

Montana Climate Solutions Council: Workforce Transition and Preparedness Recommendations

Economic transitions often occur without consistent or coherent policy to address displaced workers and community impacts. Unions secured wages, benefits, workplace safety, and jobs security that transformed employment in the manufacturing sector into respected and desired jobs. As these jobs have declined, no significant replacement for similar skills has emerged and other sectors have lacked the same wages, benefits, or security.

An industrial transition required to meet ambitious decarbonization goals will require innovation and investment in technology and infrastructure. These investments must be matched with clear and consistent support for the role of unions, fossil fuel communities, disadvantaged communities, tribal communities, and displaced workers in shaping industrial policy and spending. That includes discussions around workforce training and apprenticeship, wages and benefits, and community impacts related to the closure and replacement of energy infrastructure.

Montana's Climate Solutions Council calls for engagement with labor, the fossil fuel industry, state agencies, and the university system to ensure a just transition for communities and workers. The workforce recommendations here are aligned with recommendations related to innovation, commercialization, and deployment of technologies that are required to meet decarbonization goals, recommendations to network and build capacity to prepare Montana's communities for climate and economic transitions, and recommendations to align fiscal policy with economic development and transition strategies.

To ensure Montana's climate, transition, and industrial policy benefits the state's workforce and ensures justice for displaced workers, the following strategies are recommended:

1. Focus on apprenticeship. Apprenticeship ensures that training is targeted to actual needs and opportunities. Reduces risk by keeping existing workers in the workforce instead of removing them for months or years of education and training. Montana should expand existing, approved apprenticeship programs registered with the Montana Department of Labor and Industry and develop and provide new registered apprenticeship programs, if required, specifically to transition fossil fuel extraction, transmission, and power generation workers to renewable energy infrastructure and generation sectors.
2. Establish career training centers in public school systems that deliver basic and advanced skills-based training to middle and high school students throughout the state. These can be coordinated with proposed innovation initiatives and networked with community and tribal colleges. (For example, Billings Career Center in the Eastern Montana Net-Zero Manufacturing innovation cluster).
3. Secure prevailing wages in industrial, energy, transportation, and building sectors, including renewable energy, efficiency, and infrastructure required to meet decarbonization goals.
4. Allow for Neutrality Agreements for the purpose of collective bargaining for any new major generation facility or site.
5. Supply chain (state tax credit) 48 (c) tax credit (feds) job quality and economic value standards. (need to get specific language).
6. The state can use its spending and regulatory authority to further workforce goals listed above.