



Green Employers Roundtable

February 19, 2010

San Francisco, CA

OVERVIEW OF DISCUSSIONS

SF Works convened a gathering of Bay Area leaders representing government, business, academia, philanthropy and the community-based sector at the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, Friday, February 19. The goal: To identify the opportunities in the emerging green economy and the challenges facing green businesses and to share ideas on cross-sector strategies for fostering workforce growth. The discussion was led by Carrie Portis, Executive Director of SF Works and facilitated by Lori Bamberger, a consultant to SF Works.

Laying out the Context

Panama Bartholomy, Advisor to Commissioner Douglas at the California Energy Commission, described the policy levers expected to lead to the creation of green jobs: ambitious renewable energy and efficiency standards, rapidly proliferating local project finance and incentive programs, and growing interest from capital providers including the state's pension funds.

These policies are beginning to have an impact. SF Works shared results of a recent survey of 57 Bay Area green businesses: Ninety percent of solar installers and 75% of energy efficiency contractors expect to be hiring new workers in the next two years. Yet the economy continues to struggle. Survey respondents identified weak residential and commercial demand and problems accessing finance as significant obstacles to growth and job creation.

Discussion

The employers who attended told us they are challenged by:

- **Lack of working capital:** The difficulty accessing working capital is preventing many firms from hiring. Supplies and labor are expensive, and the structure of government rebate programs delays payment until a project's conclusion.
- **Navigating government programs:** The dizzying array of government initiatives can be overwhelming to many companies, particularly when there is no obvious point of access or effort to connect programs to small businesses.
- **Poorly designed workforce programs:** Training curriculums are poorly matched to job requirements and don't reflect the diverse hiring needs (including back-office and sales), low-skilled workers are inadequately screened for employers, local hire ordinances are too loosely designed to be effective or too restrictive given the mobile nature of the work, and the most valuable resource, wage subsidies for on-the-job training, is are



difficult to access. Given the high rates of unemployment among skilled, experienced workers, the value of workforce programs are limited even as community pressure, verging on anger, grows over the lack of jobs for training program graduates..

But above all, participants agreed that the greatest challenge is that demand is weak. Green businesses are largely dependent on regional markets and there is a critical need for market education to overcome the household knowledge gap on renewable energy and efficiency.

Some of the solutions identified included:

- Creating for employers a single point of access to government subsidies and supports.
- Mapping the market of policy initiatives and incentives down to the level of execution – identifying how our system can be better vertically integrated.
- Moving to a regional policy framework that better supports generating demand and accommodates the needs of businesses under pressure to hire locally.
- Continuing to find and grow the capital market, including tapping into the endowments of foundations, to invest in aggregated projects with known return.
- Prioritizing on-the-job training, providing more support to crew leaders, and giving employers more input into training curriculums.
- Using social networking to improve the efficiency of the green labor market as well as investing in branding and education.