

2010-2020

Emerald Cities
COLLABORATIVE

America empowered.

CELEBRATING
A Decade of Progress on the High Road to a Sustainable, Just and Democratic Society

VISION

The Emerald Cities Collaborative (ECC) envisions high-road regional economies that are more sustainable, economically just and democratic. Taking the "high road" requires cross-sector collaborations — that especially focus on those who've historically been left out — to build an economy that addresses the global climate crisis, as well as the income, wealth and social inequities baked into our policies, systems and communities. The high road strengthens our democracy when we are all engaged in furthering decisions that operate at the intersection of environment, economy and equity. This 10-year retrospective report provides an overview of ECC's mission, how we approach our work, what we've achieved and learned over the past decade and what we envision for the future.



Emerald Cities' Clean Energy, HVAC Training program in Seattle.

Our Emerald Cities demonstrate that multi-stakeholder, intersectional models work!

Cover photo: High school students getting exposure to building careers through ECC's ACES program in Los Angeles.

+POLICY

BOARD MESSAGE



Joel Rogers
COWS, University of Wisconsin



Gerald (Gerry) Hudson
SEIU

ECC CO-CHAIRS

As co-chairs, we are proud of this board's role in helping to launch the Emerald Cities Collaborative. In 2009, our idea of a high-road economy was considered "interesting," but untested. We spent a year building the vision and the partnerships, and the next decade turning our vision into action. Today, we have proven models of multi-sector collaboration focused on creating a more sustainable, equitable and democratic future.

ECC's collaborations of community, labor, business, energy, and sustainability sectors have spurred changes in local government policies, corporate business practices and the capacities of low-income communities and communities of color to build an economy that works for both people and the planet.

We are excited to see the growth of this vision and movement toward an equitable clean economy. It is this dynamism and our results to date that inspire us to head confidently into the next decade. ■

+ ACTION

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Ten years ago, a powerful network of national and local community, labor, policy, business, and nonprofit organizations officially launched Emerald Cities Collaborative (ECC) after 15 months of deep conversations and collaborative planning. This collaborative journey towards a high-road economy to advance environmental, economic and social justice was not easy; but we held steadfast to our vision and mission. Our board, national and local staff and partners built intersectional models and strategies to transform our built environment to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and to position low-income and communities of color as consumers and producers of a new clean economy.

ECC's first decade faced daunting economic and political challenges. The economy, like today, was in the tank. The demand for energy efficiency and clean energy was weak, as property owners were struggling to pay their mortgages. The anticipated market drivers (e.g., PACE) were slow to materialize. The jobs did not scale to the level needed to provide a just transition for existing workers or stable careers for new workers. And just as our national economy and climate commitments were taking flight, a new political reality emerged. Climate change was debunked and the United States withdrew from the Paris Climate Accord. Climate resilience emerged as a new reality with the frequency of extreme weather events.



Denise Fairchild
President and CEO

Covid-19, George Floyd and the multi-racial movement for Black lives, accompanied by another economic downturn, reawakened the nation to our legacy of environmental, health, economic, racial and health inequities.

Despite these challenges, we start a new decade with promising and proven models for replication and expansion. We are excited to share our experience in building high-road energy, food and water infrastructure. Thanks to our local partnerships, ECC established a solid book of work and models. We have worked with over 30 cities in building high-road policies. We have created high-wage jobs and contracting opportunities for those that need it most. We have created greener and healthier homes for low-income families. We continue to deepen our knowledge, strategies and partnerships to meet the challenges of the decade ahead. Today, a sustainable, just economy is no longer just a vision, it is critical and within grasp. ■

= PROGRESS

CONTENTS

Our Mission
6

Our Results
7

Our Stories
8

The Way Forward
16

St. Charles Efficiency Retrofit Project,
An ECC RENEW Multi-Family Housing Project
Seattle, 2016

OUR MISSION

GREEN OUR CITIES

Greening our built environment is mission-critical work. ECC's mission is to re-engineer and rebuild our urban infrastructure for a 21st Century economy that is generative, resource efficient and sustainable, climate resilient, and democratic. This entails driving public and private policies and investments towards decarbonizing and decentralizing our infrastructure — our building stock, energy, waste, food, water/wastewater and transportation infrastructure — to protect our planet for future generations, to upend centuries of environmental racism, and to increase access to affordable, clean and healthy basic infrastructure services.

BUILD OUR COMMUNITIES

Our high-road mission requires an economy that cares about people and places as much as it does the planet. Our communities are stronger, healthier and more productive with targeted investments in union and living wage jobs, viable business opportunities for populations underrepresented in major sectors of the economy, and community-scale resilient infrastructure. Our mission is to drive demand for high road labor and community standards in infrastructure policies and investments, to close the nation's income and wealth gaps through green jobs and business opportunities for disadvantaged populations, and to build community climate resilience through public and private investments in community energy, food, water and other infrastructure projects.

STRENGTHEN OUR DEMOCRACY

Strong economies are democratic and inclusive of populations impacted by public and private policies and investment decisions. ECC's primary mission is to build multi-stakeholder coalitions to advance a high-road agenda that is inclusive, accountable and equitable. ECC is also dedicated to building a new generation of community change agents/organizers to advocate for environmental, climate and economic justice through our project with the Community Learning Partnership (CLP).





OUR RESULTS

Space limits of this report prohibit a full accounting of our decade of work across the nation, and the quantitative and qualitative impacts of our high-road agenda. However, the following pages offer a glimpse of how we've spurred policy change and, more importantly, developed and implemented programs and projects that deliver real community impacts/outcomes.

SYSTEMS REFORM

- Organized stakeholders and implemented sustainable development economic inclusion policies – two Community Workforce Agreements, two Community Benefit Agreements, two Local Worker Hire Resolutions, and one Local Procurement Resolution – in five cities, connecting low-income communities of color to green jobs and businesses.

- Co-created a comprehensive diversity and inclusion infrastructure for New Orleans.

- Engaged local stakeholders in creating San Francisco's Building Electrification Equity Climate Policy.

PROGRAM/PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

- Facilitated the development of over $250 billion of high-road energy efficiency, water and solar projects; including 17 government buildings; two water infrastructure projects and over 20 affordable housing projects.

- Facilitated anchor-community initiatives in three cities to leverage the purchasing power of major institutions towards building community climate resilience.

- Created E-Contractor Academy – an eight-week training and coaching program for minority-owned, women-owned and disadvantaged enterprises in high road contracting.

- Established a community college STEAM experiential learn-

Our Results, cont'd

ing program at six Title I South/Southeast LA high schools to create pathways into architecture, engineering, construction, and environmental careers.

- Established a Green Pathway Career program for emancipated foster youth.
- Supported the formation of an Energy Democracy movement by co-authoring and publishing a collaborative book, organizing and planning tools, and creating a peer learning network.
- Established a network of 12 community-college community change experiential learning programs with the Community Learning Partnership (CLP) to build a new generation of community organizers.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

- Retrofitted green and healthy multi-family housing for roughly 2,000 low-income families.
- Facilitated 700 MW of high-road solar projects.
- Trained 260 MWDBEs, in seven cities, in socially responsible green building and infrastructure development.
- Achieved over $19 million in energy efficiency, clean energy and green infrastructure contracts awarded to minority contractors.
- Saw that 80% of ECC projects pay union or prevailing wages.
- Enrolled 204 disadvantaged workers into union apprenticeship programs
- Helped 340 high school students earn industry credentials/skills certificates; and over a dozen Latinx students to enroll in planning, environmental science and engineering programs.
- Spearheaded a local, sustainable food economy through our Anchors in Resilient Communities (ARC) program, including a new $20 million sustainable food processing facility that will employ 200 local workers into union jobs and utilize Black and Brown urban growers as suppliers.
- Equipped 225 new community change agents/organizers with community college training, certificates and degrees.

Find more details about ECC initiatives at: https://emeraldcities.org/



ACES students, Los Angeles

OUR STORIES

The Emerald Cities Collaborative has spent the past decade partnering with some of the nation's largest cities — Boston, Cleveland, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York, Oakland, Portland, San Francisco and Seattle — as well as several other jurisdictions to implement its visionary high-road approach. The following stories illustrate how Emerald Cities' methods are producing results that lead to a more sustainable, just and democratic economy, one that can deliver a brighter future for us all.



A High-Road Energy Sector
10

A High-Road Food Sector
12

High-Road Economic Inclusion Initiatives
14

A High-Road Energy Sector

ECC's high road mission is centrally focused on decarbonizing the nation's economy with high road standards. This entails changing how we source, use and distribute energy. Resource efficiency (energy and water), renewable and distributed energy, and building electrification that ensure energy democracy, equity and inclusion are among the primary tools in our toolkit.

The heart of ECC's resource efficiency work, however, is driving health, savings and jobs to families living in affordable, multi-family housing. This is typically the last and most difficult building stock to retrofit, but it also is home to populations most vulnerable to dirty energy.

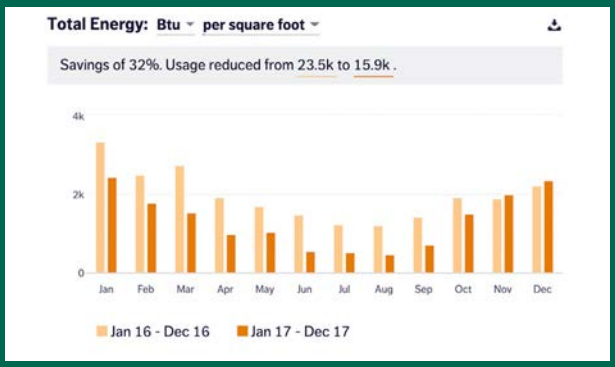
RENEW Multi-Family Program

ECC's RENEW Multi-Family housing program is a national initiative that takes a comprehensive approach to achieving energy and water efficiency savings in multi-family rental housing serving low- and moderate-income residents. ECC helps nonprofit housing developers with a full range of portfolio support: benchmarking, energy audits, financial packaging, contractor acquisition and oversight, and energy asset management.

Since launching the program in 2015, EC-Seattle Director Steve Gelb has overseen the completion of energy and water efficiency upgrades to 436 affordable apartments in four buildings — two owned by Plymouth Housing Group and two by Bellwether Housing, both nonprofits. As a result, water and energy use and carbon emissions have declined by 4.5 million gallons, 2.3 billion BTU and more than 400,000 metric tons a year, respectively. Plymouth, Bellwether and their low-income tenants are also realizing monetary savings: more than $140,000 a year on water and electric bills for owners and almost $7,000 a year for tenants. "We should recoup our investments within just a few years," says Betsy Hunter, the deputy director of Plymouth Housing Group. "And we will enjoy the energy benefits much longer than that."

RENEW Seattle
Colwell Apartments Retrofit Project

Comparative Analysis of Energy and Water Usage





"We should recoup our investments within just a few years, and we will enjoy the energy benefits much longer than that."
– Betsy Hunter, deputy director, Plymoth Housing Group, Seattle



RENEW San Francisco's Apollo Hotel Retrofit project.

Retrofitting Housing, Lives and Communities with RENEW

Emerald Cities' RENEW San Francisco and the Mission Housing Development Corporation (MHDC) implemented a $700K pilot retrofit of four multi-family properties as part of the city's Green Retrofit Initiative. The project's energy retrofit measures included boiler replacements, lighting retrofits and HVAC upgrades. An apprenticeship program was a core part of the project.

Eric, a Chinese immigrant, second-level apprentice and member of Carpenters' Local Union 22 had been unemployed for two years before applying to the ECC/MHDC apprenticeship program. The program's local-hire requirements pushed him to the head of the queue and Eric became the first "community" apprentice hired on the project.

"The first thing this apprenticeship did was improve my English," he says. "I have many more skills now after this job. Now I know the right way to do things and learned a lot about work safety ... [and] I have more work."

Eric was hired on the project by a local, minority-owned business that employed eight journey-level workers and paid union wages. Of those hired, six were local San Francisco residents.

"Emerald Cities San Francisco played an essential role in bringing together key community, labor and city stakeholders to craft a community work-force agreement that delivered not only energy savings for our residents, but good-paying union jobs for local disadvantaged workers," says Joshua Arce, director, San Francisco Office of Workforce Development and a former board president of MHDC. "This approach should become the standard on multi-family energy efficiency projects." ■

A High-Road Food Sector

Food is every society's "first economy." The pre-industrial food sector produced local food for local consumption, and it was renewable – using toxin-free (phytomass) biomass fuels. The industrial food sector introduced advanced technologies to maximize land productivity and create greater efficiencies and profits. But it also replaced the small farm economy with a highly commercialized, toxic, low-wage, carbon/energy intensive food system. The consequences?: depleted biodiversity, poor nutrition, poor health, low-wages, urban food desserts, and devastated local economies, particularly for low-income communities of color.

A high-road food sector entails a regional food economy (250-mile food shed) that supports small farmers (rural and urban) and connects them directly to regional markets and consumers, generating local economic multipliers along the supply chain. This sector is climate resilient, healthy, sustainable, pays workers union and livable wages and benefits, and ensures vulnerable communities have access to healthy foods.

Anchors in Resilient Communities

ECC's Anchors in Resilient Communities (ARC) program leverages the assets and capacities of large, place-based institutions — anchors such as hospitals, universities and local governments — to improve the health, local economies and climate resilience of low-income communities of color. The goal is to combine the assets — financial, political and social — of communities and anchors to not just create jobs or businesses but to shift entire sectors of the region's economy — food, energy, water, waste — to be greener, healthier, economically just and inclusive to the benefit of all residents.



ARC East Bay San Francisco

Currently, ARC is focused on the collaborative development of a regional food economy in East Bay San Francisco with the goal of promoting community health, community wealth and community climate resilience. ECC, Health Care Without Harm, The California Endowment's healthy community collaboratives in Richmond and Oakland, and 10 other local organizations are partnering on the project. The private and public anchors include Kaiser Permanente, Benioff Children's Hospital, UC San Francisco, UC Berkeley, Alameda County, City of Oakland and San Mateo County.

The project aims to mitigate the impacts of regional drought and heat waves on rising food and energy prices, while concurrently improving residents' health and economic opportunities. "This is an opportunity to go beyond addressing acute food insecurity to building processing and distribution infrastructure, increasing sustainable food production in the region, and funding initiatives to modify land use and preserve agricultural land," says Lucia Sayre, director of regional innovation and community resilience at Health Care Without Harm's Healthy Food in Health Care program. "All of which are critical steps in our approach to mitigate climate change."



Building Healthier Food Systems Takes Teamwork

"[ARC] is a group of people truly passionate about the work," says Meghan Therrien, of Food Services Partners, one of the Oakland/Richmond ARC collaborators. "We all believe what we are working towards."

FSP has maintained a presence in the Bay Area for more than two decades, providing nutritional services to healthcare facilities across the region. In recent years, the company has become a more active player in the high-road movement to optimize community health outcomes and wellness through healthy, sustainable food and equitable business practices.

"FSP is at the early stages of understanding their role in climate resilience," Therrien says. She recalls that five years ago, food systems conversations were largely about farmers markets. Those discussions have since evolved to focus more on holistic systems change.

"There's an increased awareness about how much food needs to cost to support living wages for labor and the importance of clean energy practices," Therrien says.■



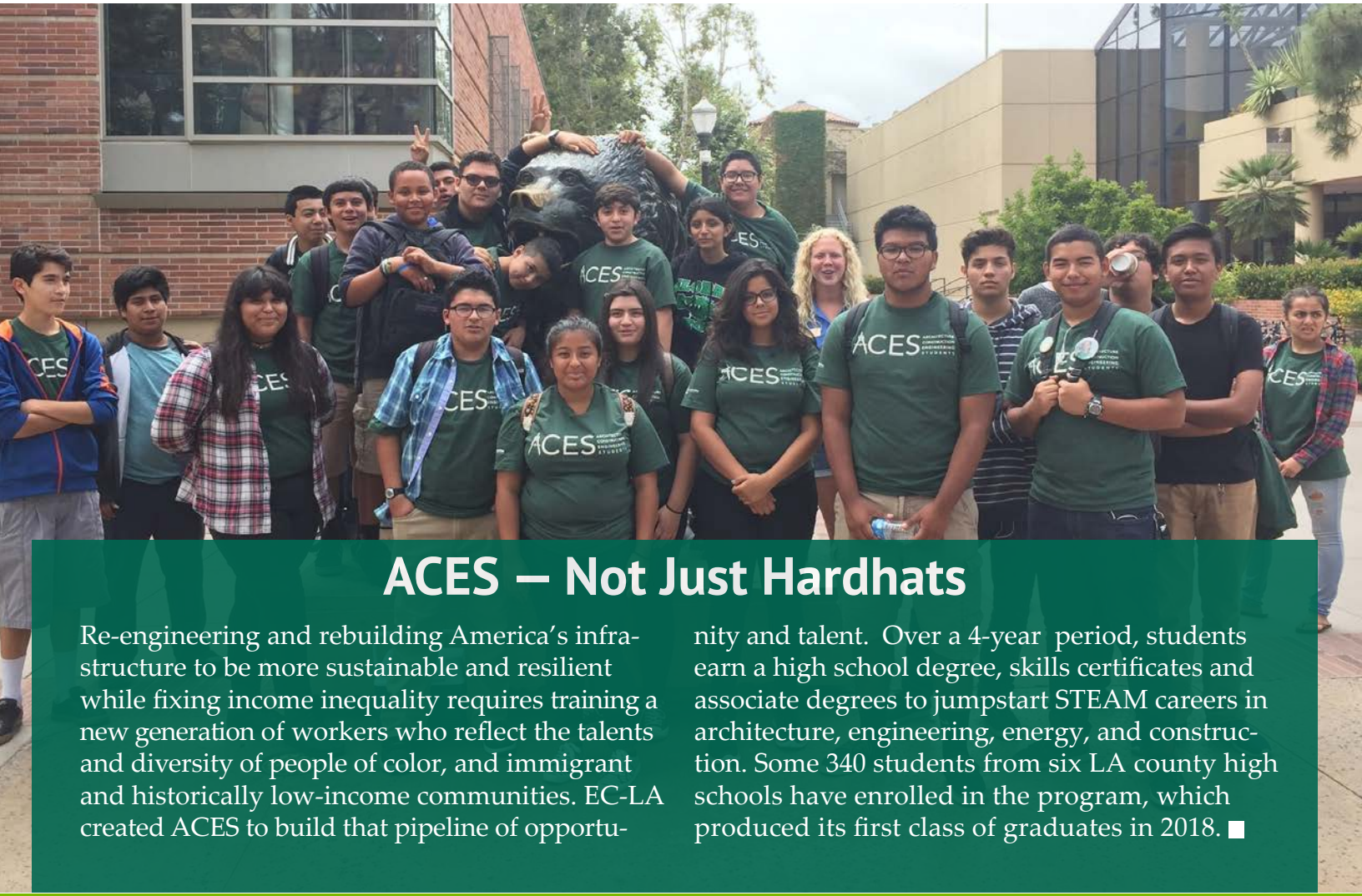
"FSP's participation in ARC has furthered our internal conversation about buying local. … More and more, [we're] focusing on purchasing from producers/ranchers that are producing food responsibly."

– Meghan Therrien, Food Services San Francisco, California

High-Road Economic Inclusion Initiatives

The greener we get, the more we risk reproducing income and wealth disparities within BIPOC communities. Opportunities in the climate economy come with major legacy challenges — limited educational pathways, lack of hiring and business networks, capital, bonding and insurance for businesses. These are now compounded by 21st century challenges. New building/constructions standards, materials and equipment, project management and estimating software, labor standards, construction administration and complex contracting methods require more advanced capacities. The lack of diversity in the environmental, climate and construction industry demonstrates the need for a more robust pipeline of diverse and skilled workers and contractors if we are to achieve a high-road economy that is sustainable, just and inclusive.

ECC addresses these challenges. We foster public and private sector local hire and local procurement policies and strategies and offer programs that give disadvantaged workers and contractors the support and training they need to be competitive. Here are just two of our success stories.



ACES — Not Just Hardhats

Re-engineering and rebuilding America's infrastructure to be more sustainable and resilient while fixing income inequality requires training a new generation of workers who reflect the talents and diversity of people of color, and immigrant and historically low-income communities. EC-LA created ACES to build that pipeline of opportunity and talent. Over a 4-year period, students earn a high school degree, skills certificates and associate degrees to jumpstart STEAM careers in architecture, engineering, energy, and construction. Some 340 students from six LA county high schools have enrolled in the program, which produced its first class of graduates in 2018. ■

E-Contractor Academy

Ryan Tittsworth, president of RBT Electric, Inc., is a veteran and a graduate of ECC's E-Contractor Academy, a seven-week program for small and minority contractors on energy efficiency and renewable energy retrofit projects. Tittsworth's Los Angeles-based company installed new solar panels, energy-efficient lighting and windows and an upgraded heating, ventilation and air conditioning system at Culver City, Calif.'s recently renovated Julian Dixon and Bilbrew Libraries. These upgrades made the libraries Los Angeles County's first net-zero energy buildings. Each solar system alone will save $27,000 a year in energy costs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to taking 28 cars off the road. It has also made the libraries' total energy consumption roughly equal to the amount of renewable energy created onsite. Half the workers Tittsworth hired on the project were minority residents of LA County. As a result of the training, Ryan is now an active signatory contractor with the local IBEW. ■

"[The E-Contractor Academy] was a great way to increase our capacity and learn practical techniques about how to improve our business and compete for larger contracts."

– Ryan Tittsworth, president, RBT Electric, Inc., Los Angeles





THE WAY FORWARD

FOR GOVERNMENT

A renewed era of government-supported climate activism can help scale high road initiatives that work at the intersection of environment, economy and equity. Our work has shown that communities that embrace highly democratic, co-governance structures as they pursue environmentally responsible development are better positioned to succeed along the high road to a more sustainable and just economy. National and local public policies and investments should support:

- Local/regional climate collaboratives involving community organizations, labor, business and environmental groups to develop "all-in" cross-sectional justice and equity-centered climate strategies. Tools for success include collaborative planning and community engagement models, capacity building through training and technical assistance for cross-sector climate planning, and project planning grants.

- Direct support for front-line organizations to have a seat at the collaborative table and to advance community-generated proposals.

- Prioritize climate investments in low-income communities, mission-critical facilities, and resilience hubs.

- HUD 3 Section authority and/or DOT economic inclusion policies across all federal agencies.

- Energy democracy initiatives focused on distributed energy infrastructure that positions communities as producers, owners and consumers of our clean energy future.

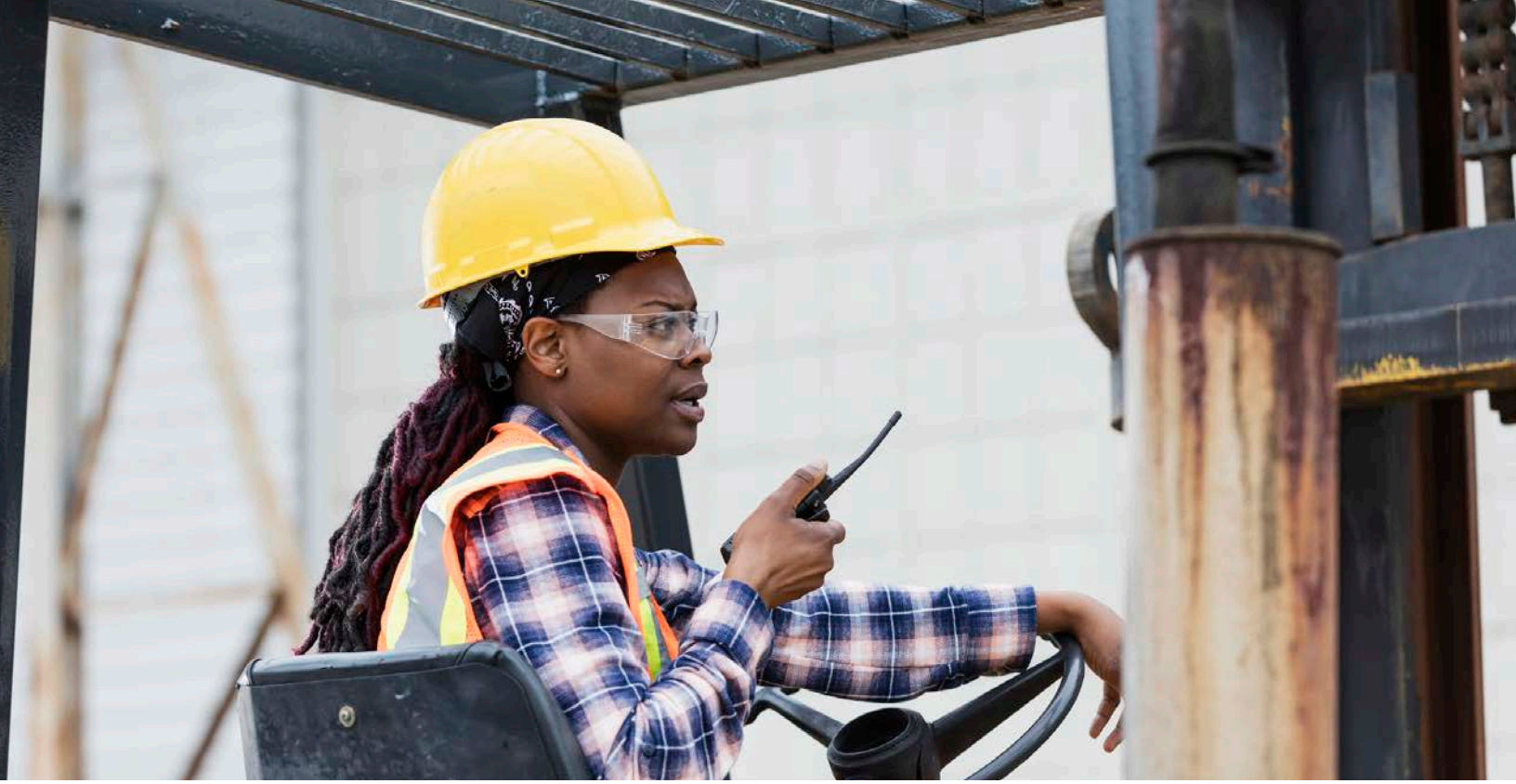
- College and career development for Black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) who might then pursue environmental and climate careers.

- The use of high-road labor standards in public sector investments for projects that significantly redress the gross underrepresentation of BIPOC communities in the construction and environmental sectors.



"Emerald Cities understands contractor and workforce needs. … We are very fortunate to have them train and prepare local contractors to develop a clean energy infrastructure and economy in Northeast Ohio."

— Mike Foley, Director, Department of Sustainability, Cayahoga County, Ohio



FOR LABOR

A high-road clean economy recovery requires the active engagement and support of unionized labor. Unions are instruments for rebuilding the middle class with their focus on livable wages, benefits, continuing education and worker voice in decision-making. Construction is responsible for two-thirds of jobs in the clean economy and construction unions specifically bring more than $1 billion of privately funded workforce training in the trades. Teachers' unions are critical to ensuring that our kids are not learning in sick buildings. Health professionals are essential partners in advancing population and environmental/public health. Unions that advance worker dignity and livable wages for essential workers such as SEIU are the cornerstones of a high-road economy. The role of Labor in building a high road economy is multi-faceted, including:

- The construction trades must actively work to dismantle their legacy of racial discrimination and exclusion, particularly among African Americans, and proactively engage in constructive dialogue with minority contractors and improve business practices to advance inclusion. A 100-year legacy of exclusion has created a huge, hard-to-mend divide between union and non-union construction workers. ECC's training on socially responsible contracting serves as a bridge strategy to ensure diversity in high-road sectors.

- Teachers unions should actively engage with industry, workforce and community organizations to build climate resilient schools with STEM-related curricula and experiential learning and career pathways that support student learning and community health.

- Health unions should proactively engage health management and community organizations in the development of Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNAs) and community benefit programs to ensure effective community participation to include upstream interventions such as environmental, climate mitigation and adaptation and economic solutions.

- Public employee and SEIU unions must continue to effectively advocate for protecting essential workers and building career pipelines in the clean economy, such as janitors and property service staff in smart building technologies or home health care workers as energy auditors.



FOR COMMUNITY

The way forward to high-road solutions requires continued advocacy and engagement from frontline communities — those most affected by environment racism and climate change — in advancing policies and modeling the solutions. Their lived experience and cultures make their voices essential in defining solutions that will do no harm and offer new frameworks for building environmentally responsible economies to benefit everyone. The role of community is to:

- Tap into, lead with and document your cultural ways of knowing and being to help develop radical and more culturally relevant futures.
- Develop personal stories and examples of the health and economic challenges and opportunities in climate/environmental solutions to support advocacy efforts.
- Develop and participate in organized efforts to move community-derived high-road solutions and projects.
- Track proposed local and state infrastructure policies and investments to ensure they include community benefit requirements.
- Inform and encourage friends, family and community residents to pursue jobs, business opportunities and policy work to help diversify the environmental, climate and construction industries.

FOR BUSINESS

Climate commitments and investments from major industries can transform markets to behave in new, high-road ways. ECC's work with major corporations, businesses, and investors reveals the significance of Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance (ESG) goals regarding the sustainability and societal impact of an investment in a company or business. More and more companies are committing to becoming net zero, to green their supply chains and other sustainability goals. These advances can be strengthened in a number of ways:

- Invest in and actively build small and minority businesses into your supply chain.
- Establish mentorship, internships and career pathways for young people to take your job.
- Pay your workers living wages and provide them benefits.
- Diversify your boards and staff.
- Develop community ownership opportunities for your products and services.


“Nothing can stop the power of a committed and determined people to make a difference in our society.”
– U.S. Rep. John Lewis

Our success is made possible by our dedicated board, funders and staff

CURRENT BOARD

American Council for Energy Efficient Economy (ACEEE)

Corps Network

Council of Large Public Housing Authorities

COWS, University of Wisconsin, Madison

Institute for Market Transformation (IMT)

IUPAT

LiUNA!

National Association of Energy Service Companies (NAESCO)

National Association of Minority Contractors

National Urban League

Policy Link

SEIU

The Daniele Company

U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC)

World Resources Institute (WRI)

YouthBuild USA

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(in memoriam)

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