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CalCCA and Greenlining Institute Host First CCA Diversity Symposium

State and Local Officials, Businesses, and Community Leaders Unite to Foster Diversity and Inclusion

Left to right: Symposium guests; Guests tour MCE Solar One; CPUC Commissioner Carla Peterman and Gary Hall, Head of Investment Banking, SCS Capital

Richmond, California - On January 26, CalCCA and The Greenlining Institute co-hosted the first CCA Supplier Diversity Symposium to review the progress, commitments, and initiatives made to support public-private partnerships in the energy sector with women, minority, disabled veteran, and LGBTQ-owned businesses, and to share best practices for diversity in the energy workforce. The Symposium created an opportunity for local and state officials, along with Community Choice Aggregation programs (CCAs), GO 156-certified businesses, and local workforce and union representatives to have open dialogue about developing diverse supplier partnerships, collaborating on workforce training, and sharing their unique experiences for what it takes to work inclusively.

California State Senator Ricardo Lara emphasized the importance of diversifying not only our energy supply with more renewables, but the need to ensure all communities benefit and participate. “Communities of color not only must benefit, but they must be at the table, in those boardrooms, if we’re going to succeed,” said Senator Lara. “If California's environmental movement is going to continue growing, it’s going to have to speak different languages.”

California State Senator Ricardo Lara, Keynote Speaker

A focus on inclusion and diversity is integral to offering services that reflect the full range of communities served by CCAs. By the end of 2018, California’s 12 operational CCAs are expected to serve over 3.3 million homes and businesses across 21 counties. Of the 12 operating CCAs in California, eight are led by minority executives, including women, Latinos, and African Americans. Additional CCAs are under consideration in at least eight other counties, and it’s estimated that over 50 percent of California residents will have CCA service by 2020.

Contra Costa County Supervisor Federal Glover welcomes guests symposium

"As public, not-for-profit organizations, community choice energy suppliers keep ratepayer dollars in the communities they serve by investing in local projects and programs, creating economic ripples that promote local business growth, job creation and market innovation," said Contra Costa County Supervisor and MCE Board Member Federal Glover. By contracting with businesses owned by historically marginalized communities, CCAs can capitalize on the impact of local spending, local hiring, and their ability to foster economic equality.

"CCAs are of service to community by our very nature," said Dawn Weisz, CEO of California's first operational CCA, MCE. "We're governed by local elected officials who advocate for diversity and a thriving community with social equity, workforce development, and fair wages. They've been elected because people believe in them and their ability to lead communities transparently, and with accountability."

CCAs are ensuring that access to clean energy and energy efficiency programs aren't only for the wealthy. In 2016, it's estimated that CCAs saved customers over $10.2 million on their electric bills. CleanPowerSF allocated $2M for solar rebates to underserved residential customers, offering 20-40 percent more in environmental justice neighborhoods and 500 percent more to low-income customers. Lancaster Choice Energy focuses its Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) financing on low-income customers, which make up half of its customer base, and is converting public transit to an all-electric bus fleet, allowing seniors to ride free. Sonoma Clean Power allocated 30 percent of its electric vehicle rebates to low-income customers. MCE allocated $1.7 million for energy efficiency improvements in low-income multifamily apartments, $75,000 for low-income solar rebates, and $185,000 to local green-collar job training programs RichmondBUILD and Rising Sun Energy Center.

"At its core, supplier diversity is about creating and sustaining jobs," said Danielle Beavers, Diversity and Inclusion Director at the Greenlining Institute. "Unfortunately, not all communities face an equal playing field in obtaining jobs. Good old boy networks still very much exist, resulting in a concentration of wealth that puts people of color, women, disabled veterans, and the LGBT community at an economic disadvantage."

Danielle Beavers, Diversity and Inclusion Director, Greenlining Institute

The City of Richmond, served by MCE, experiences the challenges of underemployment and crime that many urban areas face, particularly in underserved communities. In 2007, it launched RichmondBUILD, a public-private partnership focused on developing talent and skills in the high-growth, living-wage construction and renewable energy fields. All RichmondBUILD participants come from low-income households, 95% are people of color, and over 30% have previously been incarcerated.

"Construction is one of the few industries that hires without exclusion due to criminal history," said Surinder Sandhu, a RichmondBUILD graduate who helped build MCE Solar One. "RichmondBUILD taught me work ethic and allowed me to become a productive member of the community. Now I have a career, not just a job."

Surinder Sandhu, RichmondBUILD Graduate, Russel Pacific

MCE partners with RichmondBUILD to provide labor and job training for its local solar projects, including the San Francisco Bay Area's largest publicly-owned solar project, MCE Solar One, which provides enough power for more than 3,400 homes per year.

CCAs have invested billions to build more than 1,100 MW of new California renewables, creating and supporting thousands of fair-wage jobs, many with project labor agreements. CCAs also create jobs for data management, financial services, call centers and electric vehicle, energy efficiency, and residential rooftop solar programs.

"Today we heard from people who talked about their integrity, pride, and self-confidence. How these job opportunities helped not just them, but their children, their families, transcending generations," remarked Jenine Windeshausen, Executive Director of Placer County's Pioneer Community Energy. "We're starting with the end in mind, thinking of this symposium as just the sprout - our task at hand is to build a diversity ecosystem that is robust, healthy and vital."

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About CalCCA: CalCCA represents the interests of California's community choice electricity providers in the legislature and at the state regulatory agencies, including the California Public Utilities Commission, California Energy Commission and California Air Resources Board. Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) is a model that allows for communities to join together to purchase electricity on behalf of their community members. Community choice programs are administered by local governments with a mission to provide competitive alternatives to investor-owned utility sources. CalCCA member programs have a track record of delivering savings on customers' electric bills while providing clean power to the grid.

MCE Solar One, 10.5 MW powering 3,400+ homes annually

Green collar workers at MCE Solar One