



As the economy dips further into the red, many workers and businesses are preparing to go green. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), as well as the recently passed American Clean Energy and Security Act (ACESA), create incentives that have the potential to reshape entire industries and the U.S. labor market as a whole. Latinos make up the fastest-growing portion of the labor force, and they have experienced the largest increase in unemployment since the economic recession began in December 2007. Therefore, Latinos have much at stake in the emerging green economy.

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR)—the largest national Latino civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States—has committed to leveraging the knowledge and experience of its Affiliate Network to inform our understanding of how energy policies might impact Latino workers, seeking to form recommendations for federal policies that will maximize opportunities for Latinos.

On May 15, 2009, NCLR convened a roundtable meeting of 13 NCLR Affiliates to discuss training Latino workers for green jobs. Participants hailed from nearly every region of the country and ranged in programmatic experience from 30-year-old weatherization initiatives to infant solar panel installation training programs. The following is a summary of preliminary findings from the roundtable, substantiated by quotes from participants.

Affiliates are optimistic about the potential for new opportunities for Latinos in the green economy. They agree that community-based organizations can help prepare Latino workers to compete for jobs.

- *“It’s not a trend. It is going to become an industry. We’re at an opportune time to develop that at the front end.”*
- *“...we’ve had people from as far away as Spain, as far away as Germany, coming to these [renewable energy] summits and wanting to relocate to our area. They know something that we don’t know.”*
- *“...everybody is aware that this is the time for us to really go ahead and jump into it. I am one of the ones at my job...who pushes for it really hard. And I want to change it and I want to go forward. This is the time to do it.”*
- *“I just don’t even know why we can’t be the innovators. I really don’t.”*



The demand for green jobs has yet to match the enthusiasm. While anticipation is high, there are still relatively few new green jobs in the Latino communities represented at the Affiliate roundtable, and those Affiliates who have already started green job training programs have had difficulty placing trainees in jobs.

- *“In San Antonio they’re still educating [the community] on what green is, to be perfectly honest...we’re not there yet.”*
- *“There is not enough demand for our solar panel installation program graduates. Out of our first graduating class of 15 trainees, only two are currently employed by solar panel companies. The solar panel companies are not seeing a lot of demand from homeowners to buy the panels.”*

Questions remain about how workers value job quality. With more than two million Latinos out of work, some Affiliates perceive that the pressure to find a job often matters more to an individual than the wages or working conditions that the job offers, though other Affiliates feel that improving access to quality jobs is a top priority.

- *“...they just want a job, you know? Ideally it will be a good job. Ideally it will be a career pathway. Ideally it will be something that is permanent. But today, they just want a job.”*
- *“But they’re not just looking for a job. They’re looking for a good job, for a family-sustaining job.”*

Linking workers to a job at the end of a training program is a difficult but high priority. Several Affiliates include employers in their program design, subsidize workers’ wages, or create jobs to employ their own trainees.

- *“...we cannot design training programs without [taking into] account the labor markets. I think it would be irresponsible and it would be setting up our clients for failure. So the corporate partners, ultimately those who are going to hire them, have to be at the table in that process of design.”*
- *“...we’re trying to respond to the changing economy and to what we are hearing from employers. Solar is seasonal for residential [buildings]. So we’re still not seeing more places where the [solar panel job] openings are.”*
- *“...what works for us is [that] we get OJT, on-the-job training, funding which is an incentive for an employer. We can pay 50% of the wages based off that funding. And that’s helped us get the employer at the table and place some of our people that are going through the program.”*



Programs that provide certification in multiple skills can help workers gain entry and advance in green jobs. Undefined, emerging industries and current economic conditions have allowed employers to demand higher qualifications for the workers they hire.

- *“...once you get into that solar panel industry, solar energy, they need you to be, [as] we say, mil usos, that you can do a lot of other things, multitask in a sense.”*
- *“...things are different just even a year later in terms of what employers are looking for. We’re finding that smaller contractors are looking for people who have more construction experience...They’re also looking for people who have driver’s licenses.”*

Several Affiliates seeking support for green jobs initiatives confront barriers to accessing the federal workforce development system. Given Latinos’ historically limited access to the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) system, several Affiliates expressed concerns about being shut out of influencing how funds for green jobs initiatives are spent at the state and local levels.

- *“There are, let’s say, some procedures that have not or experiences that have not been clear in the past. And that has given some of us as community-based organizations hesitation to want to even apply, because I’m aware that all of the Department of Labor grants [for training workers for green jobs], or a majority of them, say to work in cooperation with the workforce investment boards. And so that’s when we say, ‘Oh, we can’t do that.’”*
- *“...the local workforce investment board and its administering body, the administrator or the operator, are too influenced by mayoral appointees and are not accessible to the community and community-based organization.”*