

# Training a clean energy workforce in Fresno



## BACKGROUND

This case study explores how TCC-funded solar installation training and installation programs have financially benefited both workers and low-income homeowners in Fresno. The case study does so through the lens of Luther Mays, who has completed several trainings with GRID Alternatives and now sees how families can benefit financially from new solar systems. For more on Fresno’s free solar program, see page 66.

*The interview for this story were conducted in December 2019.*

A GRID Alternatives crew installing solar panels on the Bridges at Florence affordable senior living apartments in the Transform Fresno project area. Photo credit: Fresno Housing Authority

**LUTHER MAYS** moved to Fresno this past summer to help a family member. Mays is a longtime California resident who grew up and spent most of his life in the Sacramento area. When he moved to Fresno, he immediately began looking for a new job but faced several obstacles. Mays doesn’t own or have access to a vehicle, and relies heavily on the Fresno Area Express public transportation system and his bicycle to get around the Fresno and Clovis areas. He decided to start volunteering with GRID Alternatives a few weeks after relocating — often biking up to 12 miles round trip to get to and from GRID Alternatives’ Central Valley offices.

After volunteering on a few solar installations, he learned he could become more formally trained by joining GRID Alternatives Installation Basics Training-200 (IBT-200) program. The IBT-200 is a five-week course that includes 40 hours of classroom learning and 96 hours of on-the-job training in rooftop solar PV system installation and maintenance. Enrolled participants also become certified in basic workplace safety with the Occupational Safety and Health Standards 10-hour (OSHA 10) training, and receive a cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) credential.

Mays says his motivation for joining the training program came from wanting to learn a useful skill and to help himself and other people. He now knows how to safely install



Luther Mays, a GRID Alternatives solar installation trainee. Photo credit: GRID Alternatives

**“You mean I can keep doing this?  
Sign me up!”**

LUTHER MAYS

and configure a solar array and has logged over 100 hours of installation experience.

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Luther Mays (right above and center below) working at an installation project job site. Photo credit: GRID Alternatives

**“The most rewarding part of my solar installation training is how excited and kind the families are as our crew is setting up their solar PV system.”**

LUTHER MAYS

The most rewarding part of his training was how excited and kind the families were as the crews were setting up their solar PV system. He also enjoys being able to help relieve families of the financial burden of their electricity bills, which can have a big impact. Mays graduated from the IBT-200 program in September 2019 and is inspired to keep working toward a career in the solar field.

GRID Alternatives now offers a shortened version of the IBT-200 training specifically to residents and workers who live in the project area, namely Downtown, Chinatown, and Southwest Fresno. The TCC solar training course will include 12 hours of classroom learning and 38 hours of on-the-job training, along with a CPR credential. GRID Alternatives' goal is to train 200 Transform Fresno residents. Trainees who graduate from the TCC solar program can

continue on to the full IBT-200 course and gain additional credentials and installation experience.

Mays was not familiar with the TCC program before his first day volunteering on a solar installation. GRID Alternatives staff told him about Transform Fresno and the types of projects coming to the area. Mays is optimistic about how the TCC solar projects will benefit the community, primarily by lowering the cost of household utilities and by equipping residents with skills that will help them find employment in the solar field. He thinks that when California's solar mandate takes effect in 2020 — which will require all new homes to come with solar attached — the Transform Fresno project area will be uniquely positioned by having a trained and qualified solar workforce.

**“[A solar system from] GRID Alternatives can take care of 80% of a families' electric bill, which for a lot of people, is a big expense.”**

LUTHER MAYS