

MassCEC Workforce Grantee Convening

Peer-Led Discussion Breakout Session Notes

Mass Save

- Training providers are using the **Mass Save contractor list** to identify potential employers for placing program graduates, but engagement with employers can be difficult, especially for **short duration of training programs**.
- Participants raised concerns about **exclusionary policies within Mass Save**, particularly restrictions that prevent companies from becoming certified if they employ individuals with CORI records, creating barriers to inclusive hiring.
- There is currently **no clear, coordinated pathway** to engage Mass Save contractors in **MassCEC Workforce Development–funded programs**, prompting questions about how these systems can be better aligned.
- The group emphasized the need to ensure that **small contractors and MWBEs** have greater access to Mass Save work, as current structures often favor larger firms.
- Multiple participants noted that **Mass Save processes are difficult to navigate**, especially for small contractors, with some reporting they have tried for years to understand and access opportunities.
- Contractors may complete enrollment steps but remain “**stuck in the lobby**,” receiving little or no actual work through the program.
- Increasing **supplier diversity** was identified as a shared goal, but challenges remain due to administrative complexity and limited transparency.
- Issues with **territory changes for lead vendors** were highlighted, particularly when contractors are not promptly informed, resulting in missed opportunities.
- Participants suggested **breaking up large Mass Save contracts** to create more entry points for smaller contractors.
- A Mass Save–affiliated **HERS Rater** noted that while staff make efforts to support contractors, they are constrained by systemic limitations.
- Emerging initiatives such as the **New England Heat Pump Accelerator** were discussed, with the program still in early stages and expected to launch through a Massachusetts RFP.
- There is a proposal to introduce **separate licensure requirements for geothermal work**, recognizing that geothermal systems do not involve refrigerants.
- Participants stressed the importance of supporting contractors to **scale their businesses**, which is necessary for long-term workforce growth.

- Significant effort is required to **build employer relationships**, particularly to educate businesses about available workforce development programs and incentives.
- Incentives for employers to take on **apprentices** were viewed as critical, especially since small contractors often lack the upfront capital to support apprenticeships.
- Challenges were noted for **CTE and vocational high school graduates**, who face difficulty securing job placements despite completing training.
- Program participants need additional support with **resume development and demonstrating consistent work history**, which are critical to employer confidence.
- Networking and personal connections remain a major factor in hiring, creating barriers for individuals without industry relationships.
- Participants suggested creating a **vetted list of training programs** (similar to the HPIN list) to build employer trust and familiarity.
- Administrative burden was cited as a deterrent to pursuing available **incentive programs**.
- There was strong interest in **standardizing curricula**, particularly around heat pump training, to improve employer recognition and portability.
- Finally, participants proposed that **Mass Save maintain a list of approved trainers and curricula**, which would allow training providers to more easily connect with employers by demonstrating alignment with Mass Save standards.

Supporting Justice-Impacted Individuals

- The discussion emphasized that **entry-level wages alone are insufficient** given the high cost of living, which can create financial pressure on participants and increase the risk of **recidivism**.
- **MassCEC Planning Grants** were identified as a key resource for exploring and piloting strategies that strengthen workforce pathways for individuals with CORI records.
- Strong **employer engagement** is essential to identify and cultivate **CORI-friendly employers**, particularly in clean energy and related sectors.
- Participants highlighted the value of **listening sessions within correctional facilities** to better understand participant needs, barriers, and readiness prior to release.
- **Labor market statistics** were cited as important inputs, but insufficient on their own without direct employer and participant engagement.
- Building **trust and clear lines of communication**—between participants and instructors, and between participants and employers—was seen as foundational to successful placement and retention.

- A central concern raised was whether **employers will genuinely listen and follow through**, especially when hiring individuals with CORI histories.
- Many employers are hesitant to formally document their willingness to hire CORI-impacted individuals, placing responsibility on **training organizations to present structured plans** that reduce perceived risk.
- The group questioned how to ensure **employer accountability**, particularly when informal commitments are made.
- **Transparency during intake** was identified as critical on both sides: participants should be encouraged to disclose CORI history honestly, while programs must clearly communicate available services, supports, and expectations—and reliably deliver on them.
- Training staff often play an **active intermediary role**, advocating for participants with employers and intervening when issues arise (e.g., contacting employers if a participant is late).
- Participants discussed strategies to **de-risk hiring for employers**, including:
 - Initial **wage subsidies**
 - **Retention guarantees**
 - Targeted placement through programs like **Mass Save CORI**
- The **C3I Coalition**, operating under the **Mass Save three-year plan**, was identified as an important coordinating body in this space.
- There is ongoing **uncertainty around background check requirements**, creating confusion for both employers and training providers.
- Grantees reported hosting **stakeholder convenings** to align employers, utilities, and workforce organizations.
- **Customer preference and perception** were highlighted by utilities as a barrier to CORI hiring, though participants noted a disconnect between this concern and the promises of existing funded training programs.
- Finally, it was noted that **Mass Save is preparing to release a new CORI policy**, which could significantly impact employer practices and workforce program alignment moving forward.

Engaging Employers

- Effective **employer engagement** was identified as foundational to successful workforce programs, particularly through **direct communication about program graduates** and job readiness.
- **Trust** between training providers and employers was repeatedly emphasized as essential for hiring, placement, and long-term partnerships.
- A **driver's license** was cited as a non-negotiable requirement for many clean energy jobs, especially in **rural communities** where work often involves residential projects and small contractors with dispersed job sites.
- **Professional Advisory Committees (PACs)** were highlighted as critical structures for keeping training programs aligned with current industry needs.
- Participants noted that **site visits, work-based learning opportunities, and internships** frequently lead directly to hiring and strengthen employer confidence in candidates.
- **Registered and competitive apprenticeships** were discussed as valuable but challenging pathways due to high competition and limited slots.
- Concerns were raised about whether **wages are sufficient** to attract and retain workers, particularly in light of cost-of-living pressures.
- Access to and awareness of **labor market resources** were discussed, including:
 - Massachusetts and national **clean energy industry reports** (e.g., BW Research)
 - **MassCEC workforce needs assessments**
 - **Lightcast**, with noted limitations for smaller geographic areas
- Participants stressed the importance of **direct outreach**, including phone calls with employers, rather than relying solely on digital or published data.
- Collaboration with **MassHire, Community Action Development (CAD) agencies**, and **Chambers of Commerce** was identified as an effective strategy for employer outreach and coordination.
- Listening to a wide range of employers was seen as essential to **identify common themes across varying needs**.
- The group discussed the importance—and challenge—of **adapting program design** in response to evolving employer needs.
- Programs serving **older students** highlighted the need for flexible expectations and support structures.
- **Attendance tracking** was emphasized as a key component of preparing participants for real-world job expectations.
- Informal networking and **community-building efforts**, such as “**Green Drinks**,” were highlighted as effective tools for strengthening local clean energy ecosystems and employer relationships.

ESOL Peer-Led Discussion Notes

- The discussion emphasized the need for **additional and personalized support** for ESOL learners, recognizing that language acquisition varies by individual and requires flexible approaches.
- **Language accessibility** was highlighted as a major priority, including the use of **language dubbing, interpretation, and instructors who speak learners' first languages** to improve comprehension and participation.
- Participants noted that **clean energy terminology is complex and intimidating**, not only for ESOL learners but for all participants, underscoring the need for plain language and contextual explanations.
- Supporting **multilingual cohorts** presents challenges, requiring intentional strategies to ensure equity across learners with different language backgrounds.
- There is a significant **loss of workforce potential** due to immigrants being unable to meet U.S. credentialing requirements, pointing to the need for better alignment between training, certification, and employer expectations.
- Strong collaboration between **ESOL instructors and employers** was identified as a key solution, allowing language instruction to be directly tied to workplace needs.
- The group discussed the importance of **contextual learning** (job-related language) versus **survival learning** (everyday communication), noting that effective programs should integrate both.
- **Incentives**, such as stipends or benefits, were suggested as ways to encourage greater participation and persistence among learners.
- The need to move beyond isolated successes was emphasized, with a focus on developing **scalable models** rather than solutions that only work at a local level.
- Participants stressed that **language learning takes time**, and that state policies and program expectations must be realistic and supportive of long-term progress.
- Conducting thorough **needs assessments** was identified as essential to tailoring support services effectively.
- Finally, the discussion underscored the importance of **empowering learners** by not only teaching language skills but also **building motivation, confidence, and engagement**.

Municipalities Table Discussion Notes

- The discussion focused on identifying **clear entry points within state and municipal entities** by examining how other states structure leadership, partnerships, and coordination.
- Participants emphasized the importance of identifying **local champions**, including communities with **green or sustainability designations**, as leverage points for advancing initiatives.
- **Volunteers and existing community capacity** were highlighted as valuable resources, particularly in towns that already prioritize sustainability, climate action, or the **blue economy**.
- It was noted that **municipal structures vary widely**, with different departments and staffing models addressing similar goals.
- Participants identified **hubs and multi-year (three-year) plans** as promising organizing frameworks to align efforts and reduce fragmentation.
- Organizations such as **Chambers of Commerce**, sustainability managers (e.g., Cape Cod), community-first partnerships, **economic development leaders**, town administrators, and community colleges were cited as key stakeholders.
- A major challenge discussed was **frequent changes in municipal leadership**, which can disrupt momentum, shift priorities, and require re-establishing relationships.
- While initiatives are often **sector-driven**, there is significant overlap across sectors, creating opportunities for collaboration but also contributing to a **lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities**.
- Municipal capacity to engage in this work varies greatly and is highly dependent on **available resources**, resulting in uneven implementation across regions.
- Participants stressed that municipalities have **distinct regional needs**, and that these differences should be acknowledged and used constructively to identify opportunities rather than barriers.
- There was discussion around improving **evaluation and clarity** regarding municipal focus areas to better align support and investments.
- Strong and consistent **political leadership** was seen as a critical factor in sustaining long-term efforts.
- The group highlighted the need for ongoing commitment to **basic community needs**—such as housing, childcare, and transportation—to ensure people can remain and work within their communities.

- Adding **capacity-building roles**—such as liaisons responsible for coordination, relationship management, and resource sharing—was identified as a high-value strategy.
- An example was shared of **Somerville’s external liaison model**, which helps connect stakeholders and relay information back to the municipality.
- Finally, participants emphasized the importance of creating approaches that are **inclusive of both rural and urban communities**, recognizing their differing capacities and priorities.

Clean Energy and Climate Resilience Jobs

- Participants identified a major challenge in that **clean energy occupations are not clearly visible or accessible** to jobseekers, as many relevant roles do not include “clean” in their job titles. **Union jobs are also largely absent from standard job search platforms**, further limiting awareness.
- To address this, **Julius is developing a data tool with custom analysis** designed to identify actual clean energy and climate resilience jobs, rather than relying on keyword-based job titles.
- Organizations shared various **resources currently used to understand the clean energy workforce**, including executive interviews, targeted employer surveys, and publicly available Excel-based data tools.
- National and state-level data sources cited included the **National Solar Jobs Census**, **MassCEC workforce needs assessments**, and **Lightcast**, though limitations were noted—particularly the lack of regional specificity, which can mask local labor market realities.
- A key challenge is that **employer needs vary significantly**, even within the same sector. This makes it difficult to design training programs that serve multiple employers, reinforcing the need to combine **quantitative data with qualitative insights**.
- Participants stressed the importance of **broad employer engagement**, including collaboration with Chambers of Commerce, MassHire, Community Action Programs (CAP agencies), and participation in construction and energy fairs to gather input from a wide range of employers.

- There was strong consensus that programs must focus on **foundational skills** (basic tool use, safety, identification of equipment), while allowing companies to provide training on more specific or proprietary skills.
- Building **trusted employer relationships** was identified as critical. Successful programs proactively match candidates to employers, supported by long-standing partnerships and employer familiarity with training facilities.
- Several **structural barriers to employment** were highlighted, with the most significant being lack of a **driver's license**, insurance requirements (especially in HVAC), and past license suspensions that prevent workers from remaining employed.
- Participants noted that **large employer partnerships** (e.g., utilities like National Grid) can result in entire training cohorts being hired before graduation, demonstrating the value of strong industry alignment.
- Advisory bodies such as **Professional Advisory Committees (PACs)** and groups like **Professional Women in Construction** were cited as highly effective in shaping relevant and inclusive programming.
- Barriers within the workforce itself include **low starting wages**, limited career progression in certain trades, and the logistical demands of construction work, which often requires long-distance travel.
- Union pathways, particularly through organizations like **IBEW**, remain a primary training route but are **highly competitive** and require candidates to meet strict entry and retention standards, including punctuality and attendance.
- Pre-apprenticeship programs were described as intentionally rigorous to prepare participants for real-world job expectations in the trades.
- The discussion highlighted the growing role of **AI-driven labor market analysis**, including using AI to read and normalize job postings to better capture clean energy roles.
- Participants emphasized the importance of understanding how **labor market data intersects with broader industry trends**, such as grid modernization and data center expansion, which can include roles not traditionally labeled as “clean energy.”
- Questions were raised about whether organizations like **MassCEC** are fully **capturing employer participation**, with recognition that entire sectors may still be underrepresented.
- The upcoming **Julius dashboard** was widely viewed as a promising resource to centralize employer data and improve visibility of clean energy jobs.

- Finally, innovative **community-building approaches**, such as informal networking events like “Green Drinks,” were shared as effective ways to connect stakeholders and strengthen the clean energy workforce ecosystem.

Registered Apprenticeship- Peer Led Discussion

- One grantee is developing a **competency-based drilling curriculum** intended to serve as the foundation for a registered apprenticeship program.
- Apprenticeship was discussed as a promising “**learn-and-earn**” model, particularly for roles that require significant on-the-job experience, such as positions needing **180 days at sea**, which are difficult to fill through traditional hiring.
- A grantee shared that they currently have a **strong partnership with the Carpenters Union**, but are interested in expanding apprenticeship models into other fields due to **economic shifts and limited hiring capacity** within the Carpenters Union.
- Efforts to establish an apprenticeship program have faced challenges with **Department of Apprenticeship Standards (DAS) approval**, largely due to the grantee’s **commission-based pay structure** and the absence of a clearly defined **wage progression**, both of which are required for registration.
- **Educational prerequisites** imposed by DAS—specifically the requirement for a **GED or high school diploma**—were identified as a significant barrier for some prospective apprentices.
- The grantee is collaborating with a **nonprofit organization and the Carpenters Union** to integrate **offshore wind (OSW) training** into their existing program.
- As part of this collaboration, participants will complete **two weeks of offshore experience**, providing exposure to real-world working conditions.
- Several barriers to offshore wind training were highlighted, including the need for **specialized safety and cold-water training**, the challenge of accumulating **180 days at sea**, and the requirement of having a **driver’s license**.
- Overall, the discussion underscored both the **potential of registered apprenticeships** to address experience gaps in emerging clean energy sectors and

the **structural and eligibility barriers** that must be addressed to scale these pathways effectively.

Upskilling and Business Competitiveness Peer-Led Breakout

- This table was not well attended, which limited the depth and breadth of discussion. As a result, the conversation deviated from the table's original intent.
- Discussion focused primarily on Mass Save CORI requirements, rather than the broader topics initially planned.