



National Forum: State Energy Workforce Consortia 2016



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Rosa Schmidt, Consultant, CEWD, welcomed participants to the fourth annual National Forum with the news that they represented the largest group yet to convene in Washington, D.C., to share successful energy workforce planning strategies and practices.

The Forum was attended by 88 state energy workforce consortia members, representing 21 consortia covering 29 states from each of seven regions.

What State Energy Workforce Consortia Can Do

The National Forum, said Beth Britt, Consultant, CEWD, is “by, for, and about the consortia,” presenting an opportunity for members to share ideas for developing a diverse and qualified workforce. Britt reminded consortia members that CEWD had created documents highlighting “Five Things Employers Can Do” and “Five Things Educators Can Do” to help them be successful in their workforce development efforts.

“You’ve seen them, right?” she asked. “You’ve used them, I hope.”

She encouraged members to look at their strategic plans for the next year and to focus on a few key elements: developing a state energy workforce plan if one did not already exist, building career awareness across the state, implementing core curriculum, assessing the impact of energy workforce needs, creating beneficial alliances, and ensuring consortia self-sustainability.

Britt asked if those at the Forum who already had state energy workforce plans would help those who did not; the response was vigorous head-nodding. “Having a plan is critically important because it guides where you use your resources,” she explained.

While building career awareness was something everyone was working on, doing so as part of a consortium strategic plan was more effective because it allowed companies and educators to target and prioritize, Britt noted.

She said it was also important for consortia to make sure core curriculum at the educational institutions from which they draw job applicants was aligned with their workforce needs, to ensure they were getting the type of people they wanted to hire. Companies also need to accurately assess their hiring needs—how many jobs they need to fill and what kind of jobs those are—in order to determine whether local community colleges and universities are able to provide an adequate supply of candidates, Britt said.

Beneficial alliances are critical, she said. “Figure out who your best partners are and make sure they’re at the table helping you to develop your plan.”

Finally, consortia must be self-sustaining to have any type of long-term impact, she said. “One way you can do that is to make sure you have effective succession planning of your consortium leadership.”

Ray Kelly, Consultant, CEWD, updated consortia members on a database developed through the National Energy Education Network (NEEN), a collaborative effort partnering energy companies that are members of CEWD with the educational institutions that feed their workforce pipelines.

“We’ve revamped the NEEN database to build different and unique visualizations,” including state and regional maps portraying where training programs exist to prepare candidates for gas and electric plant operator, field tech, and engineering jobs at utilities around the country, said Kelly. The maps help energy companies and their educational partners understand how well supply satisfies demand for people in their targeted job categories, highlighting where gaps may still exist.

Where the maps reveal gaps, said Kelly, “you need to get on the ground and build those strategic alliances with educators.”

“We have made significant improvements in the way employers and NEEN members will interface and update their information in the system,” noted Kelly. CEWD will hold a webinar in December to help members get the most out of the database and understand recent changes that have been made to it, such as the ability to see data updates instantaneously, he added.

Best Practices: Structure and Support

“Consortia are often successful until the leadership leaves, and then they lose momentum,” noted Schmidt, as she introduced a panel of speakers to address the issue of how to create greater sustainability.



A loss of membership or completion of one project without another to take its place can also contribute to dwindling momentum, she said. Schmidt noted that three important elements were necessary to hold consortia together and to keep them on track: a succession plan, the involvement of industry members assigned to specific roles, and buy-in from industry leadership for the work of the consortia.

“These three panelists are from consortia that have been successful in facing these challenges,” she said.

Kristie Kelley, Chair, Florida Energy Workforce Consortium (FEWC), and Workforce Coordinator, Gulf Power, said she was “volunteered for an opportunity” to take the Chair position just as her consortium approached its 10-year anniversary.

With only two people on her Executive Committee—one of whom was about to retire—“I knew I had some significant work to do,” she said. Her first step was to expand the committee’s membership to include a Chair-elect, a member to handle career awareness, an Education Chair, and a Member-at-Large who could oversee the succession process so that they’d never be without qualified leadership. That person, she said, would also be in line to become Chair-elect to ensure a smooth transition when it came time to rotate. The Chair, Chair-elect, and Member-at-Large each had to represent a utility partner.

The reorganized and expanded Executive Committee has also taken steps to raise its visibility across the state, creating business cards and shirts for its members and spreading the word about the work that they do, said Kelley. “We have really branded ourselves and made sure to make use of every opportunity we have to do so.”

As Chair, said Kelley, her job is to be “the herder of cats, because of the size (geography and population) of the state. I make sure everyone is doing their tasks and staying on mission.” That’s not always easy, she added, because “all of the committee members have full-time jobs at utilities and this is something we all do in our spare time. But we are proud to say that we are FEWC and proud to represent the state of Florida.”

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Lynn Burton, Project Manager, Colorado Energy Workforce Consortium, said the job of keeping people on-task at her consortium had fallen to her. “I am the glue. I make sure things don’t fall off the radar screen. If somebody’s not the nag, you’ll never make all of your deadlines and goals. If I’m the nag of the consortium, so be it.”

To maintain momentum, her group of utilities, educators, and workforce center representatives meets monthly, she said. For their quarterly face-to-face meetings, the five energy partners take turns hosting the meetings, conducting tours of their plants, and providing guest speakers so their educational and workforce center partners can learn more about what they do.

Other key factors that make the consortium successful include being passionate and committed to the work, communicating clearly with partners, having buy-in from company leadership, and making sure the consortium’s goals are in line with the utility members’ needs.

Having a mentor provided by CEWD was also extremely beneficial, said Burton. “If you are not tapping into who your consultant is, you are missing an opportunity,” she said, adding that Ray Kelly helped her group with everything from identifying useful CEWD toolkits they could employ to helping them prepare slides for presentations.

Being Co-Chair involves several essential roles, said **Jen Emmons, Executive Committee Member, Wisconsin Energy Workforce Consortium, and Co-Chair, Career Awareness and Diversity Taskforce: Leader, Strategist, Spokesperson, Planner, and Coach.**

In her leadership role, she understood it was important that the consortium have a clear set of priorities and a plan for how to stick to the work because “otherwise, inertia can set in quickly.”

The first thing she did upon stepping into the Chair position was to identify a Co-Chair and meet with the resigning Co-Chair. She also did an assessment of the taskforce’s strengths and weaknesses. One thing she learned from this process was that the consortium needed a document-sharing application to prevent an administrative burden. Initially it was underutilized, so she set up an in-depth training session and provided consortium members with a tip sheet for how to navigate the new system. She also assigned subcommittee leads to keep documents updated.

Emmons said the process has shown her there are several keys to success in running a consortium: being organized, implementing in phases, building and sustaining momentum, remaining open-minded and flexible, linking consortia outputs to company and industry goals, and implementing a subcommittee model.

Emmons said she implemented a subcommittee model for the taskforce that is designed to distribute the work more effectively. “It didn’t happen overnight; it takes persistence but is well worth the effort!” A subcommittee model is also being incorporated at the state consortia level, in which each utility provides representatives to ensure long-term sustainability.

Another thing she learned was that someone on the committee had to be willing to hold “authentic conversations that are not always the easiest to have,” she said. “You have to get out of your comfort zone a little bit for real progress to happen.”

During a question-and-answer period, the panel was asked whether economic development organizations such as chambers of commerce were included in the consortia. Members said they had not yet reached out to those organizations but would likely do so as their consortia matured. One issue that was raised was that because of their differing legal structures, these groups might need to operate separately, though collaboratively.

Another question was whether consortia charged dues: Some (such as Florida and Georgia) do, while others (such as Colorado and Wisconsin) do not. Those that do not charge dues ask for voluntary contributions to cover expenses associated with events, such as contests.

Schmidt encouraged those attending the Forum to look at a CEWD best practices document, *Establishing a Consortium as a 501(c)(3)*, which explains the process and offers tips to becoming a nonprofit organization.

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Consortia members said they were also split on whether to include contractors in their groups, with Wisconsin reporting a strong partnership with its contractors and Colorado unable to move forward on that decision because of divisive feelings on its committee.

Schmidt, however, encouraged consortia members to find a way to include contractors in their efforts. “It’s a reality. Employees working for contractors are a potential pool of candidates for the utilities, creating vacancies in the contractor pool. These contractors have similar skill sets as well as a demand for workers, so why not partner with them to ensure there is enough supply to meet all the demand in your state?”

CEWD also provides members with a toolkit designed to help consortia determine the level of contractor demand.

Minnesota Legacy I³: A Journey to Real Solutions

Minnesota’s energy workforce is approximately 95 percent white and male, noted **Bruce Peterson, Executive Director, Minnesota Energy Center**, a collaborative group of 10 colleges from around the state that provide energy programming. “But that certainly is not a reflection of our communities, so we knew we had to do something to address that.”

That something started to take root three years ago, when **Xcel Energy** met **Tom Cascalenda, Director, Operations Scheduling**, and he joined the Minnesota Energy Consortium.

“My boss came in one day and told me that the board of directors was concerned about diversity numbers. Our technical workforce is overwhelmingly white. I think I always knew that, but never paid much attention to it,” said Cascalenda, who was then tasked with increasing the diversity of Xcel Energy’s workforce.

He soon found out that several factors were contributing to the company’s lack of diversity, some unintentionally. For example, lineworker hires were required to have a certificate from an accredited lineworker program, but those programs were no longer being offered in urban areas. “The urban population did not have access to these schools,” he said.

Upon visiting the schools, he soon found that “there was not one diverse candidate out of 250 students. Not one African American, not one female. None. I’m not that smart, but I knew I was in big trouble,” said Cascalenda.

He soon learned an even harder lesson when he thought he could solve the problem by meeting with diverse students in a Minneapolis public school setting and offering two \$10,000 scholarships to the lineworker school. “I asked if anyone was interested, and 25 students got up and walked out of the room.”

Cascalenda learned that what “Xcel Energy meant to these kids was the person who comes to turn the lights off when they can’t pay the bills. This is not what Xcel Energy meant to me.”

The schools also told him that Xcel Energy was not welcome to participate in Career Day because educators were focused on encouraging students to attend four-year colleges and universities. “That was another hard lesson.”

Peterson said nobody wanted to take the blame for the many factors contributing to a lack of diversity in the workforce: “The energy companies said they only hire graduates and there are no diverse graduates. The colleges say they recruit, but no diverse students come to their schools. The lineworker programs say diverse candidates don’t apply in time to get in. Diverse students and parents see the utilities as the enemy, or don’t even know about the industry and the potential careers it offers. Disconnected communities believe the industry doesn’t want them. When someone does get hired, they don’t succeed because they weren’t trained with the right skills.

“We realized we had to go a whole lot deeper to make a long-term impact,” he said. “The energy industry has great jobs. Those of us in the room know that. The colleges have great training programs. The workforce centers are there to recruit. Young people are seeking direction. Lots of support agencies are doing great stuff, but everybody’s operating in their own silo. Getting them to come together is really a great challenge.”

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Enter **Deon Clark**. At the CEWD Annual Summit two years ago, Peterson heard Clark present information about a program he was running in Arizona called the **Legacy I³ Initiative**, which, in partnership with industry, provided a group of diverse high school students with all the support and training they needed to prepare for careers in energy. Sitting in the hotel lobby, the two discussed what it would take to get such a program up and running in Minnesota.

Thus began a series of trips between the two states to familiarize members of the Minnesota energy consortium, particularly Xcel Energy, with the work Legacy I³ was doing in Arizona and to determine whether the program could work in Minnesota.

MJ Horner, Senior Director of Talent Strategy and Transformation, Xcel Energy, was so impressed with what she saw that she didn't hesitate: "We have to do this," she told her boss at Xcel Energy. "It completely aligned with everything we were trying to do with our company's strategic plan, including our workforce plans and corporate giving objectives," she said.

"Previously, we had a scattered approach to diversity. We had worked with organizations that dealt with just one aspect of the problem. They taught skills or helped minorities find jobs, but Legacy I³ provides a much more holistic approach."

Legacy I³ teaches students and their families about the energy industry to get them excited 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, 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 also help them with resume writing and interview skills. They then move on to skills training at community colleges or four-year degree programs (in engineering, for example).

"This is a very long-term approach and a long-term engagement of those students who are in the program," Horner said.

Minnesota ran a pilot program over the summer and is now running the Legacy I³ program out of three high schools in St. Paul and Minneapolis, with hopes to expand to other areas soon. For its part, Xcel Energy has created an Ambassador program that trains employees at all levels to work with the students and get to know them throughout the process.

"This is really meaningful work for our employees," said Horner, who teared up as she recalled the graduation ceremony for the summer pilot. "We really believe these students are a good fit for Xcel Energy, and that they just happen to be diverse. They are very strong candidates and Legacy I³ makes sure of that."

Some of the students are now participating in an internship program that Xcel Energy created just for them.

"When our students tell their stories, that's what hits me," said **Doug Revsbeck, Principal, St. Paul Harding High School**, a highly diverse school of low-income African American, Latino, Asian, and Native American students participating in the Legacy I³ program. "Those students are now successful and we want more and more students to see that success in their own eyes. If we're going to change outcomes, knock down those opportunity and access gaps, we have to take this holistic approach."

He noted that Legacy I³ could only take 25–30 students at a time, but in truth, "everyone in our school could use this program."

Having a company such as Xcel Energy partner with the school was what convinced him the program would succeed, said Revsbeck. "If the students see themselves as successful in the eyes of business leaders, this will be a huge piece of inspiring student achievement."



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The Legacy I³ model can be replicated anywhere in the country, said Clark, because it provides all of the elements necessary to help someone overcome the barriers to success: exposure to opportunity, intrinsic motivation, a strong family or community support system, access to opportunity, and advanced training.

“If I take those five components and give them to any young person, it does not matter their zip code, their ethnicity, or whatever else; they will get to where you are today or even go further,” said Clark. But, he added, “there is no one agency that can give a student all of that. It requires that we identify the entities that have the expertise for each of these.”

The Legacy I³ model, said Clark, 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 (Clark’s group), which provides character and soft skills training and connects the students to all of the other organizations to ensure nothing falls through the cracks.

One thing that Legacy I³ does that other organizations often do not is to work with the entire family, said Clark. “Your greatest challenge is not the student, it’s Mom or Dad,” he said. Legacy I³ gets buy-in from parents and caregivers because “when Mom and Dad get excited about the program, the student will show up. They understand the value of what we are doing.”

Legacy I³ students must have a commitment from their parents to make them available to participate in all of the classes and activities. In turn, Legacy I³ connects the family to any wraparound services it may need in order to make that student available, and provides assistance to parents who need help with their own education, such as GED or English language classes. “That allows us to have a deeper impact,” said Clark, and provides the student with a greater support system.

Of the 19 students in the summer pilot program, 10 were seniors who graduated. All are now either enrolled in postsecondary education or employed. Four of the 10 have applied for internships at Xcel Energy, which has trained 25 Ambassadors to work with the students.

During the question-and-answer period, **Matt Kellam, Dominion Power**, announced that the Virginia consortium was also considering creating such a program with Clark’s assistance.

New Tools and Resources

GIE Registration Site

Staying connected with students or candidates who graduate from training programs but aren’t immediately hired can be difficult. They may take jobs elsewhere or simply fail to stay in contact, said CEWD Consultant Rosa Schmidt.

“You might not have a job to offer them when they graduate, but now you do and you can’t communicate the job openings to the graduates,” she said. “How do you stay connected?”

The Get Into Energy Registration Site offers a solution. Both jobseekers and employers can register on this site, which allows jobseekers to post personal information and upload resumes and allows employers to post job listings and other information about what it’s like to work at their companies. Employers are also able to search the database, download resumes, and reach out to graduates when jobs become available.

However, key to the site’s success is keeping that information accurate and updated, said Schmidt. “Junk in, junk out. Students need to see the value of the tool and how it can connect them with companies.”

It’s important for educators to help students register on this site while they’re still in school, she said, to ensure they see the value, understand how it works, and understand what’s needed from them for the tool to be of value: accurate, typo-free data that is continuously updated.

“Students must understand the importance of this, and employers must be engaged and use the system or it won’t be a success,” Schmidt said.

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Strengthening Education Partnerships: A How-To Guide for Industry

The CEWD website includes numerous tools for members, including a new toolkit designed to help industry members build more effective partnerships with educators in their state or consortium, said CEWD Consultant Beth Britt. The toolkit is the result of combined efforts to build educator partnerships by Black Hills Energy in 2014 and by the Michigan Energy Workforce Development Consortium in 2015.

In looking for educational partners, Britt said, the first step is to determine where your workforce needs are not currently being met and what type of expertise would help you meet them. “Start with your strategic workforce plan,” she said. “Then identify and quantify existing educator relationships.”

You should ask yourself, what are the characteristics that make an educator a desirable partner? Are they responsive to industry needs? Do they invite you to sit on their advisory councils? These characteristics may differ from state to state.

The guide provides a systematic process for review that helps companies or consortia avoid bias. First, review your existing relationships and then identify other educational programs in the area that may help you reach your goals. Once partnerships are formed, said Britt, it’s also important to sponsor those educational partners for membership in CEWD’s National Energy Education Network (NEEN) so that their data can be entered into the database and they can gain access to CEWD Members-only curriculum and resources.

This guide and others can be found at www.cewd.org.

Consortia Updates: Careers in Energy Week and Other 2016 Highlights

Schmidt gave consortia members in attendance an opportunity to update each other on the work they’d been doing over the past year, including examples of events held during Careers in Energy (CIE) Week in October.

Arizona

Colleges are replicating curricula to ensure continuity in technical skills training and Southwest Gas met with contractors at a summit that allowed them to show the contractors the value of getting on board as partners.

California

CIE Week is actually a months-long event involving a media contest for high school and community college students. Students produce either a print ad or video to promote careers in energy.

Colorado

The consortium employers sent representatives to high schools in the Denver and Pueblo areas to hold presentations on energy for students in STEM programs. Xcel Energy was also successful in obtaining a proclamation from the governor’s office for the third year in a row. The consortium also hosted a virtual job fair for veterans during CIE Week.

Connecticut

With the help of Rosa Schmidt, this consortium refocused its strategic planning efforts and educated industry employees to do outreach at local schools, including holding a Pi Day celebration.

Florida

To celebrate its 10-year anniversary and CIE Week, FEWC held a welding contest for students from five colleges across the state, held a video contest around careers in energy, and received a Governor’s Proclamation.



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Georgia

GEICC focused its CIE Week efforts on discussing the need for more student internships and work-based learning opportunities at meetings held at the state's career academies. The consortium is trying to spread the word that high school students in these programs are capable of working and learning at energy companies even though they're still young.

Iowa

This state is just beginning to re-energize its consortium and is modeling its efforts after the one in Wisconsin. An industry planning meeting was held in September and a full consortium meeting with educators and contractors will occur in December.

Illinois

Teachers were encouraged to download CEWD/CIE materials for use in the classroom and were entered into a drawing if they sent in a photo of those materials in use. Winners were given \$250 classroom grants.

Kansas

CIE Week was celebrated with a Governor's Proclamation and a lineman rodeo. Legislation is pending to allow students to earn technical college credits while still in high school.

Louisiana

This consortium is still getting its feet off the ground but celebrated CIE Week with a Governor's Proclamation.

Massachusetts

Students visited a sustainability hub in Worcester to learn about energy efficiency and renewables. Students also learned about gas and utility construction and meter reading at a Construction Career Day. October was also Disabilities Awareness Month, so Human Resources employees at National Grid were given information about how to hire people with disabilities.

New York

The consortium is putting together an employability program for people with disabilities. Another program will help women at community colleges learn about careers in nontraditional jobs, such as meter reading.

Michigan

CIE Week has grown each year. This year, in addition to a Governor's Proclamation, it included six tours of three energy companies for high school students, open houses at technical colleges, and a social media campaign featuring veteran employees. Through a state grant, the consortium is also developing an apprenticeship program for low-income students who want to pursue energy careers.

Minnesota

Three regional college fairs were held during October and an energy science trailer with kits for hands-on learning was made available for high school teachers who had previously attended a summer camp to learn about energy careers. Each school was given the trailer for a week, allowing more than 275 students to benefit.

Nebraska

A 40-hour internship was developed for teachers to explain how specific degrees could be applied to critical jobs in the energy industry where there's currently a need. CIE Week included two days of activities: one for boys of color and one for girls. In other news, the Energy Industry Fundamentals (EIF) course is being used to help retrain employees from a decommissioned nuclear plant.

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North Dakota

CIE Week was celebrated with a Governor's Proclamation and an energy career fair at Bismarck Community College, as well as Energy Exploration Night at a CTE Academy, attended by more than 200 parents and students. The Dakotas Energy Workforce Consortium issued a joint press release about CIE Week for both North Dakota and South Dakota.

Ohio

STEM teachers whose students feed into local community college training programs were surveyed to gauge their awareness of energy industry jobs. The results are currently being analyzed. CIE Week included a heavy social media campaign featuring profiles of utility workers and a career fair for eighth graders featuring bucket trucks, a windmill display, and an electric car.

South Dakota

CIE Week was celebrated with a Governor's Proclamation and an Energy Camp at Mitchell Technical Institute, which was attended by about 30 students.

Virginia

Instead of a CIE Week event once a year, this consortium focused on its all-year involvement with FIRST® Robotics. Virginia has also started teaching the EIF course at two high schools and will soon be expanding to several others. A Virginia Values Veterans program, similar to Troops to Energy Jobs, has also been launched and included an energy and utility employer training day that was held during CIE Week. The consortium is exploring whether it can replicate Deon Clark's Legacy I³ Initiative program sometime soon.

Wisconsin

CIE Week was celebrated with a Governor's Proclamation and several Utility Preview days, which received social media as well as local media coverage.