

Finding Entry Points into Portland's Clean Energy Economy



JUNE 2025 Cohort Launch

THE REGIONAL CHALLENGE: Unclear Pathways to Opportunity

The Greater Portland metro area and the state of Oregon are investing in a clean energy transition. Alongside a strong advanced manufacturing sector known locally as the "Silicon Forest," the region is positioning itself as a clean tech innovation hub. That ambition shows up in a dense layer of initiatives and policy commitments including the [Portland Clean Energy Community Benefits Fund \(PCEF\)](#) and state-level efforts like [HB 2021](#) and the [Oregon Energy Strategy](#).

Portland Metro is home to a complex network of mission-driven organizations, collaborative partnerships, secondary and higher education institutions, and proactive government partners, all impact-focused and data-driven. Investments and initiatives in the region rarely move forward without an accompanying economic analysis, typically including a labor market component, and community voice is built into the process through focus groups, listening sessions, and employer advisory committees.

Worksystems, the Portland Metro Workforce Development Board, brings real capacity to this work. Like many workforce boards, its mandate spans multiple programs and funding streams, and the organization has internal capacity to match the challenge: a dedicated research and data analysis staff member who collaborates with data colleagues at partner organizations, a Lightcast subscription, and data feeds from the Oregon Employment Department and the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industry. Even with that capacity, labor market information showing projected job growth doesn't always align with actual job postings and postings labeled "entry level" frequently aren't accessible in practice.



This project created the opportunity for us to come together and focus not only on our shared missions, but also on how we can better align our efforts, coordinate our engagement with industry, and reduce the burden on employers who are frequently asked to provide information and labor market insights to multiple organizations, coalitions, working groups, and task forces.

- Daryl Lambert, Senior Project Manager, Worksystems



AT A GLANCE

Organization	Worksystems
Organization Type	Workforce Development Board
Key Sector(s)	Clean Energy
Geographic Context	Metro
Key Partner Organizations	City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (Portland Clean Energy Fund); Energy Trust of Oregon; Prosper Portland; Portland Community College; Metro; Portland Public Schools; Beaverton School District

Compounding these gaps, many organizations, initiatives, and entities are independently trying to gather information from employers and industry experts, producing a high volume of requests that compete for the same employers' time and attention. **Within clean energy specifically, these efforts don't share a common definition of what counts as clean energy-related employment, making it difficult to compare or reconcile findings across initiatives.** Getting partners to the table has never been the problem; getting them moving the same direction has. These challenges ripple outward, affecting both job seekers and the ecosystem of stakeholders designed to support them.

OCT. 2025 ◀ Pre-Career Pathways Work Begins

AUG. 2025 ◀ Employer Hiring Signals Survey Development Start

THE DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH:

Two Efforts to Map Demand and Entry Points

Worksystems pursued two connected efforts to help align stakeholders across Oregon around a shared definition of clean-energy-related careers. The first was a real-time employer hiring signals tool, meant to be completed by the intermediaries who already work directly with clean energy employers rather than adding one more direct ask on employers themselves. **The goal was a shared framework for coordinating outreach that would reduce employer burnout.** This depended on assembling and sustaining buy-in from a wide coalition of outside organizations.

The second effort was pre-career pathways mapping. Using [O*NET Job Zones](#), Worksystems sought to connect the region's most in-demand, competitive clean energy occupations back to more accessible, lower-preparation occupations that share transferable skills, addressing the workforce system's lack of a pathway map for job seekers who face barriers to employment. Unlike the signals tool, this effort could move forward largely on Worksystems' own data capacity, producing a concrete mapping methodology.

Figure 1.

SOC	DESCRIPTION
47-2071	Septic Tank Servicers and Sewer Pipe Cleaners
49-9011	Mechanical Door Repairers
47-2053	Terrazzo Workers and Finishers
47-5023	Earth Drillers, Except Oil and Gas
49-3043	Rail Car Repairers
47-4051	Highway Maintenance Workers
51-4031	Cutting, Punching, and Press Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders, Metal and Plastic
49-9031	Home Appliance Repairers
47-4061	Rail-Track Laying and Maintenance Equipment Operators
47-2142	Paperhangers

Snapshot of Initial Occupation Mapping for Clean Energy Pathways

Worksystems' data infrastructure anchored both efforts: a Lightcast subscription and data feeds from the Oregon Employment Department and the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industry. For the employer hiring signals project, real-time information on employer demand would be gathered from partners working directly with employers. The intent was to consolidate signal-sharing across the network rather than add another employer-facing ask, so partners could pool what they were already learning instead of competing for the same employer contacts and attention.

For the pathways work, the team paired its existing labor market data with O*NET Job Zones, which rank occupations by how much preparation, education, experience, and training they typically require. Worksystems is using them to map higher-Job-Zone, in-demand clean energy occupations back to lower-Job-Zone occupations that share relevant skills, surfacing potential entry points for job seekers who don't yet have direct experience in the sector

APRIL 2026 ◊ Core Team Turnover Becomes Visible

MAY 2026 ◊ Decision to Not Move Forward With Survey

EARLY RESULTS & MILESTONES:

Momentum, Then a Fork in the Road

From 2025 to early 2026, a core team of about six active members from Worksystems and partner organizations met regularly to co-design the employer hiring signals survey. At the same time, Worksystems built out the O*NET Job Zones methodology for the pathway mapping, work it could carry forward largely on its own. That momentum continued into March 2026, when the team held two working sessions, one to finalize the survey and one on career pathway mapping planning, to keep both efforts moving.

The project's timeline, however, coincided with major shifts in the funding landscape, and led to staffing changes across nearly every partner organization. Of the six most active core team members on the employer hiring signals effort, three either left their organizations or moved into new roles by the project's end. By mid-2026, the employer hiring signals effort stalled. The remaining team could not sustain the coordination needed to finalize and launch the survey. Worksystems is now planning a workshop to capture this information in a lower effort format.

Key Takeaway #1

Match the coordination model to the effort. A broad, cross-organizational effort that needs to stay intact for a long stretch carries real coordination risk. That risk can be managed by breaking the work into shorter milestones, investing in dedicated facilitation or project management support, or scoping the ask down to something a smaller group can carry on its own.

The pathway mapping work, by contrast, continued to progress over the same period, generating early findings on which accessible occupations feed into which in-demand roles. There is still much work to be done, but early analysis of knowledge, skill, and ability relationships has already pointed to several occupations as potentially more accessible entry points for building transferable skills and experience. The goal is to recruit and train from entry-level into the region's top clean energy transition critical occupations (see snapshot in Figure 1). **The resulting analysis helped make the case that more accessible occupations can serve as important stepping stones for some job seekers, helping them build the experience, skills, and social capital needed to become competitive for high-quality, high-demand clean energy transition careers.** These findings will inform the City of Portland's future planning for clean energy workforce investments.

LESSONS LEARNED & WHAT'S NEXT:

Building a More Resilient Approach to Collaboration

Worksystems' next steps are to coordinate a workshop as a lower-effort alternative to the shelved employer hiring signals survey and rebuild a smaller, more resilient project team with clear backup ownership so turnover doesn't stall it again. On the pathways mapping side, Worksystems will finish connecting accessible, entry-level occupations to the region's most in-demand, competitive roles and use the completed map to inform the workforce system's programming and its response to priority demand signals identified by partners.

Key Takeaway #2

When a tool stalls, look for an easier way to reach the same goal. Swapping a long, drawn-out commitment for a shorter, more focused one can keep the goal in sight even when the original approach doesn't work out.

Worksystems came into this work with real strengths: existing data infrastructure, a Lightcast subscription and data feeds from state agencies, as well as a regional culture where partners show up willingly and often. Those strengths played out very differently across the two efforts, because the efforts themselves were built differently. The employer hiring signals survey depended on a broad, cross-organizational core team, Worksystems staff working alongside the Portland Clean Energy Fund, Energy Trust of Oregon, and Prosper Portland, to build a tool for the wider intermediary and employer community. The large project team was a byproduct of Portland's genuinely collaborative regional culture, but organizational turnover added additional strain to the challenge of coordination. The early-career pathways work had a concrete output and a mapping methodology the Worksystems own research team could execute and keep refining. **Running the two efforts in parallel meant Worksystems had a durable result to show for the engagement even after the signals effort stalled.** The real barrier was never a lack of willingness or a lack of underlying data; it was the absence of a concrete, finished output for a wide coalition to hold onto once disruption hit.

Learn more about Worksystems [here](#).