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From 2020 to 2023, the District of Columbia Sustainable Energy Utility (DCSEU) participated as a partner in the [Better Buildings Workforce Accelerator](#) (BBWA). The BBWA is a Department of Energy initiative seeking to raise the level of building science and energy efficiency knowledge in the nation's building-related workforce. Through the BBWA, DOE engaged industry partners in activities that build interest and awareness, streamline pathways, and improve skills for people pursuing green building careers.

The District of Columbia Sustainable Energy Utility (DCSEU) aims to build the District's clean energy workforce and economy through its Workforce Development and Train Green programs while centering equity and opportunities for underrepresented communities.

About the Partner

The District of Columbia Sustainable Energy Utility (DCSEU), established in 2011, aims to build a brighter economic, environmental, and energy future for the District of Columbia. The District's Clean & Affordable Energy Act of 2008 authorized the creation of DCSEU to create a one-stop resource for energy efficiency and renewable energy resources for residents and businesses.

Since their inception, the DCSEU has helped DC residents and businesses save \$1.3 billion in lifetime energy costs. Services provided to DC residents and businesses include assisting in the rebate application process, providing low-cost and no-cost solar energy, and building a sustainable workforce. The DCSEU implements the largest income-qualified solar program on the east coast, Solar for All, with the District Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE) and prioritizes green energy accessibility for low-income and underrepresented DC residents. The DCSEU aims to bridge the gap in skills needed for clean energy jobs with the Workforce Development and Train Green programs.

About the Project

The [DCSEU Workforce Development Program](#) is an externship program that connects job seekers with local contractors and organizations in the green job industry.

The Workforce Development Program funds two cohorts of five-month-long paid externships annually. Externships are hands-on job training programs that provide participants with practical experience in a specific job. The program matches DC residents to local contractors and organizations at no cost to the company. As of 2023, more than 220 District residents have completed the program since its inception in 2014. Program externs receive immersive training, build new skills, and obtain necessary certifications for a career in the green economy, all while earning a livable wage. Many of the externs in this program are either unemployed or underemployed and more than 85% obtain full-time jobs after completing the program. In addition to technical skills, the program also emphasizes soft skills training such financial literacy, maintaining employment, and effective communication.

AT A GLANCE

- ▶ **Partner:** District of Columbia Sustainable Energy Utility
- ▶ **Project:** Workforce Development Program
- ▶ **Program Location:** Washington D.C.
- ▶ **Audience Served:** Jobseekers, Diverse and Underrepresented Jobseekers
- ▶ **Better Buildings Workforce Accelerator Focus Area(s):** Improve Skills, Streamline Career Pathways

Challenges

In 2020, a study published by E2, an environmental business group, noted that despite 40% DC residents being Black, the DC sustainable energy field still has less than 10% Black people in the workforce, confirming the existence of racial inequities in the green job industry.

Solutions

In 2020, the DCSEU implemented a complementary program to their Workforce Development Program called the Sustainable Energy Infrastructure and Capacity Building Pipeline Program, also known as “[Train Green](#)”. The Train Green program was established in accordance with the Clean Energy DC Omnibus Amendment Act of 2018 to continue supporting the District’s goal of closing the equity gap in the local green energy sector. Through the Train Green program, businesses can build their capacity through training, credentialing, and certifications that elevate their knowledge in sustainable energy infrastructure. The program is offered on a rolling basis at no cost to the participants. This program was created specifically to work with DC-designated Certified Business Enterprises (CBEs) and CBE-eligible businesses to increase their skillset and knowledgebase in renewable energy and, in turn, better position them for District Government contracting opportunities.

The evolving landscape of the sustainable energy field offers an ideal opportunity for unemployed and underemployed DC residents to find well-paying green jobs, and the DCSEU affirmed their goal to address the documented disparity by training and serving underrepresented groups in the field.

Lessons Learned

After a decade of implementing the program, DCSEU learned it can be difficult to find mentors for the program. Mentors must commit time and energy over a five-month period to teach and support an extern. Mentors are essential to helping nurture the professional development of the extern and must have a genuine desire to provide this level of support while they increase their capacity as a company or organization. Finding candidates also presents challenges, as externship positions are directly linked to what fields the mentors operate.

Impacts and Outcomes

DCSEU’s Workforce Development Program has been extraordinarily successful:

- ▶ 85% of externs gain employment after the program;
- ▶ Each of the biannual cohorts includes 15 to 25 externs resulting in over 220 graduates;
- ▶ Between 50% – 75% of each cohort pass the national certification exams taken for technical skills like solar panel installation and energy management.

Read more about the success of DCSEU’s workforce programming on [their website](#).

[This case study was developed with content from DCSEU’s website and VEIC’s 2022 Summer Study on Energy Efficiency in Buildings.](#)