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What Can Employers Do to Build a Qualified Applicant Pipeline? Make It Easier for Them to Find Us!

CEWD members often say the toughest thing about building a pipeline of qualified applicants is figuring out how to get started and finding the resources and support they need to put solutions into practice.

So we took the time last year to identify five things employers could do that would have the greatest impact on their company, consortia, and regional workforce development efforts. In the coming months, we'll focus each newsletter on just one of these five things, highlighting success stories from members and resources available to CEWD members free of charge to help them create that diverse, qualified talent pipeline for electric and natural gas utility jobs.

This month, we're focusing on how to make it easier for potential applicants to find us: to understand our jobs as well as which education pathways in their regions will lead them to those jobs.

"This is about career awareness," said Ann Randazzo, Executive Director, CEWD. "But more specifically, it's about identifying what your needs are going to be so you can identify which demographic you need to reach. That might mean reaching out to more military veterans, more women, or more minorities, if you're trying to diversify your workforce.

"But it also means looking years down the road to ensure that you maintain that diversity and that you reach young people while they're at those critical decision-making stages that put them on course toward, or away from, STEM careers. You may need to target much younger students than you think to generate interest in STEM at an early age so those students take the science and math classes they're going to need to do your jobs. You have to get to students early on, to help them understand that we're out here, what it is that we do, and what they need to study to qualify for our jobs.

"Once you determine which demographic you want to reach, then you can look at the programs we and our members have developed and identify which ones you need," Randazzo said. "If you're talking about reaching the middle school population, for example, you may want to look at FIRST Robotics. If you want more women in your workforce, consider sponsoring an all-girls robotics team.

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“Do you have more immediate hiring needs? Perhaps you should look at hiring more veterans, who already have many of the skills our industry needs. Take a look at your company website to determine if it’s military friendly. Does it make clear to veterans which jobs you have they may be qualified for? Look at our Troops to Energy Jobs site for more ideas.”

Members might not always see the benefit of awareness efforts such as career fairs and tours for high school and college students, but that doesn’t mean they’re not working, Randazzo said. For example, this month’s newsletter features a story about a young woman who first learned about opportunities at her local utility through a tour organized by her campus chapter of IEEE. The tour was the impetus for her interest in the company, where she now works as a substation engineer.

“Tours, summer camps, and career fairs are the types of programs that help young people better understand who we are, what we do, and what opportunities exist for them,” Randazzo said. “They are well worth your time and effort and more important than you may realize.”

Here are five CEWD toolkits to help make it easier to find us:

[Career Fairs](#)

[Get Into Energy Camp](#)

[Get Into Energy FIRST Initiative and Toolkit](#)

[Women in Sustainable Employment \(WISE\) Pathways Career Exploration Workshop](#)

[Veterans-Only Career Information Day Toolkit](#)

Wondering If Your Outreach to Students Is Working? A Success Story from PPL

As utilities work to raise awareness of energy industry career opportunities among the next generation of workers, many have created or expanded outreach programs to high schools and colleges that include plant tours, summer camps, and career fairs. But they don’t always know how much impact those programs are actually having.

“Even the best applicant tracking systems do not capture the type of return on investment with students reached in years past,” said Brian Case, Manager of Human Resources, Corporate Services, at PPL in Pennsylvania.

That’s why it was so exciting to hear from a new hire that her interest in PPL grew from a cold winter day two years ago, when she happened to take a tour of the Holtwood Hydroelectric Power Plant with a group of Temple University students affiliated with IEEE.

“A couple weeks ago I was sitting in on one of our new hire orientation days,” said Case, who had arranged that tour, “and one of the hires mentioned she had graduated from Temple University’s engineering program. As we talked, I found out she’d been on our plant tour in 2014 and that had sparked her interest in our company. I pulled up my camera phone and found a picture of her and said, ‘Here you are!’”

Mary Auchincloss, now a substation engineer at PPL, remembers the tour vividly. “It was really cool because we got to see all of this machinery, but it was February and it was freezing. I really appreciated the employees coming out on such a freezing cold day.

“That tour was really important because I’d never heard of this company,” she said. “It was a great way to be introduced to them and get to see the engineering side of the business outside the classroom. Also, there was a former Temple student working there and he told us about what he does and showed us around. It was a great opportunity to hear from someone who had graduated just a few years before me.”

Auchincloss also credits her interest in engineering—and ultimately Temple University—to a summer camp program she attended in high school. “They were promoting engineering for high school girls, and I liked math and science so I wanted to see how I’d like this,” she said of Temple’s five-day camp. “I fell in love with engineering during that camp, specifically electrical engineering, and I definitely fell in love with Temple’s campus.”

Auchincloss said her interest in PPL, though sparked by the plant tour, was further solidified when company employees came to campus for a career fair. “I mentioned the tour to them and that’s how I got reintroduced to the company.” The next thing she knew, she was interviewing for a job.

“I was enthused to hear that the company’s outreach efforts, specifically its work with organizations such as NSBE, SWE, SHPE, and IEEE and its efforts to reach more women, were having an impact on students,” said Case. “This is one of those success stories reinforcing the value of these outreach programs. They do leave an impression on students and it is time well spent.”

Benevolent Fills in the Gaps for GIE Students in Arizona

“I am a 34-year-old student and single dad. I currently work full time, but decided to go back to school to earn a degree to get a better job to provide for my daughter. I am now enrolled in the Get Into Energy Program.

My goals are to earn my Electrical Utility Technology Certificate and to gain employment with a stable company that provides good benefits. I would also like to own my own house and to help my daughter pay for college.

I need a laptop to complete my coursework and to begin applying for jobs. The laptop will allow me to study from home and to not have to drag my daughter to the library, so that I can study.

Meeting this need will help me because I can complete the program and hopefully get a better-paying job and provide for my daughter. I have a lot of work experience in this field, but I need a degree to move up in to the better paying jobs. Plus, it will help me set an example to my daughter about the importance of an education.”

For Get Into Energy (GIE) students at Tucson’s Pima Community College, stories like this are not uncommon. There are resources to cover tuition, to provide career coaching, and to connect them with companies looking to fill the jobs for which they are training. But what about needs like transportation? Like boots or other work-related equipment? What about computers to do their homework?

That’s where Benevolent.net comes in. Suzanna Cruz, a career coach at Pima, said this nonprofit website, similar to GoFundMe.com, has allowed several of her students to purchase laptops so they can do their homework without having to find computer and internet access at a library or other site outside the home, complicating childcare and work schedules.

The money raised on the philanthropic website—donated by individuals from all over the world—was matched through funds from a TAACCCT grant managed by CEWD and the Arizona Sun Corridor Get Into Energy Consortium.

“The biggest struggle we had was that some students were hesitant to disclose that they were low-income and needed help,” she said. Cruz tried to make it easier for them by presenting information about the program during a GIE orientation, but encouraging students to contact her privately if they felt they had needs that qualified.

The story above is just one of several that Cruz posted on Benevolent.net for GIE students. She said five students have been able to purchase laptops so far through this program.

CEWD members who wish to replicate the program with a community college can do so by partnering with Benevolent. There is also the opportunity to provide matching funds through a corporate foundation, said Rosa Schmidt, consultant, CEWD.

“We were the first group to set up a partnership with Benevolent and a state workforce system,” said Schmidt. “Through this process, we learned that the best scenarios for establishing these partnerships would involve workforce organizations that have an established pipeline of students with unmet needs and community colleges with career coaches who can identify students who have some of these unmet needs.”

Schmidt said the program could be hugely beneficial for filling in gaps not otherwise covered. “The benefit of working with Benevolent,” she said, “is that it can help cover things that the workforce system does not cover, such as safety glasses, boots, and laptops, or even repairs for a car that breaks down and makes it hard for a student to get to class. The ultimate goal is to prevent students from dropping out due to these situations, and to have them complete their education.”

State Consortia Focus: Nebraska Consortium Learns Value of Strategic Planning

Building a pipeline of qualified workers for the energy industry can feel like a tall order. As many utilities are learning, however, it's much easier when everyone with an interest in that common goal decides to work together.

That's why utilities across the country are putting together statewide consortia that include energy companies, education partners, and others with a stake in developing a larger pool of highly qualified candidates for STEM-related jobs. CEWD offers tools to its members to help with this process, such as a template for how to develop a strategic plan.

Joyce Cooper, Co-Chair of the Nebraska Energy Workforce Consortium and Workforce Development Manager for the Omaha Public Power District (OPPD), said her initial group of three energy partners didn't realize how valuable a full-blown strategic plan could be. “We formed our consortium in 2014,” she said, “with OPPD, Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD), and Lincoln Electric System. We developed a vision and a mission and performed a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis, and we thought we were well on our way to building a strong, sustainable consortium. We even organized our first event, a Women in Trades fair for middle and high school girls, providing input into the CEWD toolkit.”

Initially, the consortium focused on tactical endeavors like participating in career fairs and other recruiting events. It wasn't until Cooper attended CEWD's 2015 Annual Summit and heard a presentation on strategic planning for consortia that she realized the team had an opportunity to collaborate more strategically to broaden its impact.

“It explained why we were kind of stuck and struggling to move forward,” she said. “We all saw the value of working together, but until we had a clearer understanding of our common workforce demands as a consortium, and a roadmap that detailed where we needed to head, who needed to be a part of it, and the roles that each partner would play, we lacked the progress we were seeking.”

At that point, she asked CEWD consultant Beth Britt to step in and help Nebraska go through the full strategic planning process. Both Cooper and her Co-Chair Laurie Schilling, Human Resources Manager for NPPD, said Britt's involvement has been a major help with everything from understanding what's involved in setting up a charter to laying out an activity prioritization matrix for the year and explaining how to help their education partners better understand industry needs.

"She helped us to understand how to build a consortium but not lose our identity as an organization," said Schilling. "She showed us how to bring in other partners, such as educators, and build those relationships so we could work together more effectively."

Cooper said one of the pieces that had been missing was a clear assignment of roles and responsibilities among consortium members. "We had been rotating responsibilities based on who hosted the meetings," she said. "Having Beth's insight and her guiding our team through the strategic planning process was invaluable."

Now they have co-chairs, project managers, and committee chairs, she said, which makes things move much faster and more efficiently. "We're really working as a unit now."

One of the outcomes of that process was the election of officers. At its last meeting, the consortium also decided to expand its membership to include several education partners. Members will spend the next meeting getting to know them, as well as helping them understand energy industry needs, said Cooper.

Those partnerships are going to be critical to ensuring the energy industry gets a diverse group of applicants with the right skills and that it has the ability to retrain workers as technology changes. "Workers will need to be more astute regarding technology," said Tom Kent, Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, NPPD, during a recent executive interview. "Training and skill-building will need to be more technology focused. Skilled trade workers will need to be more tech-savvy."

"And universities and community colleges need to have a clear understanding of the industry's requirements so that they can graduate students who will be successful in our industry," said Britt. "State energy workforce consortia like the NEWC provide the opportunity for the industry to more easily identify their shared educational requirements and speak as one voice with their educational partners. That's one example of the benefit of having an active state consortium. "

Upcoming

Northwest Region Meeting

April 13, 2016 - Spokane, WA

South/Southeast Region Meeting

May 19, 2016 - Columbia, SC

Midwest Region Meeting

June 28, 2016 - Kansas City, MO

National Energy Education Network (NEEN)

June 29, 2016 - Kansas City, MO

West Region Meeting

July 14, 2016 - Albuquerque, NM

MidAtlantic/Northeast Region Meeting

July 26, 2016 - New York, NY

Careers in Energy Week 2016

October 17-21, 2016 - Various Locations

State Energy Workforce Consortia National Forum

November 2, 2016 - Arlington, VA

CEWD Annual Summit

November 2-4, 2016 - Arlington, VA

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