



## **Clean Power, Healthy Communities 2017**

### **Background Information for the *Building union strength and workforce development* breakout session**

Energy is one of the necessities of life, like clean air, water, food, shelter and healthcare. For more than 100 years control and ownership of energy resources has been in the hands of large corporations -- Shell, Chevron, PG&E -- you get the picture.

The ability to produce electricity using wind and sun, with wind turbines and solar panels has opened up the possibility that all of us, as communities, could generate our own electricity; we could take control and ownership of that essential resource away from corporations and put it in our hands. This is what we mean when we talk about energy democracy.

Communities that own and/or control their own energy resources can get many benefits. There are direct benefits such as switching to cleaner, renewable energy and getting rid of polluting power plants, addressing the urgent crisis of climate change, and lowering energy bills by eliminating the need for huge profits.

But there are other benefits such as creating jobs and increasing business activity that result when we decide to develop those clean energy resources right in our communities, through rooftop solar, community-scale solar projects and wind farms. There are programs such as community shared solar that offer opportunities for everyone to be part owners in these clean energy projects, and profit from the electricity they produce.

Many cities and counties in California, including Alameda County, are setting up public not-for-profit Community Choice energy programs as alternatives to private, for-profit utilities like PG&E. Because these public agencies are governed by elected officials, community members can push for programs and policies that increase local control and ownership of energy resources and address pressing issues such as skyrocketing rents, unemployment, and systemic poverty in low income communities and communities of color--those that have been most harmed by the fossil fuel economy.

Alameda County is launching its own Community Choice energy program, East Bay Community Energy, next year. It's up to us to make sure it serves our community.

The purpose of this breakout session is to brainstorm ways in which the development of local clean energy projects can generate good paying union jobs, workforce development, and project labor and community benefit agreements. The following questions are provided to help guide the discussion, but we encourage you to come up with your own.

#### ***Building union strength and workforce development questions***

- What role should public clean energy programs, like Community Choice energy programs, play in setting labor and workforce development standards that will provide better jobs to more members of our community?
- Are there ways to expand the number of projects covered by union contracts? For instance, could aggregating smaller projects improve labor standards and increase the number of union jobs for the aggregated projects?

- How can we provide adequate training so that the jobs created through local clean energy projects can go to community members, especially those who have been denied access to clean energy jobs?
- What kind of support is needed to help initiate and retain new recruits to job training programs and new hires in jobs?
- Local Hire provisions in projects are a good way to secure local jobs, but how should “local” be defined in a time when so many low income people have been displaced to surrounding Bay Area cities?
- A switch from fossil fuel-driven energy to renewable energy means a loss of jobs for those in fossil fuel-related industries. How do we make sure there is a just transition, so those workers are not left behind? What steps should be taken in that process?
- Could aggregation of solar rooftop projects be utilized to begin union organizing of the solar rooftop industry? How could a public program like Community Choice energy support that aggregation process?