



FEDERATION OF PROTESTANT WELFARE AGENCIES

A Plan to Create **Green Pathways** out of Poverty

In times of economic recession, it becomes more important than ever to coordinate sustainable economic development strategies with policies aimed at permanently lifting families out of poverty through education and training opportunities and job creation. Now, in the midst of simultaneous economic, environmental, and energy problems facing our State, it is essential that our workforce development plan to improve the State's energy efficiency create "Green Pathways" out of poverty.

Low-income communities are hit hardest by both financial hardship and environmental hazards. Families in these areas often face a double burden of limited educational and employment opportunities. Low-income communities and communities of color are also disproportionately likely to live and work in toxic environments. Therefore, now is the ideal moment to craft a workforce development policy plan that achieves economic, social and environmental justice goals for families in poverty.

Unique Needs of Populations with Greater Barriers to Employment

Low-Income, Low-Skilled Working Adults, particularly Single Parents, Current/Former Welfare Recipients, and Immigrants - These individuals must often carry multiple burdens of responsibility, including managing work schedules, meeting family obligations, and maintaining a household on a limited budget. In addition, course schedules and the cost of education make it even more difficult for adults to access academic or vocational training programs tailored to those with lower skill levels, limited education and/or limited English proficiencies. Furthermore, the demands of providing care for children as a single parent can be overwhelming, particularly for those living in poverty.

Disconnected Youth, particularly Youth Aging out of Foster Care - Youth from low-income communities and those aging out of the foster care system face significant barriers to education and employment because of limited adult support and income.

Previously Incarcerated Youth and Adults - Individuals of all ages who are re-entering the community after a period of incarceration often face discrimination and the challenge of finding and maintaining employment with a criminal record.

Recommendations from the NYC **Green Pathways out of Poverty (G-POP) Team:**

A coalition of community-based, educational, and business organizations dedicated to promoting economic and environmental justice by creating, for **individuals in poverty** and **those who face the greatest barriers to employment**, green collar jobs that improve the economy, mitigate climate change, conserve the environment, increase community empowerment, and improve public health.

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The ideal Green Pathways program creates job training and basic education programs that prepare job seekers for employment in clean energy industries. Building retrofits and energy efficiency building maintenance are key green collar sectors with promising labor demand growth in the coming years. In addition, with deliberate planning and collaboration between government agencies, community-based partners, education and training providers, employers, and unions, entry into these positions can be made available to populations in poverty. A Green Pathways program not only provides employment opportunities for low-income workers, it also encourages the proliferation of green industry in urban areas, which in turn can reduce the environmental burdens faced by low-income communities.

Green Pathways out of Poverty Model – Basic Design

The ideal model should include the following key components:

- 1. Consortium of community-based organizations, labor groups, community colleges, green business services providers, and employers** – The State should provide funding and technical assistance to build regional partnerships focused on creating career pathways programs for populations in poverty in a specific green collar sector. New job opportunities such as in retrofitting buildings offer a bridge to stable, sustainable wage employment for low-income community residents. In addition, the partnership model incorporates the interests of all key players into the program design, while also ensuring that training is specifically linked to real jobs with entry points for those having limited previous experience and/or education.
- 2. Central intake agencies** – In each partnership there should be 2-3 agencies that are designated points of entry into the program for potential participants. These agencies should be responsible for conducting outreach to low-income communities to recruit (“screen in”) as many eligible individuals as possible and spread awareness about new opportunities. Then, these agencies would also conduct a thorough intake and assessment process with candidates to determine which individuals are best suited for the program and define their individualized education, training, and social service needs. Finally, the intake agencies would refer clients to the appropriate training program in addition to making referrals to essential wrap-around services, such as housing assistance, child care, mental health or substance abuse treatment, and financial literacy programs. A case manager should be assigned to each eligible participant to maintain an ongoing relationship with him or her throughout the course of the program. These case managers must be trained to understand the specific requirements of the green collar industry and the available community resources needed to help the participant overcome barriers.
- 3. Contextualized adult literacy, ESL and/or GED preparation** – To expand access to participants with lower skill levels and greater barriers to work, agencies should collaborate to design curricula that blend vocational training with skill development in basic literacy, mathematics, and technology. These programs accelerate the learning process for those with limited English proficiency, reading, and writing abilities. In addition, they give participants an opportunity to build job-specific skills that can lead to sustainable wage employment more quickly. With a focus on green collar sectors, including residential retrofits, contextualized training programs are essential to the design of workforce development programs for these populations. Participants would learn the basics of electrical, mechanical, and structural upgrade of residential homes, while improving their literacy skills and, in some instances, preparing for the GED exam. Graduates of these programs will be well-positioned to transition to their next career pathway such as a certificate degree or other higher education in a green jobs field.

4. Career ladders – Participants with varying skill levels should have the opportunity to enter the program and build an upward career pathway based on their current abilities and future job prospects in a specific green collar sector. Once an applicant has been fully assessed and referred to the appropriate program, they can set goals for career advancement through continued education, training, and on-the-job experience. This career advancement can take place immediately or the participant can decide to advance later on in their career.

5. Performance measures – The State should construct performance-based outcome measures to give agencies credit for helping clients to move each progression upward on the career ladder. For populations facing greater barriers to employment, this must include incremental steps taken from a starting point that begins at lower skill levels and with limited work experience.

For example, agencies could receive performance-based funding for:

- Increasing literacy levels (measured by TABE test scores);
- Improving English proficiency for speakers of other languages;
- Providing work-readiness “soft skills” training;
- Forming and maintaining community partnerships with other non-profit agencies, educational institutions, and employers;
- Enrolling and retaining certain numbers of individuals from target populations;
- Linking clients to supportive services in the community;
- Building contextualized program models that blend job training with a curriculum that improves basic literacy, GED test preparation, and/or college-focused learning in a specific green collar industry; and,
- Enrolling clients in various income-enhancing benefits, since access to these benefits has proven impact on long-term job retention and asset accumulation.

The importance of developing performance measures that offer incentives for providing workforce development services to those in poverty cannot be understated. It is precisely because so few public and private contracts currently provide these incentives, that so many programs are forced to “cream” the most job ready and higher educated clients to serve. Agency managers recognize the need in their communities to serve those with greater barriers. However, they are so often restricted by the performance-based outcome measurements that only give funding for meeting very high achievements, that they cannot address the needs of these individuals.

6. Funding mechanisms – It is essential that both public and private funding mechanisms be designed to support the Green Pathways out of Poverty model, using the performance-based measurement recommendations mentioned above. A significant portion of the funding should be operations-based, while the remaining performance-based funding should be provided when targets uniquely developed for individuals facing the greatest barriers to work are achieved.

Key Supports & Services and Cohort/Case Management Model¹

Supportive services are critical to empowering people in poverty to achieve success in making career advancements. By placing individuals in a “cohort” of their peers, they can participate in a social network of similar people that are determined to persist through the program together. In addition, case managers can provide crucial one-on-one support to help the participant establish an individualized action plan with clear goals and steps to achieve them. The action plan must include primarily the specific work and educational activities in the targeted green collar sector, which are vital for the participant to achieve career advancement. In addition, the plan should contain other services that will be made available, including benefits assistance, child care, transportation, health care, and if needed, mental health services, drug/alcohol treatment, or domestic violence services. Case managers must be trained to understand the specific requirements for each green collar industry and the available community resources to help clients overcome remaining barriers.

¹ SCOPE – Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (April 2008). “A Greener Future for Los Angeles: Principles to Ensure an Equitable Green Economy.” Available at: www.scopela.org.