



CREATING GOOD JOBS, A CLEAN ENVIRONMENT, AND A FAIR AND THRIVING ECONOMY

BlueGreen Alliance
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Response to Request for Information: Energy Improvements at Public School Facilities

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The BlueGreen Alliance (BGA) is a partnership of national labor unions and environmental organizations, collectively representing millions of members and supporters. BGA partners unite to solve today's environmental challenges in ways that create and maintain quality jobs and build a clean, prosperous, and equitable economy. The establishment of competitive grants for Energy Improvements at Public School Facilities is an opportunity to address several administration priorities including: tackling climate change, creating quality jobs, and reducing racial inequity.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the buildings sector accounts for 31% of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions.ⁱ Public buildings—and schools in particular—have the potential to greatly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This is due to several characteristics including large square footage, age of the facility, and the use of energy intensive equipment. For example, the average age of school buildings was calculated at 55 years old.ⁱⁱ The EPA found that approximately a quarter of energy used in U.S. schools is wasted and facilities in low-income areas are often the least efficient.ⁱⁱⁱ

At the same time, energy efficiency investments in public buildings can support existing and create new quality, family-sustaining jobs. There are currently over 2.1 million jobs in the energy efficiency sector.^{iv} The BlueGreen Alliance estimates that for every \$250 million invested in energy efficient public buildings more than 16,700 jobs are created over 10 years.^v This breaks down to 6,562 direct, 4,225 indirect, and 5,937 induced job years. Done right, these will be good, family-sustaining jobs created in domestic manufacturing, construction, and professional trades.^{vi}

Below we have responded directly to RFI questions around **Workforce (Category 4)** and have provided additional relevant information on healthy building materials as well as equity levers for implementation of Justice40 that are applicable to school retrofits and that will receive funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL).

Category 4: Questions – Workforce

2. What pathways exist to improve operations and maintenance capacity of school staff (e.g., Joint Apprenticeship Training Centers (JATCs) and/or other continuing education)?

Prioritize grantees (school districts) that invest in training up of current staff and/or recruitment of new staff for operations and maintenance positions. Grant applications should include a section describing how the proposed program will provide quality job opportunities or career advancement for school operations and maintenance staff. This may include:

- School districts partnering with unions in public-facing campaigns to recruit new workers. For example, SEIU Local 99 in Los Angeles and Local 1948 in Washington state have run advertising campaigns and provided technical assistance to help recruit workers to fill vacant K-12 positions.
- Grow-Your-Own programs that help to provide school staff in underpaid, part-time positions with opportunities to train for positions in building operations and maintenance.
- Establishing district-level labor-management committees focused on finding local solutions on environmental, climate, and sustainability issues.
- Ensuring adequate operations and maintenance staff through adoption of a school cleanliness standard

Category 4: Questions – Workforce

3. What elements (e.g., training, certifications, etc.) contribute to the quality assurance of energy improvements being installed and operated properly?

4. What workforce models (e.g., training, partnership, career maps, etc.) exist to ensure that members of rural and disadvantaged communities have access to the work associated with school energy improvements?

5. Are there school retrofit programs or policies (e.g., project labor agreements, etc.) that have led to optimal workforce outcomes, and if so, please describe.

Industry, government, and academic studies show that poor installation of energy efficiency measures often results in energy savings losses of up to 50% compared to projected savings goals.^{vii} Utilizing a qualified workforce—including workers trained through registered apprenticeships or labor management partnerships—will result in proper installation and fully realized energy efficiency savings. Qualified workforce standards can also ensure that all workers on construction projects are trained in their trade rather than just those individuals whose name(s) are on the contract.

We are encouraged to see the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) plan to *"encourage applicants to provide a plan to attract, train, retain, or transition the workforce, and ask applicants to demonstrate how they are engaging with labor unions and joint labor-management training programs."* As DOE works to implement this program, it must ensure that these investments support workers and communities and translate into quality, family-sustaining, union jobs as well as accessible jobs for workers of color and other segments of the population historically underrepresented in these jobs. This includes supporting and growing pathways into good union jobs in construction, operations, and maintenance, and along the supply chain.

Several policy levers exist to support these goals.

First, any construction funded under the School Energy Improvements Program must adhere to Davis Bacon prevailing wage provisions in the BIL. At the same time, Davis Bacon should be considered the floor of what DOE can do to ensure job quality through this program. **DOE should establish a Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)** to ensure it is aligned with DOL's Good Jobs initiative to improve job quality and support and create access to good union jobs for all workers and job seekers.^{viii} DOE should also ensure this funding opportunity is aligned with Executive Order 14052, which calls on all agencies to prioritize improving job opportunities specifically by focusing on high-road labor standards in the BIL.^{ix} Lastly, DOL can help guide DOE on implementing the additional high-road labor standards outlined below. The application of these standards, where feasible and appropriate, should be promoted throughout DOE program guidance, technical assistance, best practices, and reporting requirements.

Additionally, we recommend collaborating with the Department of Education through a Memorandum of Understanding. An MOU would optimize funding opportunities for grantees to utilize funds from BIL and the American Rescue Plan to simultaneously improve energy efficiency and overall health of students and staff. This is especially important given that in the United States, 1 in 6 Americans including K-12 students, faculty and staff spend their day in a public school building.^x

We recommend that DOE consider the following additional high-road labor standards:

Project Labor Agreements (PLA):

Large construction projects, not subject to Executive Order 14063 requiring use of Project Labor Agreements (PLA) for Federal Construction Projects over \$35 million, can still benefit from a PLA.^{xi} PLAs control the terms and conditions of employment of workers on specific construction projects, including wages, hours, working conditions, and dispute resolution methods.^{xii} These agreements can be utilized at the state and local level to ensure high-road labor standards, a qualified workforce, and timely projects.

Community Workforce Agreement or Community Benefit Agreement:

A Community Workforce Agreement (CWA) reflects a common pledge between labor and the community to work together to build a high-road path to economic revitalization that includes good jobs. In addition to the collective bargaining aspects of a PLA, CWAs frequently include local hire provisions, targeted hire of low-income or disadvantaged workers, and the creation of pre-apprenticeship pathways for careers on the project.

A Community Benefit Agreement typically includes more than economic benefits and utilizes a community input process to develop an agreement with the community for a broader array of benefits (i.e., housing or transportation priorities).^{xiii}

Registered Apprenticeship, Pre-Apprenticeship, and Labor Management Partnerships:

One of the main mechanisms for building career pathways is through registered apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and other union-affiliated training programs. Apprenticeships are registered through a state apprenticeship agency or through the Department of Labor. Registered apprenticeships are paid positions that combine on-the-job training with classroom instruction in a trade. Utilizing registered apprentices ensures a high standard of training that will result in proper installation and fully realized energy efficiency savings.

Pre-apprenticeship programs have become a key tool to improving diversity in the building trades. Such programs aim to ensure that workers can qualify for entry into an apprenticeship program and have the skills and support they need to succeed. These programs are generally designed to target certain populations or demographics such as low-income workers, workers of color, women, and other marginalized communities. Additionally, many unions offer training throughout a member's career to enable them to stay up to date with changes in technology. The most successful pre-apprenticeship programs are those affiliated with registered apprenticeships. Wraparound services such as transportation and childcare also help with recruitment and retention of underrepresented and disadvantaged workers.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Domestic Content

As DOE works to implement Energy Improvements at Public School Facilities, it must ensure that these investments support and grow pathways not only into good union jobs in construction, but also along the supply chain.

Implementing policies to increase domestic manufacturing of energy efficiency retrofit products used in school retrofits can help to support and create quality manufacturing jobs. The BlueGreen Alliance Foundation's Building Clean database identifies these products and advances energy efficiency retrofits. Our database at BuildingClean.org lists roughly 4,500 local manufacturing facilities in nearly every state across the country.

As the Build America, Buy America provisions in the BIL come into effect and strengthen the Buy America requirements associated with federal investments,

the positive market and employment effects of the school energy improvements program will be further magnified. Supply chain reporting and disclosure should also be encouraged while incentivizing assembler/supplier commitments and accountability.

Healthy Building Materials

Potentially harmful chemicals are often embedded in building materials commonly used in weatherization and retrofits. Building Clean is a database to help identify healthy building materials and minimize exposure of harmful chemicals to both installers and occupants.^{xiv} Below are Building Clean criteria that can be used to guide procurement of healthy building materials by DOE applicants.^{xv}

We recommend that DOE: Promote the use of healthy building materials for all construction projects used with federal funding from DOE.

- Provide guidance on minimizing exposure to harmful chemicals by using the following Building Clean criteria:
 - Good: Interior building products with the potential to emit volatile organic compounds should have a low-VOC emissions certification
 - Better: Utilize product certifications and labels that limit some of the most hazardous content
 - Best: Utilize product certifications and labels that are free of some of the most hazardous content
- Include Best Practices in Program Guidance:
 - Best Practices: Discourage the use of insulation materials containing respiratory sensitizers, specifically two-part spray polyurethane foam insulation which is linked to debilitating respiratory diseases
 - Best Practices: Discourage the use of funds for recycled vinyl flooring or wall-coverings which may contain a number of legacy toxics including lead

Equity Levers

The whole-of-government Justice40 Initiative calls for a minimum of 40% of all benefits of climate and clean energy federal investments to go to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized, underserved, and overburdened by pollution. Executive Order 14052 on the Implementation of the BIL highlights this priority calling on all agencies to invest public dollars equitably.^{xvi} The \$500 million provided in BIL for these school retrofits targets high-poverty schools and will likely provide more than 40% of investments to disadvantaged communities who receive upgrades to public schools. However, the Justice40 lens should also be applied to the workforce development aspect of this grant program. Below are equity levers that can be applied to DOE programs to implement Justice40.

We recommend that DOE:

- Ensure awareness and implementation of the Justice40 initiative, and the accompanying CEQ screening tool, through program guidance, technical assistance and reporting requirements
- Include a set-aside for potential grantees for capacity strengthening and technical assistance for communities identified as Justice40
- Require Justice40 information through the grant application process
 - Grant applications should include a section describing how the proposed program will provide Disadvantaged Workers with improved access to career opportunities in energy efficiency. This may include:
 - Requiring or incentivizing local or targeted hire or other hiring and procurement policies that benefit low-income communities, people of color, and women in J40 communities, as identified by CEQ Screening Tool
 - Requiring or incentivizing community benefit/community workforce agreements that increase economic opportunities for communities and local workers—especially for people of color and low-income communities.

- Requiring or incentivizing pre-apprenticeship opportunities that are linked to registered apprenticeship programs targeting disadvantaged communities
- Integrating pre-apprenticeships with community-based “wrap around” services to maximize retention of disadvantaged and underrepresented workers as they enter careers
- Omitting or limiting drug testing or background checks, except for employees with access to customer premises
- Identifying existing community networks for recruitment of disadvantaged workers
- Creating a community task force for monitoring and enforcement of a local hire provision or CWA/CBA. Such use of an oversight committee is an emerging strategy for ensuring equity on public works projects, with clearly defined roles for members, and composition drawing from relevant stakeholder organizations^{xvii}
- Reporting: Track anonymized disadvantaged worker participation (recruitment, retention and advancement) in coordination with Department of Labor
- Grant applications that include a section describing how the proposed program benefits disadvantaged communities”. This may include:
 - Projected energy efficiency savings in disadvantaged communities
 - Projected health benefits of the project to disadvantaged communities
 - Evidence of J40/EJ community engagement and/or endorsement of proposed project

Conclusion

BGA recognizes and supports the efforts already underway by DOE to implement this administration's priorities to create good union jobs, reduce emissions, and support disadvantaged communities. Our hope is that these recommendations will provide additional support in the realization of those priorities. We look forward to supporting DOE throughout the process.

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- ⁱⁱⁱ United States Green Building Council, *Green School Buildings are Better for Budgets*, 2018. Available online: <https://www.centerforgreenschools.org/green-schools-are-better-budgets>
- ^{iv} E2, *Energy Efficiency Jobs in America*, 2021. Available online: <https://e2.org/reports/energy-efficiency-jobs-in-america-2021/>
- ^v BGA, *The Build Back Better Act is a Jobs Bill*, 2021. Based on internal calculations: <https://www.bluegreenalliance.org/site/build-back-better-investments-will-create-jobs-across-the-country/methodology/>
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- ^{ix} National Archives, *Implementation of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*, 2021. Available online: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/11/18/2021-25286/implementation-of-the-infrastructure-investment-and-jobs-act>
- ^x 21st Century School Fund, *The State of Our Schools Report*, 2021. Available online: <https://education.wellcertified.com/hubfs/IWBI%20-%20State%20of%20Our%20Schools%202021.pdf>
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- ^{xiii} Emerald Cities Collaborative, *The Anatomy of a Community Workforce Agreement*, 2022. Available online: https://emeraldcities.org/j40playbook/?mc_cid=388d653980&mc_eid=1c543786c5#elementor-action%3Aaction%3Dpopup%3Aopen%26settings%3DeyJpZCI6IjE1MTU3IiwidG9nZ2xlljpmYWxzZX0%3D
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^{xv} BlueGreen Alliance Foundation, “Buy Healthy” with Product Certifications and Labels, 2022. Available online: http://www.bgafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/BuyHealthy_Certifications.pdf

^{xvi} National Archives, *Implementation of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*, 2021. Available online:

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/11/18/2021-25286/implementation-of-the-infrastructure-investment-and-jobs-act>

^{xvii} Policy Link, *Strategies for Addressing Equity in Infrastructure and Public Works*, 2015. Available online;

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