

Isles Center for Energy and Environmental Training (CEET)

Program Profile

Generating Careers in Energy Efficiency

The [Isles Center for Energy and Environmental Training](#) (CEET) helps underemployed and unemployed individuals target careers in energy efficiency, environmental health, and lead hazard control. Administered by Isles, a community development and environmental organization based in Trenton, New Jersey, CEET trains and provides nationally recognized certifications for workers and home health aides in green jobs. Thousands of New Jersey residents have been able to kickstart careers in the home energy performance field through this program.

CEET was established in 2009 to help generate jobs and economic opportunities, while making homes safe, healthy, and energy efficient. It offers industry-driven classroom and laboratory training, as well as field experiences. As a Building Performance Institute (BPI) training and testing center, CEET offers training opportunities, such as courses in HVAC systems, energy auditing, and ventilation control. The Center also features duct, heating, air sealing, and insulation labs, as well as a model house that is used for training, skills testing, and more.

New Jersey residents who are considered to be underemployed or unemployed are eligible for CEET trainings, as long as they meet at least a 10th grade reading and math level and have a high school diploma or GED. The CEET program administrators have defined underemployed residents as those working jobs that do not provide them with a living wage. In addition to these individuals, the program is also available to workers in the energy field who need to renew or obtain certifications. Private companies help boost CEET participation by directing their workers to the program for weatherization and other trainings.

Beyond energy efficiency and environmental training, CEET tries to address employment barriers faced by its trainees, including lack of soft skills—such as communication, leadership, and time management—and access to transportation. To address these challenges, CEET provides trainees with financial counselors and helps them obtain driver's licenses if they do not

Fast Facts

Program scope: Workforce development for energy efficiency including support services.

Communities served: Unemployed and underemployed individuals and workers wishing to advance their skills and certifications.

Funding: New Jersey Department of Health, Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and Department of Community Affairs; PSE&G

Key partners: Workforce Opportunity Services, New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, New Jersey Department of Health, PSE&G.

Promising practices: Direct community engagement, holistic approach to workforce development, local partnerships, braided funding sources.



already have one. Additionally, the Center partners with the state's [One-Stop Career Centers](#) to provide support for resume writing, testing, and other work-related services.

Community History

CEET is based in Trenton, New Jersey, but its services are available to residents statewide. When the 2008 recession hit, the staff at Isles recognized that unemployment was a major issue in the communities they were serving. They wanted to find a way to create opportunities for these underemployed and unemployed populations, and so created CEET, a win-win to boost jobs not only in the community, but also in the growing clean energy sector.

CEET program administrators have worked to understand the challenges faced by New Jersey communities, so they can adjust their training offerings to best suit community needs. For example, CEET helps program participants gain access to transportation services, and the program accommodates those that are transitioning out of the criminal justice system. Because CEET aims to provide training opportunities without leaving anyone behind, program administrators do not discriminate against individuals with a nonviolent criminal record.

Trenton and other parts of New Jersey also have an older housing stock. As these older homes often have a variety of sources of lead, childhood lead poisoning has become a problem faced by communities across the state. In response to this issue, CEET incorporated training opportunities, such as lead risk assessment and lead abatement, into its training portfolio. All trainees must complete CEET's soft skills training before moving on to technical courses. The technical training that each trainee participates in is determined by multiple factors, such as CEET course offerings and skill level and field of interest of the trainee.

Community Engagement

To engage local communities, CEET markets opportunities directly on its website and deploys teams on the ground to hand out flyers and speak with individuals directly. But the program relies heavily upon word-of-mouth promotion throughout New Jersey communities. Many of those who are involved with Isles, and CEET specifically, have strong ties to local communities. The connections CEET staff have within these communities strengthens trust in the program and promotes program participation. In an effort to continue building trust in New Jersey communities, the Center has also developed relationships with grassroots organizations in Trenton and other communities. Direct engagement with the community and community-based groups has provided a strong source of feedback by which CEET can constantly update and adapt its program offerings. For example, based on feedback from nurses who see childhood



lead poisoning, the program adapted outreach strategies to better promote lead-related courses and to strengthen lead education in communities.

Key Partners

CEET relies on a strong network of partners to implement its training programs, including the following:

- [Puertorriqueños Asociados for Community Organization \(PACO\)](#) – PACO is community-based bilingual organization, located in Hudson County, New Jersey. PACO provides county residents with vital social services, including through energy, youth, and senior programs.
- [Public Service Electric and Gas Co. \(PSE&G\)](#) – PSE&G is New Jersey’s largest electric and natural gas service provider. According to data from February 2023, the company serves 2.3 million electric customers and 1.9 million gas customers.
- [Workforce Opportunity Services \(WOS\)](#) – WOS is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that works to develop the skills of underserved and veteran communities by partnering with workforce development organizations.
- [New Jersey Department of Community Affairs \(NJ DCA\)](#) – DCA is a state agency that provides administrative guidance, financial support, and technical assistance to local governments, community organizations, business, and individuals. DCA’s services and programs include affordable housing production, fire and building safety, historic preservation, community planning, etc.
- [New Jersey Department of Health \(NJ DOH\)](#) – DOH is a state agency whose goal is to improve the well-being and quality of life for all New Jersey residents. The agency provides disease prevention and control, health education, and emergency preparedness, as well as addresses health equity and disparities and more.
- [New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development](#) – The Department of Labor and Workforce is a state agency dedicated to strengthening New Jersey’s workforce and businesses and promoting the dignity of residents’ work. It provides services related to income security, worker protections, workforce development, business and employer services, etc.

These partners provide CEET with a wide variety of services. For example, CEET partners with PACO to strengthen engagement with underemployed and underserved communities, especially those in Jersey City. The Center also has a training contract with PSE&G, which provides CEET trainees access to PSE&G’s on-the-job training network. Several New Jersey



state agencies provide the Center with funding, additional trainings, and accreditation opportunities, as well as support with community engagement and networking. WOS provides support services to CEET participants, and shares access to its network of HVAC companies that provide weatherization services.

CEET also leverages internal partnerships, working closely with Isles Community Development & Planning (CP&D) services. CP&D helps CEET with participant intake and provides financial and job coaching to trainees. With this internal partnership, CEET can take more of a holistic approach to workforce development, providing trainees with more than just technical knowledge.

Many of these partnerships were originally established through Isles' Lead and Healthy Homes Program and grew to support CEET. Additionally, the lead crisis in Flint, Michigan catalyzed state funding for lead programs, which helped Isles connect with organizations across the state.

Funding Mechanism

Multiple sources fund Isles' workforce development projects. CEET is funded by grants from the New Jersey Department of Health, Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and Department of Community Affairs. The Center also has contracts with energy companies, such as PSE&G, that pay CEET to train their workers or prospective workers. These funding sources generally cover the entire cost of training for individuals and in some cases other supportive services, such as financial planning and reinstating drivers' licenses.

Historically, the program has scaled implementation based on available funding, both in terms of number of trainees and types of training offered. With funding pieced together from various sources, program administrators must determine each year what types of trainings can be offered and how many individuals can be trained with the available funds. CEET program administrators also noted that differing rules, systems, and regulations across funding sources can be challenging to navigate. This has made them hesitant to accept federal funding, which program administrators say often has particularly strict regulatory requirements.

Despite the challenges associated with managing multiple funding sources, CEET continues to scale up its funding. The grant from the Department of Labor and Workforce Development is new to CEET this year and provides funding specifically for job coaching. Program administrators are also pursuing a BRIDGE (Building our Resilient, Inclusive, and Diverse Green Economy) grant offered by New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection to



expand their training to reach more communities, hire additional trainers, provide subsidies to employers for new hires, and increase the credentials CEET offers.

Program Impact

Since launching in 2009, CEET has provided energy and environmental job training and industry certifications for green-focused careers to 4,555 individuals.¹ Annually, the program provides training to 200–300 people. CEET is largely grant-driven, and fluctuations in funding impact the number of trainees they can reach each year, as well as the trainings offered. Funding sources also impact training type; in some years, CEET has had more funding for lead training, whereas in other years it has more funding for energy efficiency training programs.

CEET’s training programs serve entry level workers and current workers who wish to upgrade their certifications. Most often, training programs for entry level workers are paid for by state grants or energy companies, and the costs for upgraded credentials for current workers are covered by energy companies such as PSE&G. In recent years, program administrators have noticed a growing demand for lead, energy efficiency, and environmental health trainings. They plan to scale up capacity for trainings to keep up with these increasing needs. In the near-term, CEET’s goal is to provide lead and energy efficiency training and job placement to at least 250 individuals over the next two years, while also providing wrap-around services such as job coaching and financial counseling.²

“I’m Lee and I am a graduate of the PSEG On the Job Training (OTJ) program. The OTJ program gave me the skills that I needed to thrive in the fast-growing clean energy industry. Most of that training was done at Isles.

Isles is a valuable resource for our community, and while taking the Air Leakage Control Installer course, I was impressed by the caring and commitment of the staff there. The instructor, Andre Thomas, was an inspiration and made attaining my certifications smooth and easy. His attention to detail and spirit makes the course fun, yet he is serious about giving us the tools we need to succeed.

The learning area at Isles is like a learning playground where you not only learn the “why” but you can put those skills to the test. After my classes at Isles, I was well equipped to enter the job market and have been moving up ever since. Respect to PSEG for starting this program, and thank you to Isles for blessing me with so many opportunities.”

– Lee Henry, an Isles field technician

1 Emily Puskar, Isles Inc., 2023. Personal Communication.

2 Emily Puskar, Isles Inc., 2023. Personal Communication.



Barriers and Challenges

Engagement with local communities is vital to the success of CEET. However, program administrators noted that it can often be challenging to engage members of the community that are most in need. Therefore, the program is always looking for new and creative outreach strategies, as well as new partnerships with community-based organizations.

Program administrators carefully vet future partners to ensure partnerships result in jobs for CEET trainees. Some communities have been disenchanted by organizations that presented them with the illusion of job opportunities but did not follow through. CEET program administrators note that there can be challenges working with underserved communities, but the success stories motivate them to continue their work.

Recommendations from the Field

For communities replicating the CEET program, administrators recommend building a diverse team with varying expertise, including grant writers, those with technical expertise, and staff with deep knowledge of and connections to the communities being served. Strong community connections are perhaps most important to attract participants, in addition to identifying local partners—who are also vital to program success. In fact, partnering with agencies that serve similar demographics but offer complementary services can help increase community impact. CEET program administrators also flagged that program impact can be maximized by providing diverse training opportunities relevant to community needs—for example, pairing hard-skill trainings with soft-skill trainings, and finding ways to include support services directly or through program partners. The story of CEET's success is one of strong community engagement and targeting the true needs of underserved communities across New Jersey.

For More Information

- [Isles Inc.](#)