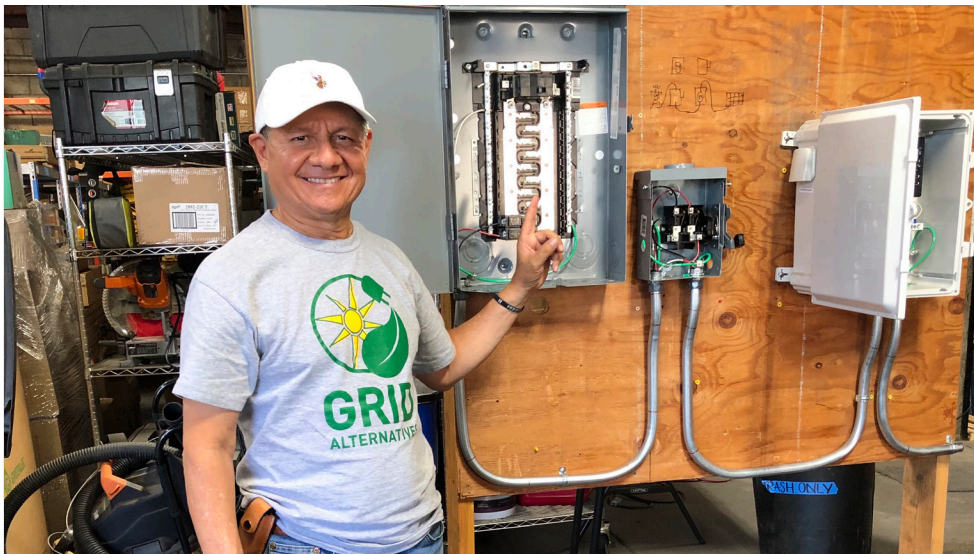


Hands-on training gives residents skills needed to join the solar workforce



BACKGROUND

This case study illustrates how TCC-funded job training has prepared residents of the project area to enter the clean energy workforce. It highlights Mario Fuentes, a solar panel installation trainee who gained critical skills and industry exposure in a field he is passionate about. To learn more about the GRID Alternatives training program, see page “Workforce Development Plan” on page 47.

The interview for this story was conducted in September 2022.

Mario Fuentes shows a training tool used to learn about solar panel installation. Photo courtesy of Mario Fuentes.

Mario Fuentes has lived in the City of San Fernando with his wife and two children for nearly 10 years, having moved from North Hollywood in 2015. He appreciates his neighborhood for its peace and tranquility: he says, “I know my neighbors; they know me. We support each other. So it’s sort of a real community sense.” With a background in community and labor organizing, Fuentes is now a pastor in his community.

In 2022, Fuentes was ready for a career change. So when he saw a Facebook post from GRID Alternatives advertising the TCC-funded solar panel installation job training program, his interest was piqued. With a strong interest in electrical work and a philosophy that everyone should make an effort to help the environment, Fuentes was immediately motivated to join the program. “I wanted to be employed in an industry that is fast-moving and expanding, and that is making an actual impact on the lives of people. This is something I really want to pursue for the common good — and professional growth and income.”

He did research to make sure the opportunity was legitimate. Once he read up on GRID’s track record, he knew it was for real. “I saw that GRID was a serious community organization that has been there for a while. So I had no hesitation; just gratitude to GRID for bringing me in.”

Fuentes has developed a wide array of skills necessary for installing solar panels. He learned the process of installing the panels themselves, as well as how to do the wiring to connect them to the home’s electricity system. Crucially, the training covered safety measures that are important for the installation process.

“If you gave me the materials, I know what to do with them. I know how to install panels at your home. I feel prepared to go in with the knowledge and capacity to do the job of an installer.”

MARIO FUENTES

GRID has helped Fuentes and his fellow trainees prepare for the job search with resume editing and other support. “For some, they’ve never had a resume. For some, like myself, they’ve helped to update my resume. It’s been rather helpful for GRID to help us with the tools that are needed to secure employment.”

GRID also offered a stipend of \$13 per hour — about \$3600 over 13 weeks of part-time work — as well as a bus pass or gas card to help them get around. “It was really helpful for myself and other participants to get from where we live, in different parts of the county, to the GRID offices for hands-on training,” Fuentes said.

Fuentes is in the early stages of launching his career in the solar sector, and while he hadn’t transitioned to working in that sector quite yet, he thinks the GRID training will prepare him to achieve his long-term goals. He wants to direct his own solar installation training institute, either alongside GRID or independently. “I want to direct a group of trainers, training the next generation of technicians that come from the most poverty stricken households. I want to give these youth an opportunity, so that they can improve themselves and improve their families.”