

Green-Collar Jobs Overview

Green Collar Jobs Rebuild a Strong Middle Class

Green-collar jobs are good jobs. Like blue-collar jobs, green-collar jobs pay family wages and provide opportunities for advancement along a career track of increasing skills and wages. A job that does something for the planet, and little to nothing for the people or the economy, is not a green-collar job. The green economy cannot be built with solar sweat shops and Wal-Mart wind farms.

Green-Collar Jobs Provide Pathways Out of Poverty

Most green-collar jobs are middle-skill jobs requiring more education than high school, but less than a four-year degree -- and are well within reach for lower-skilled and low-income workers as long as they have access to effective training programs and appropriate supports. We must ensure that all green-collar jobs strategies provide opportunities for low-income people to take the first step on a pathway from poverty to economic self-sufficiency.

Green-Collar Jobs Require Some New Skills (and some new thinking about old skills)

The green economy demands workers with new skill sets. Some green collar jobs -- say renewable energy technicians -- are brand new. But even more are existing jobs that are being transformed as industries transition to a clean energy economy: computer control operators who can cut steel for wind towers as well as for submarines; or mechanics who can fix an electric engine as well as an internal combustion engine. We need identify the specific skills the green economy demands. Then we need to invest in creating new training programs and retooling existing training programs to meet the demand.

Green-Collar Jobs Tend To Be Local Jobs

Much of the work we have to do to green our economy involves transforming the places that we live and work and the way we get around. These jobs are difficult or impossible to offshore. For instance, you can't pick up a house, send it to China to have solar panels installed, and have it shipped back. In addition, one of the major sources of manufacturing jobs -- a sector that has been extensively off-shored -- are components parts for wind towers and turbines. Because of their size and related high transportation costs, they are most cost-effectively produced as near as possible to wind-farm sites. Cities and communities should begin thinking now about ways their green strategies can also create local jobs.

A Green-Collar Job Strengthens Urban and Rural Communities

Urban and rural America have both been negatively impacted over the past decades by a failure to invest in their growth -- green-collar jobs provide an opportunity to reclaim these areas for the benefit of local residents. From new transit spending and energy audits in inner cities to windmills and biomass in our nation's heartland, green jobs mean a reinvestment in the communities hardest hit in recent decades.

And By the Way ... Green-Collar Jobs Save Planet Earth

This may be obvious. The "green" in green-collar is about preserving and enhancing environmental quality. Green-collar jobs are in the growing industries that are helping us kick the oil habit, curb greenhouse-gas emissions, eliminate toxins, and protect natural systems.

Green-collar workers are installing solar panels, retrofitting buildings to make them more efficient, constructing transit lines, refining waste oil into bio-diesel, erecting wind farms, repairing hybrid cars, building green rooftops, planting trees, and so much more. And they are doing it today. There are already many green-collar jobs in America. But there could be so many more if we focus our economic strategies on growing a green economy.