



Transforming Worker Skills to Match a Transforming Green Economy

While technology has brought innovation to people's lives, it has also created job vulnerability for millions of workers. With the right skills training, the transformation to a green economy could be the path to opportunities for these employees.

Technology has delivered remarkable innovations to people's lives, but it has also created job vulnerabilities. Technology is eliminating many of the lower-skilled jobs, leaving employees to wonder if their jobs will still exist in a few years. As the United States moves towards a green economy, new employment opportunities are created, but with the caveat that transitioning from low-skill jobs to higher-skilled technology-based jobs requires upskilling. Developing a labor force that thrives in a green economy needs a collaborative effort from employers, educational institutions, and the government. This will not be easy, but as the future of work changes to accommodate environmental sustainability and address climate change, workers need upskilling and reskilling.

Economically and Socially Just Greening of America

The U.S. federal government recently announced it would fund the development and installation of electric vehicle charging stations along highways, and several states also have plans to do so. Many opportunities and challenges presented by the greening process can be found in this single area of transitioning to a green economy. For example, there are opportunities for EV charging station developers, manufacturers, installers, maintenance personnel, and repair technicians. But who will have the necessary skills to maintain and repair the stations? It could be that current employees sitting in a booth at a gas station whose main job responsibilities are collecting payment and selling supplies will move in to those roles, but to move from the booth into a more technical job requires training.

The jobs market is quickly shifting, with tens of millions of jobs requiring technology skills, and this will accelerate as the country works to "go green." At the same time, it is an opportunity to integrate economic, racial, gender, and generational justice. For example, minority communities coping with poor air quality and contaminated water supplies would see improvements critical to the quality of life, in addition to new job opportunities. A truly environmentally sustainable economy does not just protect the environment - it also addresses equity in the receipt of the benefits such an economy delivers.

Investing in the Future for Economic and Business Sustainability



In a green economy, goods and services are produced in a way that benefits the environment. Achieving this goal could mean reducing carbon emissions, moving towards a circular economy, refining logistics, and changing business models, but it certainly also means reskilling and upskilling a large segment of the workforce. For business and government, investing in the right skills for the future has become imperative. The complexity of the transition cannot be overstated. Some sectors of the economy will be impacted more than others, i.e. phasing out fossil fuels impacts the energy industry more than the healthcare industry.

New green job creation will not take place uniformly across industries, either, meaning some workers who currently lack mobility will have to become more mobile and flexible. Individuals have a responsibility, along with businesses and the government, and a blueprint for building a workforce for the future requires everyone to move in the same direction.

The government and higher education institutions need to offer educational systems that teach the skills future workers need. Many of the programs are ideally taught at community colleges. Employers can assist their current workforce by offering training programs or funding the cost of upskilling or reskilling at an institution. The workers who are replaced with technology need access to government subsidies for retraining to close skills gaps. The key is to first fund training for people in low-mobility low-paying jobs at risk of elimination to help them gain employment in transitioning to high-growth occupational segments. This will drive funding to people living in historically underserved communities, because many of these low-paid jobs are held by minorities. Thus, economic and social justice is built into the transitioning effort. Reskilling and upskilling can occur either before or after jobs are lost.

Employers Become Proactive

Employers are just as central to the greening of America as the government and educational facilities. They can take several proactive steps, first identifying the skills gaps in relation to the company's strategies for automation and implementing sustainability practices. Being proactive implies taking a step like this before the green transformation accelerates. They can make use of experiential learning or work-based learning, combined with training through specialized programs. Partnering with NGOs, diversity organizations, educational facilities, and government programs can provide the reskilling and upskilling support needed.

Diverse suppliers have remarkable opportunities to be leaders in helping companies with their transformation, from developing new technologies to offering training programs. However, they can also green their own businesses, which will make them more attractive to corporate customers sincere about making the greening of the company and the marketplace a priority. As businesses strive to contribute to a green economy, they make "green" an element of their brand, attracting the right talent for the future.

People Make the Green Economy.



There are companies leading the way. PowerCorpsPHL is an AmeriCorps cross-sector collaborative nonprofit that engages disconnected adults and returning citizens to career pathways. The organization offers a “4-18-month paid workforce development program that uses environmental services as the vehicle to teach technical and career skills.”¹ Participants train for jobs in clean energy, green infrastructure, and community-based careers.

In the program’s phase two, trainees can apply for a fellowship for placement with employer partners, or participate in an industry career academy that offers specific technical training for specific careers. PowerCorpsPHL says employers are crucial to the programs because they help keep training focused on industry standards and future needs. Revolution Recovery is a business providing recycling services to construction, commercial, manufacturing, and residential markets. Pedro Soto is one of the PowerCorpsPHL trainees who went to work for Revolution Recovery, strengthening his job skills while contributing to the green economy and Revolution Recovery’s success. He is now the PowerCorpsPHL project coordinator.

This real-world example is provided to demonstrate that small to large employers are leading the progress towards an economically and socially just green economy. Training people for jobs within the green economy is essential to make the green economy possible.