workforce Development Consortium and Manager of Workforce Planning and Analytics at DTE, said job openings at DTE will grow in the next decade.

“Over the next 10 years, as much as 50 percent of DTE’s workforce will be leaving, mostly due to retirements,” DiSanto said. “That means job openings at DTE and those students with a skilled trades certification in hand will likely have a leg up on those without that qualification.”

The program appears to be achieving its goals: Both Palmer and Phillips said they were attracted to linework and hoped to learn more about it, even though the work can be strenuous and potentially hazardous.

“It’s kind of dangerous,” said Phillips, “but I like to take risks, to be honest. When I was on my worksite, the linemen would come in every day and tell me about what they did. It’s just a feeling that they gave me; I really want to do it.”
Legacy I³ Model Grows Local, Diverse, and Highly Qualified Talent

Multiple CEWD Members and TCI Solutions, LLC

The Center for Energy Workforce Development (CEWD) focuses its Get Into Energy Career Pathways Model on five demographics: Youth, Low Income Young Adults, Women, Military, and Transitioning Workers. The Legacy I³ Model provides one of the most effective examples of a Career Pathways Model for Low Income Young Adults.

Developed in 2012 by TCI Solutions, LLC, the Legacy I³ Model is designed to systematically address the factors that cause industries to falter in attracting, developing, and retaining qualified, local, diverse young adults. It is based on a collaborative approach that synchronizes and leverages existing resources from industry, education, government, and support organizations and prepares high school juniors and seniors for entry-level employment or further education. The model, which is applicable to industries beyond energy, offers advantages to companies by providing highly qualified, diverse hires while reducing their average cost to hire compared to traditional recruiting and pre-employment testing approaches.

Legacy I³ is being implemented in Minnesota with support from Xcel Energy and the Minnesota Energy Consortium and in Nebraska with support from Omaha Public Power District. A Legacy pilot was conducted with Arizona Public Service Company in early 2015, where the program has now shifted to train students for jobs in manufacturing, healthcare, and general skilled trades to meet regional hiring needs. Implementations for the energy industry are currently being considered in Virginia, Michigan, and Illinois.

Of the 124 students who had graduated from Legacy programs in Arizona and Minnesota as of June 2017, about 80 percent are either currently interning or working in their field or are in postsecondary programs pursuing degrees. Roughly half are pursuing energy careers or degrees, with the others engaged in manufacturing, healthcare, or other skilled trades.

Legacy I³ works by pairing diverse and geographically local high school students—and their parents—with industry mentors in a long-term, holistic approach that focuses on helping them improve their job preparation and job-seeking skills and connecting them to existing community support resources that allow them to stay on track.

Legacy I³ teaches students and their families about the energy industry, creating a positive image of the industry and building excitement about possible career paths. It provides character and skills training after school and on weekends, and connects families with community-based agencies that provide support services (such as financial training, daycare services, transportation assistance, English language classes, GED classes, and links to financial assistance). Students are paired with industry mentors who show them what it's like to work in the energy industry through tours and presentations and help them with resume writing and interview skills. Students are then better prepared to master skills training at community colleges or four-year degree programs (in engineering, for example). The model can be particularly attractive to State Energy Workforce Consortia seeking strategies to increase the diversity of their candidates.

Entering the Legacy program “was the best thing I ever did in my life. I knew that I wanted to be an engineer, but until Legacy, I didn’t know how to get there. I didn’t know how to get scholarships. They helped me build my own path. They showed me the steps.”

Laura Varela Yanez
EMCC
Deon Clark, CEO of TCI Solutions, said Legacy I³ requires participation from each of the following groups: secondary schools, which provide the students; postsecondary institutions, which provide the skills training; industry, which provides the jobs, the mentors, and the funding; state and local governments, which provide a variety of resources; community support organizations, which provide wraparound services to families; and the TCI Solutions team, which provides character and soft skills training and connects the students to all of the other organizations to ensure nothing falls through the cracks. Perhaps most importantly, students’ parents or guardians are required to participate.

Working with young people, many of whom are living in poverty, has unique challenges. One challenge is avoiding labels. Often, companies feel like they are being told that they need to “do the right thing” by giving the young people a chance. But companies are looking for the best candidates, not candidates who simply need a chance. “We remove the label from the candidates,” Clark said. “This is not a charitable thing; companies are gaining high-quality candidates, young people who live in their service areas. They are local, diverse, highly qualified, and aspire to work for the companies that are based in their own communities. These are the candidates we are preparing—nothing more, nothing less.”

Clark emphasized that students selected for the Legacy program have the intelligence and drive to succeed, but may simply lack the guidance or exposure often obtained by others in families that have historically pursued postsecondary education.

Entering the Legacy program, said Laura Varela Yanez, an Estrella Mountain Community College (EMCC) student, “was the best thing I ever did in my life. I knew that I wanted to be an engineer, but until Legacy, I didn’t know how to get there. I didn’t know how to get scholarships. They helped me build my own path. They showed me the steps.”

“The soft skills that came with the program really helped me out,” added Juan Panduro, an Arizona State University student. “I wasn’t sure how to present myself or put together a portfolio. Everything they taught me, I used it in my scholarship applications. Almost every scholarship I got was because of how I presented myself. I owe that to Legacy.”

Abdiaiz Abdinasir, 21, who recently graduated from the Legacy program in Minnesota, is now enrolled in a program at Dakota County Technical College (DCTC) that will put him on track to become a lineworker within two years. “Before Legacy, I was interested in the electrical field,” he said, but was unsure how to get on that career path. Legacy showed him how to set a goal and follow it through to fruition. “I was kind of lost. This is the opportunity I’ve been looking for for a long time. Legacy showed me how to take action to make my dream happen.”

For more information about the Minnesota Legacy I³ Initiative program, see the CEWD Member Best Practices Guide.
Providing Support in Postsecondary

Internships are a highly effective practice for supporting a qualified, diverse pipeline as they prepare to enter the job market. Find out how one company is utilizing INROADS to help.

Making INROADS in Creation of a More Diverse Pipeline

JEA

Two years ago, Pat Sams needed to fill an accounting co-op position at Jacksonville, Florida-based utility JEA. As Manager of Emerging Workforce Strategies, it’s her job to find at least 25 students each year to fill co-op positions across a wide range of disciplines, including numerous engineering fields as well as in finance, technology, accounting, and communications.

But none of the accounting candidates whose resumes she had reviewed seemed suitable. So Sams did what she always does when she’s unable to find the right fit—she picked up the phone and called her contact at INROADS. “I told them I needed a great accounting student,” she said. “And they gave me Florence, and she has proven phenomenal.”

INROADS is a Chicago-based organization created to increase ethnically diverse employees in corporate management. The organization selects students from more than 400 colleges and universities and places them in degree-relevant internships or co-op positions, in addition to providing them with 60 hours of workplace training and one-on-one coaching.

Sams gets a handful of students from INROADS for her company’s co-op program each year, in addition to doing her own recruiting. She said it’s an efficient means of finding not only talent, but diverse talent, which can be challenging in northeast Florida. “I can call my INROADS manager and say I need an environmental engineer—better if it’s a woman, even better if it’s a woman of color.”

Florence Ouattara learned about INROADS when a representative came to her campus at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in Tallahassee, where she was studying accounting. “They gave me some training and helped me with my resume,” she said, “and then they introduced me to JEA because I was looking for a company that was involved in the community. That means a lot to me.”

During the 2016 CEWD Annual Summit, INROADS Chief Business Development Officer Harland Abraham said his organization works with companies of all sizes, helping them find ethnically diverse students for a wide range of internship positions and providing year-round training to the students, who must maintain a GPA of at least 3.0 to participate. The highly competitive program receives about 13,000 applications each year for 1,200-1,600 internships across the nation.
“Some of our corporate partners have been with us 30-40 years,” he said. “We provide them with pipeline talent who work for them full-time and have stuck around.”

Ouattara said she asked to return to JEA’s co-op program for a second summer because she was given meaningful work to do during her first summer there. “I wasn’t just left alone; I was involved on the team, doing work that was beneficial to JEA. I felt really, really included and that’s the reason I wanted to come back.”

During her second co-op stint, the 23-year-old was given even greater responsibilities, said Sams. Ouattara was also given a bump in pay—up to $16 an hour, which is the top of the pay scale—because of her past experience and her status as a senior. “She could do substantive project work, and that is exactly what her evaluation said.”

The 12-13 week co-op program includes hands-on experience for all of the students who participate, said Sams. It often leads to offers for full-time employment after the students graduate, “if it’s a fit for them and for us and if we have the opportunity available.”

Ouattara plans to attend business school after she graduates in December, but hopes to return to JEA when she’s ready to work full-time. “I wouldn’t try to come back a second time if I wasn’t trying to have a strong relationship with JEA,” she said. “I hope that they have a position for me when I’m ready and that the timing is right. Fingers crossed.”
Retaining Diverse Talent

These best practices highlight the impacts of Employee Resources Groups (ERGs) at three different companies, and how those groups influence recruiting and hiring while also serving an important retention role as ERG members provide outreach to and relationship development with diverse populations in the community.

SheServed: Female Veterans Recruiting Their Own
Commonwealth Edison Company

Commonwealth Edison Company (ComEd) wants to hire more veterans and more women, but doing both at the same time can be tricky. Female veterans make up just 6 percent of the company’s veteran employees, according to self-reported data from internal company surveys. And they make up just 8 percent of new veteran hires for 2017.

“Working in field positions at utilities has been considered a nontraditional role for women,” explained Julie Savoia, a Senior Recruiter for ComEd. “And female veterans have some unique needs that can make them difficult to reach.”

Savoia learned about those needs when attending a ceremony at which a female veteran spoke about the plight of homeless female veterans and the challenges they faced. The speaker inspired her to look for new ways to reach out to female veterans and introduce them to career opportunities in energy.

What began as an idea for a simple recruiting event with information on energy careers and tips for doing interviews quickly grew into a much larger endeavor, incorporating the aid of two of Exelon’s ERGs. Together they created a day-long event called SheServed, featuring company speakers, workshops, a luncheon, a clothing boutique, and multiple supervised, child-friendly activities to overcome any daycare challenges the women might face.

“I worked with Exelon’s Corporate Talent Acquisition Team to spread the invitation to a large network of veteran organizations,” Savoia said, such as National Able Network—Veterans Forward, Roll Call Chicagoland, Illinois Joining Forces, and SVA—Illinois. The event was supported by parent company Exelon’s veteran ERGs (Exelon Militaries Actively Connected, or EMAC) and the Network of Exelon Women, or NEW.

While the women attended workshops on resume writing and interviewing, their children enjoyed STEM-related activities in ComEd’s Smart Energy Hub, where the children were able to see how much power they could generate while riding a bike. The children also learned about safety and were able to take home giveaways such as hard hats and backpacks filled with coloring books.
Having learned that proper business attire was often financially out of reach for female veterans, Savoia asked NEW members to organize a clothing drive to stock an onsite boutique of gently used career-appropriate clothing, which the women could take home for free.

“We rented clothing racks and set up dressing rooms,” Savoia said. “We ironed and pressed the clothing. And we stocked the boutique with clothes, purses, and shoes.”

Savoia said 38 women and 19 children attended the event, which was held on a Saturday in April. The day began with four ComEd speakers—all women who were also veterans and now working in energy careers.

Erica Borggren, ComEd Vice President of Communications, was one of them. Borggren, an Army veteran, served seven years in active duty before transitioning to the civilian workforce, where she then worked for the governor of Illinois. Before joining Exelon, she said, “my entire background was in public service. I loved being part of a mission that matters.”

Her dedication to public service is what brought her to the energy industry, Borggren said she told the women. “I wanted something that would make me feel as if what I was doing day in and day out was meaningful,” she said. “When you’re the company that keeps the lights on and you’re the only one that does that, it really matters. And that’s a big part of the cultural draw for veterans, especially female veterans—being part of something that matters.”

Another common characteristic for military and energy sector workers is the experience of “being put into a scenario that is demanding and something you’ve never done before, and having to lead,” Borggren said. “That constant stretching is part of the experience: Knowing how to be comfortable with the uncomfortable. That really resonated with the women there.”

The event also included a presentation from Dawson Technical Institute, which offers a certificate program for overhead lineworkers. “They’ve also been trying to increase the number of women in their program going into this field,” said Savoia. By the end of the day, 11 women who attended the presentation expressed interest in the program. “That’s huge for Dawson,” Savoia said, “because they have not had a lot of women attend this program or earn this certification.”

Several other women followed up with ComEd to pursue job openings. “Some of them made it to the interviewing stage,” Savoia said, but explained they would likely require more training before making it to the hiring stage.

Savoia said she hopes to repeat the event again next year. Exelon may also replicate the event at some of its other locations, such as Baltimore, Philadelphia, or Washington, D.C.

In the meantime, the company has learned much from the experience and will be incorporating what it learned into its general recruiting practices, said Recruiting Program Specialist Aaron LeMay.

For example, he’ll look to identify additional female veterans who work for the company to play a more active role in career fairs that target veterans, he said. “It’s one thing to have a recruiter at the event, but if you have a female veteran there, they can have peer-to-peer talks and deal with issues women veterans are most concerned about.

“SheServed really changed the way I and our recruiting team think about recruiting and attracting talent,” he said, “to keep more women veterans in mind. It has opened my eyes to make sure we don’t lose sight of this population. Women veterans bring unique talents and skill sets to the energy industry and feel this is an opportunity to expand our efforts with this demographic.”
Expanding the Role of Employee Resource Groups

Duke Energy

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are a popular means for companies to provide support to employees who share certain characteristics or backgrounds, such as having served in the military or belonging to a particular ethnic group. They are often used as internal support networks, vehicles for professional development, or hubs for employee-led community service.

Duke Energy has recently decided to expand the role of its ERGs even further. “We have just gone through a restructuring to align our ERGs to Duke Energy’s strategy,” said Diversity and Inclusion Program Manager Aithyni Rucker. These include attracting and hiring a diverse workforce that reflects the community served by Duke Energy, creating an environment in which all people are valued and respected and can reach their full potential, and integrating diversity and inclusion into the company’s business practices.

Duke Energy currently has seven ERGs, including A³ (Advocates for African Americans), BWN (Business Women’s Network), DO-IT! (Disability Outreach & Inclusion Team), N2D (New 2 Duke Energy), LED (Latinos Energizing Diversity), WeR1 (We Are One for LGBT Equality), and TWS (Together We Stand for Our Veterans), said Rucker.

While its ERGs have always been active, Rucker explained, each will now focus its efforts more intentionally in four areas: workplace inclusion, recruiting, professional development, and customer impact.

“We support the programs already developed by our ERGs,” she said, “but we also expect them to find ways to further impact employee and community engagement.”

For example, WeR1, which has a chapter in Charlotte, receives support from Duke Energy for its involvement in the Pride Parade each year, she said. More recently, however, the group has played an important role in helping other Duke Energy employees understand how to support transitioning transgender coworkers.

“Having the opportunity to participate in these ERGs and the programs they offer really highlights the importance of diversity and inclusion in our workplace,” said Rucker, and “helps support our goals for attracting, retaining, and engaging a diverse workforce. I think it really helps to know that Duke Energy supports all of our employees. They are able to develop themselves, identify with people who may be just like them. The ERGs also provide leadership opportunities and visibility with our senior executives. It really highlights how much we believe in and support an inclusive workplace.”

Duke Energy’s ERGs have long been active in the community in a variety of ways, she said. For example, since its creation 21 years ago, A³ has given out more than $1 million in scholarship funds to 86 students of color and Duke Energy will continue to support these efforts, she said. The program currently provides three renewable $2,000 scholarships per year to students of color pursuing math, science, accounting, and other energy-related degrees at colleges and universities in North and South Carolina. The company has hired at least one scholarship recipient, said Rucker, though it doesn’t track where the recipients end up.
A³ also established a Youth Energy Academy with the American Association of Blacks in Energy (AABE) that offers instruction introducing high school and college students to professional and craft/technical careers in the utility industry and other STEM fields. The program, launched in 2013, has reached more than 450 students in Ocala, St. Petersburg, and Winter Garden, Florida.

The free, two-day interactive workshop includes an emphasis on the importance of safety in energy careers, hands-on projects such as building energy circuits, and an overview of the role of energy in our daily lives, said Rucker.

Through its LED chapters, Duke Energy supports Hispanic Heritage Celebration Month, with events taking place this fall in North Carolina, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, and Florida, said Rucker. And its veterans’ group, TWS, offers volunteer opportunities that reach out to homeless veterans in the community, in addition to providing support for veterans transitioning into the civilian workplace.

Rucker said the ERGs are making Duke Energy an employer of choice, by showing employees that “no matter who they are or how they identify, they are valued and supported as part of the team.”

**African American Professional Employee Group Mentoring and Giving Back**

*NextEra Energy, Florida Power and Light*

As a 10th grader at Hallandale High School, Keithlyn Slack had a keen interest in math and science and liked to take part in math competitions. So, when his biology teacher told him about a team engineering competition that involved building mousetrap cars, he was eager to give it a try.

“I enjoyed the teamwork,” said Slack, now a Project Coordinator at Florida Power and Light (FPL), where he helps generate a passion for STEM careers among the next generation of high school students by volunteering to help with the same competition he once entered. It’s run by an organization that was created by the Southeast Consortium for Minorities in Engineering (SECME) and is now known as SECME Inc.

Slack said it was the process of development that fascinated him as a teen and that still makes the competition fun for young people.

“You start with a design or idea and watch it come to fruition,” he said. “It’s on paper, and then you can see it in 3D and it actually works. Seeing it go from design to production, that execution phase was exciting to me.”

So much so that Slack followed his passion and enthusiasm for STEM competitions into a career that took him from chemical engineering to jobs with Transitions Optical, the Kennedy Space Center, and now FPL, where he is an active member of the African American Professional Employee Group (AAPEG). Through AAPEG, he and his coworkers sponsored a new competition for SECME, in which students build generators out of $30 worth of materials.
Education Program Manager Maureen Wilt said FPL employees from AAPEG hold workshops in three Florida school districts to show elementary, middle, and high school teachers and students how to build the generators. The program is one of two that are intentionally geared toward increasing an interest in STEM among a more diverse student population, she said. The other—Robot in a Weekend—is a 30-hour workshop that teaches students from underserved communities how to build robots.

Wilt said she put together a group of six or seven diverse employees, including AAPEG members and female engineers, so that the students will see people who look like them working in STEM careers. At the end of 30 hours, the students and FPL employees compete against each other with the robots they’ve built.

“A lot of these kids have no background in STEM,” said Wilt. “They have never coded and don’t even have game systems at home. We wanted to surround them with people who looked like them and show them what’s possible.”

But the competitions aren’t all AAPEG mentors help with. Slack said he also visits colleges and high schools with high minority student populations around the state to speak to kids about career opportunities in math and science. And, he added, he and his own children volunteer at the local YMCA over the holidays, helping other AAPEG members repaint fields or working on other projects as needed.

“I enjoy giving back,” he said. “A lot of people helped me and now I want to help.”

Having an ERG such as AAPEG provides a vehicle for doing so, said Slack, but it also provides an important resource, support system, and network for employees of color in a predominantly white industry.

“You have opportunities to just talk and be colleagues with someone who has the same interests and background,” he said. “I think it matters. If you have goals, you may see someone like you meeting those goals and it helps to see people like yourself advancing. You can find a mentor or be a mentor.”

For example, said Slack, he has taken minority interns out to lunch and invited high-level minority FPL employees to join them, “just to give them some guidance.” He also introduced an African American manager at the company to a young man with a PhD who wanted to make a career shift. “He hired him about a month later,” said Slack.

Increasing diversity helps everyone at the company, he added. “Having a diverse group of employees opens you up to different ways of thinking and solving problems,” he said. “If you have just one way of thinking, you are losing out. This way we are expanding everyone’s knowledge base.”
Formed in March 2006, the Center for Energy Workforce Development (CEWD) is a non-profit consortium of electric, natural gas, and nuclear utilities, contractors, and their associations—Edison Electric Institute, American Gas Association, American Public Power Association, Nuclear Energy Institute, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, and Distribution Contractors Association.