

## RESEARCH PROJECTS

### Green Collar Jobs

Poverty, unemployment and racial inequality are significant problems in the US and there is an urgent need for a new source of living wage jobs for low income residents with barriers to employment. Where can these jobs come from? This research project shows that an important part of the answer is the deliberate cultivation of what I call “green collar jobs” (Pinderhughes, 2006).

I define green-collar jobs as “manual labor jobs in businesses whose primary processes, products and/or services have a beneficial effect on the environment and whose work directly improves environmental quality in some way” (Pinderhughes, 2006). These green businesses can be owned and managed by for-profit, non-profit, public sector, worker-owned cooperatives or collectives and include firms, institutions, and other types of business entities. I focus exclusively on manual labor work force opportunities in green businesses because these jobs are ideal entry level work force opportunities for low-income residents with barriers to employment.

The research project is focused on understanding how a city’s support for green economic development and green businesses can be leveraged to support living wage work force opportunities for low-income job seekers with barriers to employment. This population includes youth and adults who do not have a high school degree, have been out of the labor market for a long time, were formally incarcerated, and/or have limited labor market skills.

The green economy is exploding. Every week we see evidence of new green products, new green services, and new green processes being introduced. This explosion is creating new business opportunities for the rich and new consumer opportunities for the affluent but it is not bringing direct benefits to low income people and communities, many of whom bear the brunt of environmentally hazardous productive, distributive, consumptive and waste processes, facilities, and products concentrated where they live, work, and/or attend school.

I am conducting in-depth research with owners and managers of green businesses in Berkeley, San Francisco, Oakland, Union City, and Hayward to understand and document their capacity to provide workers with green collar jobs.

My methodological approach combined quantitative and qualitative methods to generate the data needed to address these seven questions empirically, analytically, and programmatically.

(1) I generated primary data on green businesses and green-collar jobs through conducting in-depth interviews and surveys with the owners and managers of green businesses. Interviews and surveys with employers and managers provided us with detailed information about green firms, about green collar jobs in the firms, and about the willingness of employers to hire workers with barriers to employment<sup>1</sup>. Questions related to the businesses covered:

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<sup>1</sup> The term business and firm are used interchangeably in this report. It does not indicate that the business or businesses are privately owned. Our study includes businesses that are owned and

- the work of the firm
- the clients served
- conditions under which local green businesses are most likely to succeed and thrive
- factors that contribute to growth of the sectors
- infrastructure and location issues effecting green business development and growth (i.e. information related to ownership/leasing of buildings and property, square footage for industrial, office, and retail space, expansion plans, etc.).

Questions related to job opportunities covered:

- the range of employment opportunities in the firm
- characteristics of specific green-collar jobs in green businesses
- the range, number, and type, of green collar jobs in the city of Berkeley
- specific training, qualifications, skill sets, certification, equipment, etc. that potential employees must possess in order to apply for particular green jobs
- how jobs were posted
- the networks workers use to find out about employment opportunities in the sector
- how workers are hired
- the potential for occupational mobility.

Finally, we gathered information about:

- employers attitudes about work force training programs and workers barriers to employment;
- employer interest in employing residents with barriers to employment in green-collar jobs:
- under what conditions employers would hire workers with barriers to employment.

(2) I conducted lengthy background interviews with staff working in city government and work force development programs in Berkeley and other Bay Area cities to understand local labor policies and the structure of work force development programs in these cities; the specific organizations engaged in local work force development efforts; the funding streams available to support work force development in the Bay Area; the capacity of existing programs to prepare workers for green collar work force opportunities.

(3) I reviewed public policy documents related to local environmental policies, programs, and plans; economic development policies and strategies; and green economic development strategies and efforts.

(4) I attended dozens of public and private meetings focused on economic development, green businesses, work force development, environmental quality, and sustainability efforts in Berkeley, Oakland, and San Francisco.

My interviews and surveys with employers and managers are designed to provide detailed information about (1) the work of the firm, (2) the clients served, (3) the range of employment opportunities in the firm, (4) characteristics of specific green-collar jobs in green businesses; (5)

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operated by private individuals and corporation, government agencies, non-profits, co-ops, and collectives.

the range, number, and type, of green collar jobs in the city of Berkeley; (6) conditions under which local green businesses are most likely to succeed and thrive, (7) specific training, qualifications, skill sets, certification, equipment, etc. that potential employees must possess in order to apply for this range of employment opportunities, (8) the networks workers use to find out about employment opportunities in the sector, (9) how workers are hired, (10) the potential for upward mobility, (11) factors that contribute to growth of the sectors, (12) employers attitudes about work force training programs and workers with limited initial education and skills; (13) employer interest in employing residents with barriers to employment in green-collar jobs in their firms; (14) under what conditions employers would hire workers with limited initial education and skills; and (15) infrastructure and location issues effecting green business development and growth (i.e. information related to ownership/leasing of buildings and property, square footage for industrial, office, and retail space, expansion plans, etc.).

My research findings show that green collar jobs (manual labor jobs in green businesses) are very good jobs. They provide workers with stable, long-term work force opportunities, living wages, health benefits, occupationally safe and healthy working conditions, and meaningful, community-serving, environmentally restorative work force opportunities that improve environmental quality and quality of life for people. As importantly, my research reveals that green-collar jobs are excellent entry level work force opportunities for job seekers with barriers to employment because they do not require high levels of education, have low barriers to entry, and provide entry level workers with on-the-job training.

The questions generated by the research project include:

- (1) How can we support green businesses that create green collar (manual labor) jobs?
- (2) How can we prepare youth and adults with barriers to employment for these jobs?
- (3) How can we cultivate relationships with local green business employers to ensure that jobs that become available are given to “job ready” candidates with barriers to employment?

Based on my research findings, I am developing a program and strategy that addresses these questions programmatically.