

# County Economic Development and Green Jobs

## The Role of Elected County Officials

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One way that counties can promote local job growth and economic development is by pursuing strategies to create “green jobs.” Currently there are different definitions of what constitutes a green job and the U.S. Department of Labor is in the process of precisely defining the term. However, some of the main sectors for green jobs include but are not limited to: retrofitting commercial and residential buildings to improve energy efficiency, expanding public transportation systems, developing renewable and alternative energies, smart grid development, agriculture and natural resource conservation, storm water management, pollution prevention and cleanup and waste management and recycling.

Counties can prioritize the development of these types of employment opportunities within a broader goal of creating a local green economy that focuses on environmentally-friendly and sustainable economic development for the county. Merging county economic growth goals with green practices has the potential to not only generate job growth but also result in local savings both environmentally and financially.

### ■ Assessing Existing County Resources for Developing Green Jobs

The first step that county leaders can take toward promoting green jobs is to inventory existing local programs, policies and initiatives

that help develop and sustain green jobs and how they connect with county workforce and economic development plans. For some counties, it may be important to conduct a broader regional assessment and coordinate with other local jurisdictions to determine what types of green economy activities are occurring in the area.

### Develop a county green team/green task force

When beginning to assess local green economic development efforts, county officials may find it useful coordinate a group of staff members from different county departments and/or seek assistance from consultants to help determine priorities and streamline efforts to build a local green economy and promote green job development. This county green-focused work group can:<sup>1</sup>

- Conduct or assist with the assessment of existing local green economy efforts;
- Assist in identifying the county’s green economy goals and help create a county-wide strategic plan for green job development; and
- Help gather input from other relevant community stakeholders, such as local industries, small and large businesses, local workforce training providers, local workforce investment boards, nonprofit organizations and residents.

During the process of evaluating existing local green economic and employment development practices and policies, leaders of the county’s assessment efforts may want to consider some of the following factors:





## Assessing Existing Local Resources and Industries/Businesses

A key initial component of the assessment process is to evaluate the county's existing resources and local businesses within the context of how they can support local green employment opportunities or may already be a part of local green economic development.

- What types of resources exist in the county? Consider not only existing local industries and businesses, but also the county's natural resources, workforce population characteristics, and other factors. How can these resources be most effectively utilized to promote green economic development?
- Are there local industries or businesses in the county already employing workers in green jobs, or do existing local industries have the potential to incorporate green jobs into their business models? During the assessment process it may be useful to categorize these jobs by industry types, such as energy companies, green technologies and others.
- Are there established manufacturing plants in the county, either currently operational or vacated, that have facilities that could be retrofitted to accommodate green jobs?
- Does the county have brownfields or other abandoned land parcels that could be redeveloped specifically for green industries? (see NACo's issue briefs, *Redevelopment of Vacant Sites and Protecting Public Health* and *The Politics of Redeveloping Brownfields and Abandoned Property*)
- Does the county have the available land, infrastructure and other resources to support local food production? Does the county have the resources to develop biofuels or other types of local energy generation? Local production is another way that counties can promote green economic development and job growth.

## Assessing Current County Economic Development Plans and County Policies

Another important step in the assessment process is to examine current local economic development plans as well as existing county policies that may help promote green economic development and green employment opportunities.

- Does the county economic development plan contain strategies that could help develop the local green economy? For example, does the plan already include targeted initiatives intended to attract alternative energy companies or other green industries?

**Case Study:** In Cuyahoga County, OH, county commissioners established the Great Lakes Energy Development Task Force to determine how the county might promote advanced energy technologies in the county. The county's Department of Development coordinates the activities of the task force, which invites participation from the private sector, nonprofit organizations and community members. For more information, go to <http://development.cuyahogacounty.us/en-US/energy-task-force.aspx>.

- Retrofitting county, commercial and residential buildings to be more energy efficient has the potential to create new local green employment opportunities. Considering this, are there existing policies and practices in the county that support green economic development, such as county policies that promote green purchasing, efforts to encourage energy efficiency, or reduce waste among local industries or businesses? Local businesses that are recognized by the county as environmentally responsible not only help improve the environment but may also benefit from increased business growth through this recognition.

**Case Study:** In Florida, Sarasota County's Green Business Partnership is a collaborative program of the county, local businesses and business organizations that provides official recognition to environmentally-responsible local businesses. Recognized businesses must meet certain environmental standards and resource conservation measures, such as solid waste standards and water and energy conservation practices that are verified through a certification assessment process that occurs every three years. For more information, visit [www.scgov.net/greenbusiness](http://www.scgov.net/greenbusiness).

## Assessing Existing Workforce Training Programs and Providers

There are many categories of green employment opportunities, and as a result there are also a range of different workforce skill levels needed depending on the type of job. For example, some employment opportunities in the green technology sector would require advanced training in engineering, while workers who weatherize homes can gain the necessary skills in shorter-term training programs. Counties will want to assess local workforce training pro-

grams in the context of the existing and anticipated local green employment opportunities and consider the following factors:

- What specific types of skills do workers need for existing or anticipated local green employment opportunities?
- Do local education and training institutions such as community colleges and proprietary schools and universities offer courses or certification programs that adequately prepare workers for existing or potential local green employment opportunities?
- Are there community-based organizations that train individuals for green jobs, such as weatherization, green construction and retrofitting practices?
- Does the local workforce investment plan focus on training that matches the existing or potential needs of green industries and businesses in the county?

## ■ Planning & Action Steps for Developing Green Jobs at the County Level

After conducting an assessment of existing resources, policies and workforce training programs, county leaders can consider the following strategies to facilitate green job growth and green economic development:

### Develop a county-wide strategic plan for green job development

County officials can lead their green team in the development of specific goals related to expanding local green employment opportunities, using the assessment information and input from community stakeholders to inform a green job development plan. For an example of a county green economy plan, see Montgomery County, MD's plan, available at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/ded/pdf/green\\_economy\\_report.pdf](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/ded/pdf/green_economy_report.pdf). The following are some guiding questions that may be useful in the creation of a green economic and workforce development plan.

### Working with Local Businesses and Industries to Develop Local Green Employment Opportunities

After assessing the types of green jobs and businesses that already exist in the county and the sectors of green industries that would work best considering the county's resources, county officials in partnership with economic development departments can consider some of the following issues:

- If there are local industries and businesses already employing workers in green jobs, are there ways the county can help enhance their efforts to promote greater local job growth? For example are there sectors of green jobs that could be expanded or are there new sectors that could be pursued?
- Can the county, through incentives, policies or other measures, encourage existing local industries and businesses to green their operations and practices, which could in turn result in new green employment opportunities?
- If there are few local employers offering green jobs, county officials may want to consider developing incentives to attract new green businesses to the county. Examples of these types of incentives are:

- » Offering tax credits or exemptions to businesses that manufacture, sell or assemble green products or technologies
- » Providing density bonuses or easing the permitting process for developers that follow LEED building standards<sup>2</sup> or for other green industries such as renewable energy

**Case Study:** Arlington County, VA has a green building density incentive policy to encourage developers to construct and operate buildings that meet LEED standards. For more information, see [www.arlingtonva.us/departments/environmentalservices/epo/environmentalservicesepoincentiveprogram.aspx%5C](http://www.arlingtonva.us/departments/environmentalservices/epo/environmentalservicesepoincentiveprogram.aspx%5C).

- » Encouraging the development of green industrial parks in the county by creating "green enterprise/economic development zones" to attract green businesses through a mix of tax and development incentives

**Case Study:** In Clinton County, OH, a local grassroots organization, Energize Clinton County, partnered with the Clinton County Regional Planning Commission and the private sector to develop the Wilmington Green Enterprise Zone. For more information, see [http://energizecc.com/ohios-first-green-enterprise-zone/gez\\_interactive\\_pr/](http://energizecc.com/ohios-first-green-enterprise-zone/gez_interactive_pr/).

- » Providing green business developers with information about areas within the county where green industries could potentially locate

**Case Study:** Klickitat County, WA developed a clean energy overlay zone which provided potential green industries such as wind farm developers with information about possible locations for sites and created an ordinance that expedites wind farm permits. For more information, see [www.klickitatcounty.org/Planning](http://www.klickitatcounty.org/Planning) and select "Index Energy Overlay EIS files".

## Building and Training a Local Green Workforce

Counties can play an important role in aligning workforce training efforts with local businesses' workforce needs for green employment opportunities. Some questions county leaders may want to consider are the following:

- How can workers being trained for green jobs become better connected to existing local employment opportunities? Can the county help coordinate green job training programs that directly link with green apprenticeship and employment opportunities?

**Case Study:** In St. Lucie County, FL, through assistance from a state grant, county commissioners along with other community partners formed a Green Collar Task Force and developed a green jobs apprenticeship program with its own training facility. The program is focused on training workers for employment opportunities in green construction and retrofitting projects. For more information, go to <http://greencollartf.org>.

- Are there specific populations of residents in the county that may particularly benefit from green job training? For example, counties may want to consider targeting green job training initiatives to unemployed and underemployed individuals, dislocated workers, formerly incarcerated individuals, at-risk youth, or low-income individuals in the community.

**Case Study:** San Mateo County, CA's Green Jobs Training Academy provides training for green employment opportunities to low-income parents. For more information, see [www.co.sanmateo.ca.us/Attachments/humanservices/Files/AboutUs/PressReleases/Press%20Release%20-%20Inaugural%20Class%20of%20Green%20Jobs%20Academy%20Graduates%2012-09.pdf](http://www.co.sanmateo.ca.us/Attachments/humanservices/Files/AboutUs/PressReleases/Press%20Release%20-%20Inaugural%20Class%20of%20Green%20Jobs%20Academy%20Graduates%2012-09.pdf).

**Case Study:** Boulder County, CO's Green Jobs Pipeline Partnership focuses on helping low-income and lower-skilled workers gain on-the-job training for jobs in green construction and other projects. The initiative is a joint effort of Boulder County Housing and Human Services, Boulder County Housing Authority, Boulder County Community Services and Workforce Boulder County. For more information, go to [www.greenjobspipeline.org](http://www.greenjobspipeline.org).

- If there are limited efforts to train workers for green jobs, county officials can consider the following:
  - » Is there a greater need among local employers for workers with advanced degrees in engineering or other technical fields, or for workers trained in green construction, or do both types of employment opportunities exist? What are the anticipated workforce needs of local green industries that the county is trying to attract?
  - » What types of new courses/programs should local education and training institutions offer to help train workers for green jobs that exist or that are expected to grow in the county?
  - » Are there state, federal or private sector funding resources related to promoting green economic development that could be used to provide green job training for workers?
  - » How can county officials improve coordination with workforce training providers and local businesses to help develop local workforce development plans that include efforts to expand green employment opportunities in the community? How can these types of workforce development efforts be better connected to county economic development efforts?

## Other Strategies to Develop Local Green Employment Opportunities

In addition to actively leading efforts within the county to coordinate green workforce training efforts with the needs of local green industries, county governments can pursue other strategies that support green economic development.

- Counties can implement grant or loan programs that help local businesses and residents make energy efficiency upgrades and

other green retrofits. Promoting these types of activities can create new local green employment opportunities as well as improve energy efficiency in county buildings, local businesses and homes.

**Case Study:** Sonoma County, CA's Energy Independence Program (SCEIP) offers residential and commercial property owners the opportunity to finance upgrades for renewable energy generation or that improve energy or water efficiency. The assessments are tied to a lien on the property which is paid over time through property tax bills. For more information, go to [www.sonomacountyenergy.org/energy-improvements.php](http://www.sonomacountyenergy.org/energy-improvements.php).

- To demonstrate the county's commitment to promoting green economic development, county officials may consider enacting resolutions or pledges that demonstrate the county's commitment to building a sustainable green economy. This commitment could include specific initiatives related to helping green businesses locating in the county.
- Public-private partnerships to promote green county initiatives can provide both financial and technical support to counties' green economy efforts through activities such as sponsorship and community outreach, providing assistance with economic and workforce development planning efforts or helping counties provide consumers with incentives to select green products. (For more information, see NACo's issue brief, *Counties and Green Public-Private Partnerships*, available at [www.greencounties.org](http://www.greencounties.org).)

As recognized by the Green Economy Task Force of Montgomery County, MD, fostering green economic development is a process that takes time and requires new collaborative partnerships and investments. However with leadership and commitment from county officials, counties can lead the way in promoting sustainable economic development and job growth in existing and emerging local green industries.

1 For more information, see NACo's Green Government fact sheet "Creating a Green County Team" at [www.greencounties.org](http://www.greencounties.org).

2 LEED is an internationally recognized green building certification system developed by the U.S. Green Building Council that verifies a building was constructed using strategies that promote energy savings, water efficiency, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reduction, improved indoor environmental quality, and stewardship of resources and sensitivity to their impacts.

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