

California's offshore wind (OSW) industry is transitioning from planning to implementation in a statewide effort to deliver 2-5 GW clean energy by 2030. In support of this goal, the California Energy Commission (CEC) released a draft of its [Assembly Bill 525 Offshore Wind Strategic Plan](#) (the Plan). In a nascent industry with complex community interests at play, the need to monitor and optimize OSW's local impacts is paramount. Among the range of benefits that OSW can deliver to state residents, the workforce development spurred by offshore wind and supply chain activities could emerge as the most significant.

This post examines the Plan's approach to advancing workforce opportunities in communities impacted by California's OSW development. As discussed in an earlier Legal Planet [post](#), the Plan organizes existing knowledge about California offshore wind. By gathering information and discussing key stages of workforce development, the Plan helps set a platform for developers and prospective workers to coordinate and mobilize. Some remaining gaps in the details of implementation could challenge efforts to maximize workforce benefits among highly impacted communities. Fully realizing the Plan's projected benefits and equity principles will require that developers and stakeholders collectively identify how to implement the Plan.

Labor Supply and Demand

The Plan consolidates data analyses and highlights key considerations for assembling the workforce needed to realize the State's goals. Referencing the State Lands Commission's (SLC) [Assembly Bill 525 Workforce Development Readiness Plan](#) (the Workforce Plan) throughout its discussion, the CEC Plan identifies workforce needs (e.g., job magnitudes, occupation types and skill levels) associated with different stages of project implementation; total estimated jobs range from about 2,400 - 8,300 for California's 2030 OSW goals and between 5,100 - 18,000 for the State's 2045 OSW goals. The Plan categorizes jobs by their qualification levels and associated training durations, adding some insight to discussions of workforce development timelines.

When relating workforce demand to coastal California labor supply, the Plan notes that organized labor has affirmed its ability to meet industry demands and increase training and recruitment activities. Whether many of these prospective employees reside in the same impacted communities that the Plan intends to prioritize (underserved groups, fisheries, tribal communities) remains uncertain. According to the Plan, OSW's supply chain constitutes the greatest share of overall labor demand among all OSW project components. Supply chain jobs also exhibit the greatest need for highly-skilled, specialized labor. Taken together, these analyses may place geographical and occupational distance between many of the industry's high quality jobs and the underserved communities most directly impacted

by OSW development. Further work is needed to understand how to ensure underserved communities have access to OSW employment opportunities.

Workforce Training

The Strategic Plan identifies the need to create workforce training opportunities so that residents in California coastal communities can access OSW employment opportunities. In its discussion of existing training programs, the CEC references an SLC database that compiles 145 OSW workforce training opportunities spanning a wide range of venues and providers (e.g., labor unions, community colleges, technical schools). The Plan elevates a few specific workforce training opportunities, including the [California Apprenticeship Initiative New and Innovative Grant Program](#) (administered by Chancellor of California Community Colleges) and [High Road Training Partnerships](#).

In its draft form, the Plan does not thoroughly situate specific training programs within their localized contexts. Programs' proximity to low-income residents, public transportation and OSW sites, and the languages in which these programs are taught – among other community alignment considerations – could each influence program uptake among impacted communities. The Plan also omits discussion of optimal timelines and leaves uncertainty as to which specific actors – government agencies, project leaseholders or residents themselves – could initiate OSW skills training. As many of the most readily available OSW industry jobs require 1-2 years of training, preparing prospective employees to help deliver California's 2030 OSW goals will require prompt mobilization.

Industry-Labor Coordination

The Strategic Plan considers the coordination efforts needed to connect available workers with industry employers, recognizing that industry-labor alignment will “[rely] on engagement and support from industry, labor, educational and training institutions, and regulatory and government agencies.” While the Plan does not identify a primary state agency to lead these efforts (an action item proposed in the SLC Workforce Plan), the CEC elevates several practices as viable methods to execute engagement – including local hiring policies and industry-labor partnership structures like [Community Benefit Agreements](#) (CBAs), [Project Labor Agreements](#) (PLAs), and Social Impact Partnerships (SIPs), among others.

Whereas CBAs directly implicate specific actors (project leaseholders and community representatives), other partnership structures and local hiring requirements could involve a variety of institutions and government agencies. In areas where uncertainty in development

timelines and relevant actors prevents a clear direction, the Plan endorses early engagement efforts – including CBA conversations to potentially commence in the coming months.

Planning Uncertainty

Gaps in The Plan’s analysis of OSW workforce development are largely attributable to lingering uncertainties in the industry’s supply chain infrastructure and leaseholder plans. The supply chain’s uncertain geographical scope prevents early commitments among developers and prospective workers to initiate training processes. Meanwhile, developers cannot identify their exact workforce needs until they finalize details of project designs, facilities, and operational procedures. The Plan leaves space for stakeholder initiative, local insights, and new developments to inform implementation processes. Such planning uncertainty affords flexibility but also burdens developers and stakeholders to ensure that workforce development initiatives beyond the Plan’s explicit terms are anchored by principles of equity.

Conclusion

The CEC’s draft Strategic Plan for Offshore Wind provides guidance and cohesion for workforce development efforts in a new and complex industry. The Plan’s extensive analysis of workforce needs, training opportunities and industry-labor alignment sets a foundation for developers and prospective workers to coordinate efforts and mobilize. Some gaps that remain in the details of implementation can be reasonably attributed to supply chain and project design uncertainties. If developers and stakeholders do not collectively resolve these gaps through principles of equity, developers may mobilize in ways that fail to maximize workforce benefits among OSW’s most impacted communities. Further efforts to aggregate the Plan’s insights and link its content to responsible actors and timelines can help carve a tangible pathway toward California’s OSW goals.