



Empowering Communities through Workforce Development

GRID Alternatives
Oakland, CA

GRID Alternatives is a United States-based nonprofit solar installer that provides solar power to low-income communities and tribes in the US as well as energy access to rural and urban communities in Nicaragua, Mexico, and Nepal. In keeping with their mission to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in the field of renewable energy, the organization has robust and differentiated workforce development programs focusing on women, veterans, tribal and low-income communities. GRID helps create communities that are both environmentally and economically sustainable, addressing economic inequality and un/underemployment while mitigating further degradation to the climate.

“By preparing Washingtonians for careers in rapidly expanding green industries and making it easier for residents to access clean energy, we are taking our commitment to the environment and DC’s green economy one step further and modeling how cities can lead the way on this critical global issue.”

Washington D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser, speaking about Solar Works DC, a solar job training program GRID Alternatives runs on the city’s behalf

Overview

GRID Alternatives is a full-service solar installer that works exclusively with low-income communities. GRID uses a service learning model of installation, inviting local community members, solar job trainees, students and other volunteers to learn solar installation skills onsite. Through strong community partnerships and individual outreach to homeowners, GRID finds income-qualified clients then engages job trainees and volunteers in installing the solar systems under the supervision of trained constructions staff. GRID funds it’s model through a variety of resources, including donations, foundation and government grants as well as in-kind equipment donations from the industry. GRID’s funding streams eliminate cost barriers for participants, maximizing the long term benefit for the household and their community.



To achieve its mission of making solar job training accessible to all, GRID has several workforce development initiatives and programs focused on specific groups that have been historically underrepresented in the industry including, women, people of color, veterans and tribes; these few stand out as exemplary of GRID’s values of inclusion, equity, and diversity in renewable energy:

Tribal Workforce Development and Education

GRID's Tribal Program, based out of Denver Colorado, partners with Tribes across the country to install solar systems on tribal lands. GRID maintains its workforce development model in the tribal program, engaging local community members, K-12 students, tribal colleges, and existing job training programs to train tribal members in solar installation and energy efficiency and promote renewable energy awareness with all age groups.



Women in Solar

As part of GRID's deep and ongoing commitment to Equity, Inclusion and Diversity GRID launched a Women in Solar initiative in 2014 to build a diverse, equitable and inclusive solar industry by providing pathways to technical careers for women, highlighting the voices of women in the industry, and providing leadership on solar workforce diversity. Women's voices, talents and leadership are needed more than ever to build a strong and sustainable industry worldwide. Across all of its workforce development programs both domestically and internationally, GRID specifically recruits women from colleges, job training organizations, and the communities they work with to participate in installations and provide resources and support for women to build community and thrive in a mostly male dominated industry.

Solar Futures

GRID Alternatives partners with high schools in underserved communities to introduce students to career pathways in renewable energy and provide both classroom and hands-on training. While the programs vary in length and depth with the needs and interests of the school, many



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students leave the training job-ready.

Impact

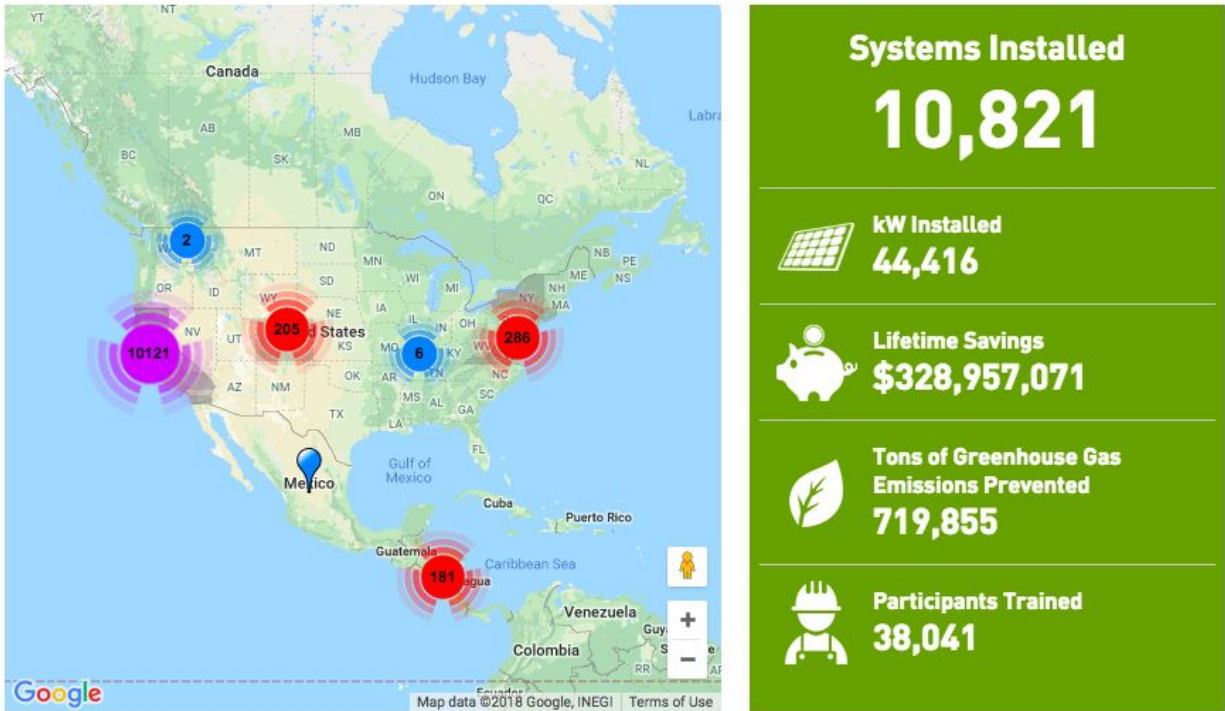


Image: [Grid Alternatives program impact](#)

Domestic Impact

“GRID Alternatives develops unskilled, untrained workers at no out-of-pocket cost by combining local renewable energy installation and job training. Last year GRID Alternatives connected 87 volunteers to solar energy jobs and apprenticeships based on the workforce training and grit validation that they provided.”

For many students who do not seek college education, our schools don't provide sufficient hands-on workforce experience. This education gap is where GRID Alternatives' fantastic work comes into play. Long Beach as a whole is better for GRID Alternatives' efforts. They educate and activate residents, and put real resources into the changes we need to increase energy independence for the vulnerable, safeguard our environment, and put residents on the path to strong and sustainable careers.”

Long Beach City Councilwoman Jeannine Pearce, speaking about GRID Greater Los Angeles

Since 2004, GRID has installed over 10,500 solar electric systems in the US and engaged more than 37,711 volunteers and job trainees in their mission. GRID's approach to solar installation has prevented 720,000 tons of greenhouse gas emissions while providing pathways into the renewable energy industry for participants, many of whom come from traditionally underrepresented groups. GRID's domestic workforce development programs seek to not only increased the number of trained workers in the renewable energy industry but also ensure that the solar workforce better reflects the country they serve.

International Impact

“Beyond bringing electricity to this community, without knowing it, we were planting a seed that will continue expanding its roots. In a small but profound way, we are empowering young women to make tangible changes in our society, in spite of the adversities and the gender norms that have held us back and categorized us as the weaker sex.”

Paola Pérez Belli, Mujeres del Sol participant in Nicaragua

GRID Alternatives' International Program (formerly Power to the People), has been working in Nicaragua since 2008, expanding to Nepal in 2016, and Mexico in the fall of 2017. To date, GRID has installed over 200 off-grid and grid-tied solar electric systems and 1 microgrid across the three countries it works, bringing energy access to more than 35 communities, and providing training and workforce development for over 400 local and international participants. In 2015, GRID launched Mujeres del Sol (Women in Solar) in Nicaragua, a program that offers unique, hands-on training opportunities for Nicaraguan women to gain practical knowledge, build their skills and resumes, and be more competitive as they pursue employment in the heavily male-dominated solar industry. Since its launch, GRID has trained 40 Nicaragua women pursuing college degrees, working, or interested in the renewable energy field in a hands-on solar installation. Two Nicaraguan Women in Solar participants have been hired as full-time Solar Technicians with GRID in Nicaragua, and many more have carried enhanced skills forward with them in their careers. Replicating its success in the US and Nicaragua, GRID plans to launch a Women in



Solar Nepal program in 2019 to empower and train Nepali women to enter and be competitive in the growing, and male-dominated solar industry in Nepal.

Lessons Learned

The just transition to renewable energy has to include everyone and the clean energy workforce of the future must reflect the diversity of the places it serves in order to create an equitable post-carbon world. GRID Alternatives is evidence that this belief can be put into practice. Their workforce development programs support several takeaways:

Low-income, rural, and communities of color can not be left out of the just transition

Environmentally burdened communities, often low-income, rural, or communities of color must be part of the climate change solution. Offering job training is a powerful way to expand the renewable energy workforce and diversify access to renewable energy jobs.

Working with many different organizations can be a strength

GRID Alternatives' accomplishments are a testament to the success of its network partnerships with local and regional governments, philanthropic institutions, private companies, nonprofits, and individual volunteers.

Decarbonization and social action can happen at the same time

The statistics speak for themselves: GRID has been able to simultaneously mitigate thousands of tons of carbon emissions, expand the renewable energy workforce, and work towards environmental and economic justice in disadvantaged communities.

State policy can make or break workforce development programs

GRID's model works best in areas with a vested interest in low-income solar and growing the solar workforce. The growth of the U.S. solar market provides an opportunity for municipalities to address economic and environmental injustice through programs that help make solar accessible to lower-income communities and incorporate solar job training to support the industry. States like California, Illinois and the District of Columbia lead the way by requiring hands-on training on installs within their incentive programs, exposure that goes a long way in an industry that values experience as a top hiring requirement.¹ To help drive the creation of low-income solar policies and program, GRID partnered with Vote Solar to create the Low Income Solar Policy Guide at lowincomesolar.org.

¹ Solar Foundation, 2017 Solar Job Census



GRID Alternatives works locally through ten regional and affiliate offices to serve families in California, Colorado, and Mid-Atlantic region. We also have an International Program serving Nicaragua and Nepal, and a Tribal Program serving families nationwide.

Point of Contact

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GRID Alternatives

Partners

[Corporate Sponsorships](#)

[Utility partnerships](#)

[Affordable housing partnerships](#)

[Job Training Partnerships](#)

[Government partnerships](#)

Resources/Website

<https://gridalternatives.org>

<https://gridalternatives.org/what-we-do/international-program>

www.lowincomesolar.org

[Triangle Court case study](#)

[Sun Crest Heights case study](#)