

Will a Green Jobs Objective Help or Hinder the Achievement of Energy Savings Goals?

Lance Loncke, District Department of the Environment, Energy Administration, Washington DC
Teri Lutz, Tetra Tech, Madison, WI

Introduction

In recent years, green jobs objectives have realized an increased emphasis as a means to stimulate both short-term and sustainable job creation across North America. This is an understandable and valued intention as governments, policy makers, and citizens demand additional benefits from tax dollars spent on mandated energy efficiency and renewable energy programs designed to produce a more energy efficient economy. As one would expect, this demand receives increased scrutiny and expectations for localized job creation when coupled with rate-payer funding.

So...what happens when localized green jobs objectives are directly attached to energy and demand savings goals? Do they distract from cost-effective implementation efforts as implementers deploy resources to chase jobs rather than and/or in addition to pursuing energy savings? Does pursuing localized jobs increase or decrease cost effectiveness of energy programs? Are there short-term costs for this strategy that will be outweighed in the longer term? Will an early-on aggressive green jobs objective prove insightful and brilliant once programs become more mature?

The Harmony, or Dichotomy, of Objectives

In 2011, the District Department of the Environment, through the District of Columbia Sustainable Energy Utility (DC SEU), began implementing energy efficiency and renewable energy programs within the District. The DC SEU is charged with helping District households and businesses save energy and money through energy efficiency and renewable energy programs while increasing the number of green-collar jobs in the District. In addition, the DC SEU must implement a cost effective portfolio of energy efficiency programs, increase renewable energy generation capacity, and ensure 30 percent of expenditures support low-income housing efficiency programs on a year-by-year basis. Additionally, DDOE requires rigorous tracking, verification, and reporting of local resident green jobs directly resulting from the DC SEU expenditures, a unique District requirement. These objectives and requirements compete for money and labor, as well as for strategic and tactical planning for the development and delivery of the energy savings portfolio.

A Lot of Questions and Developing Answers

Full implementation efforts have been in operation for less than two years and the portfolio of programs offered by the DC SEU was first evaluated in the first quarter of 2013. Initial evaluation efforts, as well as early implementation efforts, are leading to more questions than quantifiable answers regarding the interplay between objectives. Although there are indications that the challenges of growing a local job force competes for resources and detracts from other portfolio goals early on, the questions for how these objectives will play out in the future remain open...and evaluation efforts will continue to assess the impacts of these objectives. Stay tuned...