

Pacific Gas and Electric



Collaboration with Workforce System and Education Creates Skilled Applicant Pool Pacific Gas and Electric Company

Time-to-productivity gained through PG&E's PowerPathway™ program, a collaboration between business, the public workforce system and higher education, creates a skilled, "ready now" and diverse pool of talent with a return on investment of over 3-to-1.

Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) is one of the largest combination natural gas and electric utilities in the United States. Based in San Francisco, the company employs approximately 20,000 associates who carry out PG&E's primary business – the transmission and delivery of energy. The company provides natural gas and electric service to approximately 15 million people throughout a 70,000-square-mile service area in northern and central California. Like many in the energy industry, PG&E is concerned about the disconnect between the company's workforce demands and the availability of work-ready applicants.

At the same time, new green energy technologies are emerging and incumbent workers, as well as new job applicants, are not prepared with the skills needed for the industry. PG&E needed to increase awareness of its good union-wage jobs and help individuals in its surrounding communities understand and acquire the skills required to work in these jobs. In order to build a strong candidate pool of "ready now" skilled and diverse workers, to improve supervisor satisfaction with new hires, and to enhance time-to-productivity, PG&E launched the PowerPathway™ program—with a combination of education, government, labor and industry partners—cultivating career pathways that strengthen community access to and employee progression into new energy jobs.

buy-in at the company across departments and within the C-Suite leadership for the PowerPathway™ concept, which was to create a network of educational programs designed to build capacity to produce skilled workers.

PERSONAL STORY

Sayphong Moua, a first generation Hmong-American, had been working for eight years in the meat department at a food retailer when he learned about the PG&E PowerPathway™ training program. As someone who likes to work with his hands and enjoys being outside most of the time, he leapt at the chance to train for a career in utilities. In 2008, Sayphong was accepted into one of the first PowerPathway™ Bridge to Utility Worker programs at Fresno City College. The program gave him a better understanding of how the company operated, and gave him exposure to climbing poles safely and other demands of the job. Most importantly, he learned it all from people who were already inside the company. After completing the program in the fall, Sayphong was hired by PG&E as a utility worker in the Gas Department Service Center in Rocklin, California. He has since moved up into the apprentice program at PG&E and today is an Apprentice Electrician in PG&E's Hydro Department based in Auberry, California. Sayphong has discovered an industry he is excited about and is encouraged by the support he receives from supervisors and others who work closely with him to help him achieve journey-level status and advance his career.

Business Impact

- Over 3-to-1 return on investment due to accelerated time to productivity
- 4.6 out of 5.0 hiring satisfaction
- 60% average diversity of applicant pool
- Accelerated career progression
- Leverages public/private partnership

Student Impact

- Receive work readiness training and skills relevant to energy sector jobs
- Prepare to effectively compete for job opportunities in the high-growth energy field

PowerPathway™

- Customizes workforce training through higher education institutional partners
- Cultivates career pathways to strengthen the talent pool of skilled workers in communities across California
- Improves access to jobs in high-growth energy field for underserved communities and military veterans
- Fosters public/private partnership with WIBs and education

Collaborating with Industry and Higher Education Partners

Due to the shortage of skilled applicants and the acceleration of incumbent skilled workers retiring, PG&E aggressively built internal

With an understanding of the public workforce system, PG&E created a partnership with the Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) and community colleges that leveraged their assets to serve not only the company but also the broader employer community. Pre-employment services are supplied by the public workforce system, and the community colleges provide customized skilled craft training.

When it launched PowerPathway™ in 2008, PG&E's initial goal was to fill 70 vacant positions and graduate three cohort classes of 25 applicants each from three different locations. PG&E received more than 4,000 applications when the program was first posted. Applicants, generally from local, underserved communities and with at least tenth grade level math and English skills, apply to the program through PG&E's PowerPathway™ website (www.pge.com/powerpathway).

“It takes many years of training to operate and maintain our gas and electric facilities. PowerPathway allows us to partner with schools and communities to ensure we have a qualified pool of candidates for our workforce.”

— Chris Johns
President
Pacific Gas and Electric Company

The WIBs then screen, pre-test, advise and support potential applications to PG&E. Three local community colleges provide 10-to-12-week training courses, developed and customized jointly by PG&E and the community college leadership. General coursework for the training classes runs from math and reading to physical conditioning, industry awareness, and compliance with Occupational Health and Safety Administration guidelines.

Once applicants are signed up for classes, they receive Individual Training Account funds from the WIB to support their education.

Upon successful completion of the program, graduates receive a certificate of completion from the college, a certificate of completion from the PowerPathway™ program, and, most importantly, are considered work ready and competitive candidates for career opportunities within the energy sector.

Producing Competitive Applicants

Recognizing the need for qualified applicants not only within PG&E but also across California's extended energy industry, PG&E invited other energy employers to tap the talent pool by considering those who have completed all prerequisites and coursework to be work ready, and to be competitive job applicants. Though there is never a guarantee of a job, graduates of PowerPathway™ fare much better in the hiring process than typical applicants. From 2008-2010, the PowerPathway Skilled Crafts Training Network trained over 160 individuals across seven Bridge to Pre-apprentice/Utility Worker programs; 104 have been hired into industry-related positions, including 88 at PG&E. Wages earned range from \$19.50 to \$35 an hour. Of those PG&E supervisors who have hired and worked with graduates, 100% said that they would hire other PowerPathway™ graduates and rated their hiring satisfaction a 4.6 out of 5.0. PG&E is also seeing PowerPathway™ hires advance on average six months ahead of their peers when it comes to their apprenticeship progression.

Calculated Return on Investment

PG&E calculated its return on investment by determining that a PowerPathway™ hire who progresses six months ahead of peers in his/her apprenticeship equates to roughly a \$30,000 savings in time-to-productivity, based on salary alone. Currently, with 28 employees meeting that criteria, the return is over 3-to-1 on the investment. PowerPathway™ also engenders significant intangible benefits in the form of community goodwill and increased diversity.

About Corporate Voices

Corporate Voices is the leading national business membership organization shaping conversations and collaborations on public and corporate policy issues involving working families. A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, we are a unique voice, and provide leading and best-practice employers a forum to improve the lives of working families, while strengthening our nation's economy and enhancing the vitality of our communities.

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Find Out More

Corporate Voices is committed to identifying and spotlighting businesses supporting postsecondary completion while making significant contributions to internal company goals. “Best practice” talent development models that increase access to career opportunities through education and training are being examined for characteristics that are transferable and replicable to other employers. This research is being conducted with the guidance of the Corporate Voices Learn and Earn Business Leadership Team consisting of business executives leading promising models and those interested in peer-to-peer learning. If you are interested in joining, contact Peggy Walton at pwalton@corporatevoices.org. Team members include:

- Verizon Wireless
- UPS
- Convergys
- Expeditors
- CVS Caremark
- AOL

For more information about PG&E, please visit www.pge.com

For more information about PowerPathway, please visit www.pge.com/powerpathway

Sector: Energy. Serving 15 million within 70,000 square mile service area

Employees: Approximately 20,000

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