

Community Engagement Report
Labor Workshop
March 5, 2015



This Labor Workshop was an event organized by the Clean Energy & Jobs Oakland Campaign of the Oakland Climate Action Coalition to engage the broader labor movement in the East Bay. It was a special mid-afternoon workshop at the Local Clean Energy Alliance’s Clean Power, Healthy Communities Conference on Thursday, March 5, 2015, from 2:00 pm to 3:00pm.

Participants/Attendees

The event drew approximately 45 attendees, including a core group of about fifteen unionists in the East Bay and about twice that number of clean energy activists interested in working with unions to build labor support for local renewable energy development.

The unions participating in the workshop included: Laborers (LIUNA) Local 304, Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 192, California Nurses Association (CNA), Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1021, Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 9412, American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) District 57, International Longshoremen and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 6, United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 1981, and International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) Local 70. Other labor organizations included staff members of the East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy (EBASE), Emerald Cities Collaborative, and US Labor Against the War (USLAW).

Purpose/Goal

The goal of the event was to increase union understanding and support for the goals of the OCAC’s Clean Energy & Jobs Oakland Campaign: to promote local clean energy development and family-sustaining, clean energy jobs through an East Bay Community Choice energy program. The event sought to draw union members and officials from across organized labor, from public service workers, nurses, warehouse workers, private sector services, and building trades. Union support is crucial for advancing community-based clean energy development, especially given labor’s strong political influence in the East Bay.

Partner Organizations

The Clean Energy & Jobs Oakland Campaign partnered with the Labor program of Movement Generation Justice and Ecology Project (Climate Workers) to plan and facilitate the workshop.

Program

The program began with an opening presentation by Brooke Anderson from Climate Workers. She shared her own personal trajectory of seeing workers suffer the consequences of economic transitions due to environmental regulation and climate change—from hotel housekeepers, to port truck drivers, to recycling workers, to restaurant servers. The lesson she shared is that transition is inevitable, but that justice is not. Whether we have a “just transition” depends on the movement we build. When workers and their unions don’t drive the transition, they lose. When workers and their unions *do* drive the transition, it’s an opportunity to build membership, density, and power in a new economy that’s good for people and the planet.

Sean Sweeney from Trade Unions for Energy Democracy then talked about the international context of the economic and climate crisis, and the fundamental role played by energy. He argued that the local

clean energy transition that we need can only occur if there is a decisive shift in power towards workers, communities and the public—energy democracy. He called for a transfer of resources, capital, and infrastructure from private hands to a democratically controlled public sector in order to ensure that a truly sustainable energy system can be developed in the decades ahead. Sweeney concluded with the argument that because of the impacts of climate change on all work, all unions, not just the traditional energy unions, are energy unions, and he invited all labor unions to take leadership on the climate issue.

Colin Miller from Clean Energy & Jobs Oakland Campaign concluded the round of introductory speakers by describing the establishment of an East Bay Community Choice energy program as a specific example of how we can democratize energy. He described the potential for Community Choice to create family-sustaining clean energy jobs through broad-based community participation, governance, control and ownership of renewable energy resources. He invited union members and leaders to join the Clean Energy & Jobs Oakland Campaign and the East Bay Clean Power Alliance, an Alameda County-wide coalition seeking to ensure local clean energy resource development and community benefits. Much as Brooke Anderson had begun, he asked labor leaders to get involved in shaping a just transition in the energy sector.

Once these speakers had provided introductory context, the program was opened to questions and answers between workshop participants and speakers. Themes that arose included the impact of an Alameda Labor Council resolution on “Labor-Friendly Community Choice program;” the precedent of an Environmental Justice caucus in San Diego’s Labor Council; the need for labor and community groups to unite more effectively for the mutual benefit of workers, impacted community members, and the environment; and local clean energy development through a democratically-run Community Choice energy program.

Outcomes

The principle outcome of the Labor Workshop was union members’ and labor leaders’ interest in continuing the conversation further. It was clear that even with a majority of non-union environmental and clean energy activists in the room, union members and labor leaders were deeply engaged in the discussion and wanting more. There was also interest by some unions in forming environmental justice committees or caucuses to ensure that issues of climate and social justice can be adequately aired and discussed by union members.

Follow-up

We are organizing a series of one-on-one meetings with the leadership of labor unions who were represented at the workshop, as well as with labor union representatives who couldn’t attend. We are seeking to build a broad constituency of union organizations who see climate change as a union issue, and more broadly as an issue for all working people. We aim to engage unions who are motivated to take action on energy and climate issues as supporters of our Clean Energy & Jobs Oakland Campaign and as members of our East Bay Clean Power Alliance.

For unions that are contemplating joining this Community Choice energy initiative, we are prepared to do presentations for membership, executive board meetings, or other decision-making bodies within your union.

We are also working to organize a second Labor Workshop for the late spring / early summer. This next workshop would include a more focused participant list of organized labor / worker justice organizations and a longer duration session to enable deeper conversation and, potentially, the development of some concrete next steps.

Please direct any inquiries about the Campaign or presentations on clean energy and labor to Colin Miller at colin@baylocalize.org or Brooke Anderson at organizadora@gmail.com.