SECTION 5
SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

Why Sector Partnerships Matter
Industry Leadership
Sector Partnership Checklist
Partnerships Across Industries
Why Sector Partnerships Matter

SIMPLY LISTING OPEN POSITIONS IS FAR FROM BEING A SOLUTION TO THE INDUSTRY’S medium- and long-term workforce needs. Solar businesses are beginning to work more closely with local and regional stakeholders, such as other solar businesses and community colleges, but most solar companies lack experience in convening full-fledged sector partnerships seen in more mature industries. Organizing and formalizing the collaborative efforts between solar companies and their relevant stakeholders (such as the LWDB, community college, solar trade associations, and economic development organizations) in a given community or market is the basis of a sector partnership – which is designed to match the industry’s workforce needs and the solutions deployed to address them. The workforce system can help solar companies establish these partnerships. Sector partnerships and cross-sector strategies (developing mutually-beneficial efforts with other relevant industries) will allow businesses to pool their resources, identify common challenges, and respond to them more efficiently and effectively.

For more information on how each state supports sector partnerships, visit the National Skills Coalition’s “Skills in the States: Sector Partnership Policy 50-State Scan.

KEY COMPONENTS OF A SECTOR PARTNERSHIP

// EMPLOYER LED // to ensure the system is truly demand-driven and will lead to better outcomes for individuals

// SINGLE INDUSTRY FOCUS // to allow employers to connect with peers from their own industry, identify needs beyond basic workplace skills, and dive deeply into the technical needs of the industry

// REGIONAL // to address unique needs of subsectors while reflecting the true dynamics within a regional economy

// CONVENED BY A NEUTRAL INTERMEDIARY // to align all relevant partner programs and resources as solutions to identified industry needs
**Effective Sector Partnerships**

When solar businesses and their workforce partners come together to form sector partnerships, they:

- Identify common issues, challenges, and opportunities across companies;
- Coordinates previously disconnected stakeholders to address the priority needs of the solar industry, reducing duplication and leveraging each stakeholder’s impact;
- Communicate industry priorities to policy makers and workforce development partners, enabling them to design responsive solutions;
- Address current and emerging skill gaps, both short- and long-term;
- Provide a means to engage directly with industry across traditional boundaries; and,
- Better align programs, education/training curriculum, and other resources serving employers and workers.

Benefits of sector partnership participation include:

- System adapts to regional business needs, including reduced duplication and system inefficiencies;
- Streamlined and maximized resources and services;
- Capacity to build a stronger pipeline of future workers and shortens the time to hire;
- Builds career pathways with seamless transitions between educational stepping stones;
- A cohesive voice for the industry to influence training programs, impact policy, and attract funding;
- Mechanism for ongoing feedback with education, training, and workforce programs.

**Industry Leadership**

THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF ANY SECTOR PARTNERSHIP, BUT ESPECIALLY FOR SOLAR sector partnerships, is industry leadership. Without solar businesses recommending priorities and influencing decisions, the public workforce system will continue to prioritize other industries or provide solutions misaligned with solar workforce needs. By taking a more proactive role in addressing the solar industry’s workforce challenges, businesses can contribute to effective and lasting change.

Solar industry executives or business owners may consider becoming an industry champion and perhaps a founder of a local solar sector partnership.

An industry champion takes a personal interest in and responsibility for the success of a sector partnership, organizing and encouraging other stakeholders to make substantive contributions to workforce development initiatives and programs. Industry champions should be the kind of leaders who not only have decision-making authority at their businesses but also understand that the long-term success of their companies is linked to the broader prosperity of the community and the solar industry.
STEP 1 // ASSESS YOUR MARKET AND DECIDE IF IT IS MORE APPROPRIATE TO CONVENE A SECTOR PARTNERSHIP OR A CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIP.

- Do you have a high concentration of solar businesses in your region? Are the solar businesses in your area expecting significant growth in the coming months? If yes to either of these questions, a sector partnership may be right for you.
- Do you have a small number of solar businesses in your region, but a thriving manufacturing, construction, or renewable energy economy in your area? If yes, a cross-sector partnership may be right for you.

Your local workforce development board or solar trade association can help you answer these questions. Boards often sponsor State of the Workforce studies, keep track of in-demand jobs data, and, in general, have a good understanding of the economic and industry factors that will determine which route you should take. Regional economic development organizations sometimes take on similar roles.

2 // IDENTIFY INDUSTRY CHAMPIONS AND BEGIN TO ORGANIZE YOUR PARTNERSHIP.

- Are other business owners in your area having similar recruitment and hiring challenges as your business? Do you see neighboring businesses as competition for qualified candidates? If yes, contact the business owners or executives and invite them to help solve the problem.

Industry Champions are the driving force behind sector and cross-sector partnerships, and peer-to-peer outreach is key. If you need help making connections with other potential champions, contact your local workforce development board.

3 // DEFINE YOUR PARTNERSHIP’S MISSION AND VALUE PROPOSITION.

You can use any number of strategic planning or visioning processes to accomplish this step. Or, start by answering the following questions:

- How will your partnership benefit businesses?
- How will your partnership change and improve the solar workforce? (i.e., what are your goals?)
- How will your partnership collaborate with the public workforce system? (Workforce Development Board, Economic Development Organizations, Local Governments, Community Based Organizations, and Education Providers)
- How will you know when your partnership has been successful? (i.e., how will you measure outcomes?)

4 // ENGAGE POTENTIAL MEMBERS, STAKEHOLDERS, AND PARTNERS.

Begin with your professional network and others who have similar goals (such as the workforce system partners described in Section 5 of this toolkit), local governments, and utility companies. Schedule an information and planning session with these potential members. Be sure there’s a clear purpose and a detailed agenda. Topics should include the following.
5 // IDENTIFY LOCAL RESOURCES

Identify local resources, including policies and incentives to support the solar industry and/or sector partnerships; grant funding; education and training providers; potential third-party conveners.

WISCONSIN REGIONAL TRAINING PARTNERSHIP (WRTP)/BIG STEP ALIGN PROGRAMS WITH BUSINESS NEEDS

The solar industry is just getting started down the path to sector partnerships; however, many complimentary industries have mature sector partnerships that solar businesses can learn from. The Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership (WRTP) is one example.

WRTP/Big Step is an industry-led, worker-centered and community-focused sector partnership with the mission to enhance the ability of private sector organizations to recruit and develop a more diverse, qualified workforce in construction, manufacturing, and emerging sectors of the regional economy. WRTP/Big Step’s success relies on industry champions to help drive the partnership. Serving as a workforce intermediary, WRTP:

- Recruits and assesses job-ready candidates from community-based referral programs;
- Prepares qualified candidates for recruitment and advancement opportunities;
- Offers employment readiness training designed by industry; and
- Provides placement and retention services that link career and apprenticeship-ready candidates to the trades.

WRTP/Big Step has served 3,302 individuals, connected 850 to employment, and trained more than 2000 people, preparing them for apprenticeships and assisting in career exploration in construction and other skilled trades.
Partnerships Across Industries

SOLAR COMPANIES ARE FOUND ACROSS the United States but concentrated in some regions more than others. For emerging markets where there are a small number of solar employers, there may not be enough critical mass to develop a solar-specific sector partnership. If this is the case, a cross-sector partnership can provide support and create a pipeline of workers that possess competencies and qualities that are transferable to fill workforce needs in the solar industry. Cross-sector partnerships bring government, education, training, economic development, labor, and community organizations together to focus on the workforce needs of businesses within a regional labor market.

Typically, effective cross-sector partnerships include representation from various sectors or industries with similar training and education requirements and competencies. According to The Solar Training Network’s 2017 Solar Training and Hiring Insights, solar employers look less to job-specific training among applicants and place more value on those experiences that develop technical abilities, safety techniques, and soft skills that are common to all companies. Many of these competencies are prevalent within other industries like manufacturing, construction, and energy/utilities and would make for effective cross-sector partnerships.

When thinking of industries to engage for a cross-sector partnership, consider the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOLAR-FOCUSED COMPANY</th>
<th>POSSIBLE SECTORS TO ENGAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residential Installation</td>
<td>Roofing, Home Energy Efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Energy Installation</td>
<td>Heavy Construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricians</td>
<td>Solar Storage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PV Design</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solar Sales</td>
<td>Real Estate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The image on the right illustrates solar employers across the United States to show where clusters are located that would be better suited for a sector partnership. The colored dots indicate the location of a solar company. Those areas without colored dots may be better suited for a cross-sector partnership.

Photo courtesy of Solar Energy Industries Association

Jobs for the Future provides a step-by-step guide to engaging industry partners in the Green Economy. Click the link below to learn more.

JOBS FOR THE FUTURE
Since passage of the Future Energy Jobs Act (FEJA) in 2016, Illinois is expanding its renewable energy economy and striving to become a solar jobs powerhouse. As a part of FEJA’s $750 million commitment to help low-income communities benefit from clean energy, ComEd, the state’s largest investor-owned utility, has committed $30 million in funding to three workforce training programs: a solar training pipeline, a craft apprenticeship program, and a multicultural jobs program.

ComEd’s first cohort of grantees for the multicultural jobs program included the Chicago Urban League, the National Latino Education Institute, ASPIRA, the Hispanic American Construction Industry Association (HACIA), Chatham Business Association, and the Austin People’s Action Center. Grantees are working with diverse and underserved communities in Illinois, including people of color, low income communities, individuals reintegrating from the criminal justice system, and foster care alumni. In addition to providing job training to community members, the funding will also reach some existing minority contractors, who will grow their business in the state’s expanding clean energy marketplace.

ComEd’s solar training efforts complement the CONSTRUCT program, a 9-week construction sector training in partnership with several of the same community organizations. Since its inception in 2013, CONSTRUCT has worked with over 400 trainees, about 70% of whom have received job offers through partnering companies.