

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

BUILDING A PIPELINE TO ENERGY SECTOR CAREERS THROUGH SERVICE YEARS

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WELCOMING REMARKS:

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OPENING REMARKS:

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PANEL DISCUSSION:

Moderator: JOSEPH W. KANE
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Martha Ross [00:00:52] Hello and welcome to this webinar, excuse me, building a pipeline to energy sector careers through service year programs. I'm Martha Ross, senior fellow at Brookings Metro, where we believe that every community can be prosperous, just and resilient, whatever its starting point. We are very proud to co-host this session today with Service Year Alliance and to highlight how service year programs can help the nation meet the infrastructure, climate and clean energy goals laid out in two landmark pieces of legislation: the Infrastructure Investment Act and, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act. These laws provide unprecedented levels of investment in a whole range of activities related to climate adaptation and resilience. They lay out ambitious capital projects, physical upgrades and operational improvements.

Now attention turns to state and local leaders who are in pivotal roles because they are the ones who will plan and lead many of these projects. And they face a few fundamental questions. One, where are all the workers who will construct, operate and maintain these infrastructure assets? And two, how can state and local leaders most effectively harness these new funding streams to break out of business-as-usual human resources strategies, and instead draw from broader, more diverse talent pools to hire and train workers. The infrastructure field has long faced challenges in recruiting and retaining workers, and without new approaches, the consequences will be very clear and very negative. Projects will flounder or face cost overruns, and meanwhile, too many people will struggle to find clear pathways into good jobs. The infrastructure workforce is aging, and the field badly needs to recruit younger workers.

Given demographic changes in this country, that means recruiting more younger people of color and creating work and creating welcoming workplaces for them in what has been a predominantly white workforce, particularly in the higher paid positions and welcoming women as well, given how a male dominated the field has been. We firmly believe that Service and Conservation Corps are part of the solution to these questions that I posed earlier, where to find the workers and how to build more inclusive recruiting, hiring and training practices. We have organized a great lineup of speakers and panelists. Next up is a speaker from the Department of Energy who I will formally introduce in a moment. My colleague Joe Kane will moderate a panel focused on the Minnesota Home Energy Initiative, and we'll hear how an AmeriCorps program works with the Minnesota Department of Commerce to help residents weatherize their homes. And then Robin Fernkas from the

Department of Labor will bring us home with closing remarks highlighting the role of workforce boards and the public workforce system as strategic and key partners.

And now let me turn it over to the Department of Energy speaker I mentioned, Nicole Steele. She is a senior advisor for Energy, Justice and Workforce and a nationally recognized leader in clean energy with a specific focus on front line communities and workforce development. And notably for this conversation, she is also an AmeriCorps alum with the Marine Conservation Corps in Northern California. Nicole, please take it away.

Nicole Steele [00:04:18] Thank you, Martha, really appreciate the introduction. I am actually very excited to be part of this conversation today as an AmeriCorps alum many, many years ago, it's funny to think about how long that was ago, but really did establish a foundation in my own personal path. And I have found that to be such an incredible element to the success of a lot of the work that I have been able to take part in over the years. And you know, I'm here to really sort of set the stage around this conversation and talk about where we're coming from and what this, what these funding opportunities can do. And then just really how we're thinking about ensuring that we have enough folks to support the clean energy transition.

And so, you know, I think most people on this call are very aware that about two years ago, the administration rolled out this high-level goal of establishing a clean energy transition by ensuring that our building sector was decarbonized by 2035 and our full economy by 2050. So that is a huge, lofty climate goal that we are all working towards. But layered on top of that is the Justice 40 goal. And so I think less people are familiar with the Justice 40 goal but is equally as important. And this is to ensure that a minimum of 40% of the benefit through this clean energy transition does flow to disadvantaged communities. So communities that have been historically left behind and historically disproportionately impacted by our fossil fuel economy. And so really ensuring that through all of our programing, including workforce development, has that lens of the Justice 40 priority.

And then last but not least, one of the other major sort of administration, whole of government goals is to as we are working towards these other two goals, we are ensuring that folks that are part of this clean energy transition have a pathway to union membership if they so choose. And the reason I bring this up is because, you know, it really is an equity conversation by centering the employee and, you know, a really amazing way or place to start that is early in folks career through possible service here and possible pre-apprenticeship programing and so you know really making sure that we are not

only bringing the voices of the individual employee but, you know, making sure that we're creating an industry and a movement that people want to be part of.

And so we have this larger, you know, these two funding opportunities that exist today. And so we talked a little bit about the bipartisan infrastructure law and then now, the now the Inflation Reduction Act. And so these are two huge funding. And so we have set these large goals and then now we actually have funding to implement those goals. And so we are saying, okay, well, you know, that's one more step down the line around being successful in this transition. And so the sort of the major issues next are not only like where is this law going to go, but who is going to do this work? And so I, I my background is, you know, very heavily in the solar market. And, you know, in, in solar alone, there is a need for a million workers in the next decade. And if we are not able to meet that requirement, we are not going to be able to deploy.

And so the, the worker and, you know, sort of the focus on ensuring that there is a pipeline of workers that are, you know, well-trained, well-supported and really see themselves in this movement, in this industry, and that they truly belong, you know, we're like as a nation, not going to be successful in this clean energy transition. And so it's really imperative that we spend time focusing on building coalitions. And so that's what we've been doing at the Department of Energy and ensuring that we have a whole of government approach and truly understand what agencies are working in the workforce development space, how are we supporting states and local governments and other organizations working in this space, and how are we bringing them together?

And so some of it too, is that we've been in this space for a long time now, and we don't need to necessarily reinvent the wheel for every new technology that comes out in the clean energy transition and that, you know, we really should be taking a craft or a trade approach to both pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programming and training. Training exists and yes, there are some gaps that we need to focus on, but we really need to be leveraging that exist, those existing resources and that existing infrastructure to, to really scale up the work that we're doing rather than, you know, like designing your own personal training program that, those resources exist. And so what we're trying to do is really facilitate the building of those coalitions and leveraging those existing resources to really scale up this movement.

And the other thing I would say is that we also very much have what we call the high road approach, and this is an industry driven approach, meaning that we're being we're working with

industry, we're being thoughtful about where the workers need to be, where they're needed, what types of skills they need to have, but really is centering the employee. And so I had talked a little bit earlier about, you know, empowering the worker and ensuring that, you know, the worker has wraparound services that they need in order to be successful. So do they have transportation? Do they have, are they housed? Are they fed? Are they do they have childcare? Do they have a bank? And so there's a lot of sort of basic services that we need to make sure that we're being thoughtful about to really ensure that folks are successful long term in, in these opportunities. And so, you know, really, truly centering the employee.

And so there's, you know, obviously the basic wraparound services, but then there's just basic employee needs around current training, safety standards, good benefits, good pay. Some of you may have seen that some of the guidance has recently come out of Treasury for the prevailing wage tax provisions. And so, you know, I myself haven't even had an opportunity to see what those final, final guidance looks like. But, you know, this is truly going to drive an evolution of the workforce and having the prevailing wage and requirement, that apprenticeship requirement in this clean energy transition as part of those tax credits. You know, as Martha mentioned, I am an AmeriCorps alum, and so I'm truly proud of that and really want to highlight that. You know, even after me taking part in actually two, two rounds of services for, for AmeriCorps, I was able to build two different AmeriCorps programs in two different organizations that I worked at to really create sort of that grounding entry level opportunity for folks to understand what it's like to be in the clean energy economy and receive those wraparound services that they need to be successful, including career guidance and mentoring. But, you know, really giving people an opportunity to see whether or not this is, this is a transition and really, truly a movement that they want to be part of.

And so, you know, I would almost say back to everyone that's on this call today to say that it is on us to truly be creating a movement where folks and workers really see themselves a part of, that they truly feel a level of belonging. And, and in that, you know, we are going to be able to recruit and motivate and inspire a whole new generation of workers in this clean energy transition, whether they're at their beginning of their career or transitioning from a different service sector or even sort of in their later, their later years and transitioning into the workforce.

And so I'll leave it there, and I think I have an opportunity now to transition it over to Joe Kane for this fantastic panel discussion that everyone is going to dive into. So thank you so much for

allowing me to join this conversation and be part of, you know, sort of your support and, and not only sort of the youth build service, your Conservation Corps effort. And I really do look forward to being a resource to folks in the federal government that are interested in furthering sort of the, the, the, the that sort of pre-apprenticeship and that worker-focused training as, as we're all trying to figure this out. And so stay tuned on a number of different announcements that will be having that will be coming down the pipeline in the next month or so. So thanks again and over to Joe.

Joseph Kane [00:14:17] Thanks so much, Nicole, for all that and for setting the stage really well, I think for, for our conversation today. And, and thanks, everyone, for, for tuning in. I'm Joe Kane, I'm a fellow at Brookings Metro program focusing on infrastructure and workforce issues. And I'll be leading a panel discussion among several leaders innovating on service programs. You know, part of the goal of our discussion today is to get past broad national views on these issues and to get into the weeds of why service programs matter and how state and local leaders are implementing them. Getting a better sense of the detailed challenges and solutions is essential to help more people in more places access these career pathways. And it's essential for leaders across the country, regardless of their starting point, technically or programmatically, to scale these efforts. That's especially true given the once in a generation window that Martha was describing of federal investment we're seeing over the next few years.

So that's why we're specifically looking at Minnesota and how leaders there are undertaking energy transition work and establishing strong relationships with different partners in their service year programing, specifically through the Home Energy Initiative, as you'll hear about for the next 30 minutes or so, before we move to audience Q&A. And as a reminder, you all can submit questions via Twitter using the hashtag National Service or by emailing events at Brookings dot edu. With that, I'd like to invite our panelists to the virtual stage. Great.

So first is Brent Kossick, the managing director of programs at the Service Year Alliance, who is covering a variety of these issues nationally. Second is Emily Beltt, training and outreach specialist at the Minnesota Department of Commerce, who is focused on state and local issues here. And last but not least, is Dylan Kelly, the director of climate programs at Ampact, a nonprofit focused on service programs, particularly around education, environment and healthy futures. Thanks to all of you for for being here today. To kick things off, I'll just start with a sort of a broader question. We know there is a need to connect more workers to clean energy careers, and service programs can help

support these pathways through on the job training, connection with employers in the community, and more. Can you explain a little bit more about service programs and why they matter and how does your current role support these efforts? Brent, I think I'd, I'd start with, with you on this one, given kind of your broader national take.

Brent Kossick [00:16:48] Sure. Well, thanks for that, Joe. And I guess before I get started, I too wanted to share that I'm an AmeriCorps alumni, similar to Nicole. And so I joined AmeriCorps right after graduating college, was exposed to a lot of different kind of career options to that, learned a lot of skills that I still really use throughout my career to this day. One of those things that I was able to be exposed to was retrofitting homes. So obviously this topic that we're going to be talking about today has been a long-standing interest area for me, so really excited about the conversation. So really with over 75,000 similar service opportunities in the U.S. alone on an annual basis, like the service year experience can take many different forms. But some common threads that really kind of tie it all together is, first of all, it's a paid, limited term experience where participants— what we currently refer to as corps members— receive stipend, other benefits like health care, childcare assistance, but it's really kind of that earn and learn type of model. They also develop real world skills by performing those hand on a hands-on services.

So whether or not they are installing insulation in a low-income home or learning or leading a educational workshop, they are doing a, fulfilling a need in that community, but also learning all those tangible skills that go along the lines of getting to that point. And then finally, I would also say that it's a transformative experience for both the participant and the communities involved. So there's a high emphasis on that corps member training and development, but also at the core of all these programing is really working in concert with the communities as part of the corps partners in advancing this work. So it's not just like a typical job type of thing.

So there are several federal programs. There's VISTA, YouthBuild, AmeriCorps, PeaceCorps, but there's also independent opportunities as well. I guess one thing that I would like to frame for the audience is, although we'll be focusing on the great Ampact model about how we can lead to a service funneling into energy efficiency, workforce development, there's programs across the country that are really advancing programing that go into a lot of different high need, job seeking areas, everything from health care, renewable energy, disaster response and mitigation, education, you name it, type of thing. So in summary, really what I'm trying to get out is a service year is a paid

opportunity for these young people to devote their time and talent to meeting these pressing community needs, but also developing those real-world skills. Okay.

So with all that being said, Service Year Alliance, my organization, our mission is to ensure that a year, a paid full-time year of service is a service year in the common expectation, an opportunity for all young Americans. So really, when you think about that, what we're all about is making sure that the supports are out there to all these great organizations across the country, that they need to really tap into these talents that the youth are able to provide. So we really have three main pillars that help advance that work. First, through expansion. And what this is really all about is partnership, development and setting the foundation for scale. So bringing the players to the table that can support this ecosystem, whether that's public policy advocates, philanthropy, workforce development, employers, whatever these programs need, that's the space we want to be in. Service Year Alliance is also very much in the recruitment space. We have service year dot org, which is a common application platform where we advertise really heavily to bring applicants to the table for all these great positions that can be posted in a central location.

We're also very much in the market research and messaging aspect about that to finding out what are these effective messages that come across to young people to want to join into these kind of opportunities and pursue career paths related to it. Finally, our impact work and what that's all about is bringing both stakeholders within the National Service field and then also outside of that field together to really solve common problems or take advantage of common opportunities. We also do play space work with our impact communities, which is about 12 communities across the country that are working really collaboratively to advance these same type of goals. So I'll kind of pause there. I know that was a lot, but I'm interested in the rest of this conversation. I can share much more about, paint a picture of what service is all about, and how we can funnel into this talent pipeline.

Joseph Kane [00:21:09] That, that's great Brent. And I think, you know, you put a lot of items out there to chew on that I know will come up in this conversation. Earn and learn, involvement in the community, reaching more and different types of workers, so many dimensions that that you and and Service Year Alliance are doing which are terrific to hear. I think as you know, as we're zooming in to Minnesota and a particular effort here, you know, Emily, turning to you just quickly, you know, can you just share a little bit more about, you know, your role here and how you're looking at service programing.

Emily Beltt [00:21:40] Yeah. Thank you so much, Joe. My name is Emily Beltt and I work with the Minnesota Department of Commerce in the Weatherization Assistance Program that I am employed here in a training and outreach capacity. So that has looked like a million different things every single day. And it's a very entertaining role because it's constantly changing the landscape of our work, especially in light of Bill and IRA funding coming down the pike is just inherently very exciting. The opportunity to partner with Ampact is one that I do not take lightly and have been just graced with having inherited from several colleagues of mine who have been real champions of the cause, and we'll talk a bit about my own personal beliefs of why that's so important later.

But I did want to just give a brief outline of how the Weatherization Assistance Program works, because it's kind of a, there's a lot of interactions here, there's a lot of moving parts. Our program is administered by 23 service providers across the state of Minnesota with two thirds of our funding going to communities that are more rural in outstate Minnesota. So what that means is we are really trusting these 23 service providers, many of whom are community action agencies, to know their own communities and to gauge what important factors they need to be focusing on. With all of our work, we inherently serve the lower income, income eligible folks who are often elderly or have children or have disabilities that they're already conquering.

So we're recognizing that these are communities of people who are disadvantaged as it comes. It's important for us to approach this work always with a sense of grace and a sense of understanding about the very humanity and basis that we are all approaching from. That said, I think our opportunities here to partner with Ampact and participate in these service years bring bringing these into our program has allowed us to see some of the great successes and potential pitfalls that we might run into. It's given us a great opportunity to do some community building and building among other partnerships. So I'm very excited to see this continue growing and developing over the years. I believe that's all I have for now.

Joseph Kane [00:23:52] That's great. And I know we'll unpack more of that too Emily as we get into the specifics of, of that collaboration in Minnesota and what's really even made that possible. And, you know, Dylan, turning to you, too, last here, but not least, I mean, the you know, can you describe a little bit more of like an Ampact, right. And like your work as it relates to, to some of the service programing.

Dylan Kelly [00:24:11] Definitely, thanks Joe. So I'm Dylan Kelly, director of climate programs with Ampact, and Ampact's a nonprofit that leads a variety of different AmeriCorps programs. We got started with education programing, with reading corps and math corps, which is in several states. But I particularly work with our climate impact corps, which has a few different initiatives here, mainly today we're going to talk about the Home Energy Initiative, but I do, just to mention the other ones, we also focus on community forestry and community resilience in the form of sustainability projects and kind of developing social connections as a form of resilience too. I mention those because I try to look at the work, I'll just say what Nicole said earlier, I really appreciate is that we're not just building an industry, but a movement, right.

And so I really try to take that look at how do we create a service experience for our members that is a launchpad that doesn't just have impacts immediately over the service time but is a launchpad for the rest of their lives. Right. That's building a movement, building that network. So a lot of my work is in connecting people like Emily or with Brent, colleagues and other programs across the country to understand how people are doing different things and where those needs are, and then how we can set up training opportunities, networking opportunities to get people on the ground doing this work and really getting rolling, on this critical climate work. So, yeah, it's, it's a great experience. I love it. And I'm very happy to be here today with Brent and Emily to chat about it.

Joseph Kane [00:25:53] That's terrific, Dylan. And I think it's just so powerful, right, to highlight not just obviously one singular effort here as we're going to be focusing here, but, but on all the work that's going on that goes well beyond even just this, this one conversation. But I think, you know, following up on, on where you just were, Dylan, right. Service programs, I think, clearly offer so much potential and are making a real difference. But, but not every place is like Minnesota or understands how to maximize their impact. I mean, how did you set up the Home Energy Initiative? I mean, what is it you know, what challenges have you come across and how have you even addressed them?

Dylan Kelly [00:26:32] Sure. Yeah. I guess the origin story, I would really start with our state commission serve Minnesota. So every state has a commission for AmeriCorps that is kind of the federal agencies, state level arms and in some cases the public agency, some cases it's a nonprofit. They understood they wanted to get in the climate work, and they created an advisory panel that consisted of people from all different sectors of the economy of Minnesota, local government leaders,

state level government, leaders of nonprofits, leaders of banks, leaders of a lot of different organizations to talk about where are the best places for us to get involved in.

The home energy initiative specifically was pushed by Lissa Pawlisch, who works with University of Minnesota Extension, and leads a state partnership called the Clean Energy Resource Teams. And she basically was saying, we have this critical need, we're not meeting it at the current rate that we need to in terms of retrofitting houses in Minnesota. There's a study done in 2017 that's at the current rate they're getting to them, it would be about 291 years before we got to all the houses that are eligible. So clearly a need there and, and she helped actually connect Serve Minnesota, Ampact and the Minnesota Department of Commerce in order to begin those discussions about how we could start working together.

And I think one thing that really highlights is that even if it's, you know, there's a role to play in getting these efforts moving, not just for those who are going to run an AmeriCorps program or for state commissions, but for different parties that have an interest in this field, to, to help catalyze these efforts. It wouldn't have happened if it weren't for Lisa Pawlisch stepping in and saying this is really important and she continues to be involved in those conversations. So there really is a lot of effort, a lot of ability from leaders in different sectors to be getting engaged on this.

Joseph Kane [00:28:38] Yeah. And I'm curious, you know, Emily, just to quickly follow up, I want to turn to Brent too but like quickly follow up on, you know, Minnesota, the sort of the state role in that. And obviously one individual in particular is instrumental here. But, but can you describe a little bit more how from your position, right, the state has been involved in this and how that kind of has, has grown over time?

Emily Beltt [00:29:01] Yeah, absolutely. Well, I'd lead by saying I work with a team of really, really wonderful, creative, out-of-the-box thinkers. And that is one of the greatest gifts for a state agency to have, because it allows us to take a look with a really critical lens at all of the projects and things that we have on our state plan budgeted out for the year and say, is there any space to create more, where can we, you know, where can we give more? Where can we partner more? Where can we creatively bend a little bit to think about this in a new way? And one of the inherent struggles with that that I just want to call out is, is staffing for sure. Like not every state is going to be in a position where they have enough staff support to, you know, have a Kelly Rowse, who is just the leveraging specialist and a big dreamer and a big thinker who was able to not only connect with folks from all of

these different parties and wrangle and bring them together, but in addition to really help push the envelope about how we look at what we call leveraged funding.

I know a lot of states don't actually elect to get leveraged funds, which was something I learned along the way while I was doing my research for this panel. But that funding has the opportunity to be flexed in ways that potential other sources don't always have. And I think that was one of the big realizations for us in Minnesota of like, oh, we do have, we do have the space in our budget to make this happen and to really lean into these causes. How do we negotiate that, how do we like write that in and get it all approved by Department of Energy appropriately going along those lines? But once we were able to really connect and think those through, we're still figuring out creative ways.

Now it's like, well, can we wrap in certification training potentially at the end of a service year so that not only are these folks coming through these programs going, I have learned and spent a year doing this really functional task and learning about building science, but I also have this certificate to go along with it. Those are very powerful steps for folks who are entering a new job market, and it is just amazing to see what kind of benefits those can have on a person's career and trajectory of where they're going in life. So I would say that making sure you have someone in the, in the wheelhouse whose job is really how do I meet the folks who are going to be these change agents, how do I connect with them and truly leverage that the strengths of everyone around.

Joseph Kane [00:31:27] Yeah. Well we'll get into like funding here in a second for sure. And leverage is a good word, probably will come up again. And I'm, I'm curious, Brent, just quickly here for this question, right, of kind of, this one effort in Minnesota, but obviously thinking, you know, there's some like national lessons from this, too, and obviously appetite, I think, from other places to learn from it. I mean, how, how are you looking at this effort? And, you know, I guess, you know, scalability and, and replication, right, even across the country.

Brent Kossick [00:31:56] Well, first of all, I really appreciated Emily's description of like Minnesota Department of Commerce approach and innovation in this space. And that's a lot of what's needed. I guess what I would like to add to this is just the understanding that the great thing about service year programing is it's really a bottom-up approach. It's not like these federal agencies coming down and saying, this is what's going to happen to your community. It really allows these efforts to like home in to like the, the unique needs of a diverse communities, but also diverse stakeholders that are

maybe involved, exactly like this example. I do want to mention that, you know, although as we go through this conversation, this example in Minnesota is very much focused on corps members providing like direct weatherization kind of services. There's a lot of flexibility. So you can also be thinking about things, about capacity building services, more of that kind of nature. So things like coordinating among state or community or local partners, community planning, data collection analysis, community educational outreach, recruitment, all kinds of stuff. So there's just a lot of flexibility to different ways of making this work. It's not like one model fits all.

I also am happy to share that, you know, at Service Year Alliance, we try to our biggest thing is try to break down some of these barriers. So in 2023 we'll be releasing a series of what we're currently calling program replication blueprints to really try to help states or other communities really kind of navigate all these different options and it's really going to be kind of a plug and play tool that you'll be able to look at menus of potential corps member services that would be appropriate, partners that could be brought into the space that have been shown to be effective in other models, like, like what we're talking about today or even like funding to tap into the other federal resources. But also, you know what interests philanthropy or local partners as well. So anyway, that's all going to be free on our website coming into next year. So if anybody's interested in that kind of stuff, hopefully we'll make your life a little bit easier.

Joseph Kane [00:33:44] Yeah, I think it's so huge to hear Brent and I think helps right demystify all of this of you know people heard about it and like how do I navigate this? It's just like it's out there, but I don't know where to start. And I think, you know, kind of leads to sort of the next question I had, you know, around, I think what makes this this conversation so fascinating to me, anyway, is that each of you represents kind of a different entity at a different geographic level in some ways, right? Public, private, nonprofit, national, state, local level. But, you know, working together has clearly made this initiative in Minnesota possible. But I think, you know, spells promise in other places across the country, too.

And I'm curious, you know, turning a little bit, Emily, to you, being the state kind of in the middle of some of this stuff on the ground, you know, local sort of application and then obviously larger national sort of federal issues which we'll get at, get at in a second. But you know what, what has made this collaboration possible? I mean, when and how do you even check in with each other? Right. Like it's beyond like as you said, like having the staff that actually do it. But like, like. like, you

know, what advice would you have for other leaders tuning in, right, of like how, how are you even, like logistically doing this?

Emily Beltt [00:34:56] It's a great question. And I think it boils down, if you want to get it really simple to being willing to not know. And I think all of us have approached this picture from a humble understanding that we don't necessarily have all the answers without researching and looking into it first, really digging into policy language or making sure we're approving things that are allowable expenses and not, you know, going around any of the rights of our program restrictions. But all that to be said, I think we've all really approached the, this equation with the understanding of the need, our world is at a record of employment right now. We in Minnesota, we have just a record amount of employees that are not really looking for work because they are already employed by one or two other people in jobs.

So I think there's this reality that we have to work together to overcome the hurdles that are in place, because these, it's not just one industry, we're seeing it across the board in many industries, specifically in more blue collar work, but where, there just isn't a pipeline for talent, for young people, because there has been this kind of long standing approach preventing people from getting into these jobs if they're coming from nontraditional backgrounds. And I've so appreciated working with Dylan at Ampact because he's not just looking at young people coming out of high school who might be perfect for this program. He's looking at all sorts of nontraditional people who might be interested in getting a new certificate badge or learning a new trade. It's, there's a ton of market out there, and I think we all have an approach to be creative problem solvers and to look at all these potentially unreached populations that would be great at representing their own communities and their own communities needs in these spaces.

So it's really about connection to make sure that basis is happening. As far as the how, we email, we call, we revert back to step one and start and jump back to step three. You know, it's, it hasn't been the prettiest process all the time, but I think that the general understanding of collaboration and the spirit of collaboration has been huge for our success, as well as just understanding that there's a lot to be learned from existing programs across the country. I mean, next week I'm going out to California with Serve Minnesota to look at a program that California is running, to see if there are potential overlays that we can bring into our state programs and see where potential might be. But obviously, the landscape of every state is a little different and there's going to

be a ton of nuance. So I think working with local partners who really understand the landscape of their own sphere is where we found so much success.

Joseph Kane [00:37:40] Yeah, kind of, you know, learning by doing obviously, you know, nice, collaboration isn't just a nice to have, it's a must have for you make these things possible, you know, curious just kind of, Dylan, maybe you and then Brent like, like think like how, what, what additional sort of perspective would you have on kind of, right? What's made this collaboration even possible?

Dylan Kelly [00:38:06] I mean, I think, and Emily kind of alluded to this is just using each other's networks, right. And, and there being lots of networks that are being tied in together here, right. So just, you know, I kind of mentioned Lisa bringing together her network at Department of Commerce or Minnesota and Ampact in order to move things along. But I got brought into a network that Brent is putting together along with different climate leaders to start having conversations. And I'm learning from them and bringing that to my conversations with Emily. What Emily is saying about us all not knowing I think is true across the board, this, climate change is this unprecedented problem, or challenge that we're facing. We're seeing unprecedented levels of investment going into it, and everyone's trying to figure out the best way to move forward.

And I think we're just developing a kind of personal and professional relationships based on trust and learning and staying in communication and trying to connect to each other in a really positive ways to keep those conversations going from the most local level, like our sites where we actually have an AmeriCorps member to these national levels, where we're talking with other programs, trying to tackle the same challenges and learning from each other. So as much as possible, bringing in those, those conversations, it's just been really helpful and critical.

Joseph Kane [00:39:27] Yeah. Brent, do you want to add to that?

Brent Kossick [00:39:29] Yeah, I was just going to say that a lot of what both Emily and Dylan just really resonated with me. You know a big part of our impact work has been partnering with the Cisco Foundation over the last year to really bring like those climate learning cohorts together, programs together to share among one another, but really to document and get that out to the field to make this easier for everybody to advance in their own communities. So like, yeah, my, my biggest advice to everybody is like, you don't have to start from scratch. You don't have to do that, this alone, there's a lot of resources out there. Like I mentioned, we could connect you to resources that are free

on our website or these learning collaboratives or communities of practice that we're already advancing.

But as Dylan mentioned, there's state service commissions in every state that are really familiar with the national service landscape. There's other partners in this field as well. So like it can be daunting to first look at, but you have a lot of collaboration that can occur to really expedite the impact that can happen both for the community, but also that workforce development aspect as well.

Joseph Kane [00:40:25] Yeah. So yeah, totally hear you. And I think that's actually leads really well to, to the next question, which I feel like probably a lot of people have been waiting for of like, all right, we're now, we're in this federal moment like, like, what do we do with all this? So it's like, you know, scaling service programs, you know, clearly requires proactive leadership, including y'all on the call today and others who aren't, but coordinated planning as we were just describing, and let's be real just more funding to actually do this.

Now fortunately with the passage of the infrastructure law, IRA and other generational federal infrastructure legislation, you know, there appears to be a window for more action, including support for workforce development. But as Martha was describing and I'm working with my colleague Annalies Goger as well, you know, more money does not guarantee more impact, and, and where business as usual approaches are likely, unfortunately, to take precedent that focus more on projects than on training more people in more places necessarily. And so, you know, just kind of just open to all of you and whoever wants to take it first. But, you know, what do you foresee as major challenges and solutions to accessing and using this funding? You know, what challenges are you already encountering or solutions are you already testing? Just a small question. Nothing, nothing big.

Brent Kossick [00:41:47] It's all doom, but I would like to focus on the opportunities that I'm seeing, I guess. So like, first of all, we keep on hearing from the field again and again that it can be a cost prohibitive for a lot of programs to provide that professional level certifications, credentials, trainings and things like that. So I'm really interested and all these, you know, training and workforce development resources that have been embedded into IRA infrastructure act. So I think there's a lot of opportunity for entities like Department of Energy, states, even community action agencies to form those partnerships with service year programs in their area, to really infuse some of that training into their program curriculum to like build this workforce that they're looking for.

In Brent's mind, I think one of the first steps you can take to make this process a little bit easier on everybody is as federal agencies or state agencies release request for proposals for some of these, these funding going out, so encourage just even conversations to occur with state service commissions and applicants, that would be the first step of just like learning what that landscape is and what the opportunities are. But, you know, at the very least, some of these requests for proposals I've heard a lot of hesitation about, it was not specifically spelled out that, you know, like this is an option to think about service as a tie into this workforce development goal. Like states or applicants are leery to even think about it because they don't want that to hurt an application. So just like a sentence along those lines could be a long way.

For folks that are interested, I also just want to mention that there's the Partnership for the Civilian Climate Corps, which is made up of hundreds of cross-sector organizations that are really interested in advancing about how to infuse national service into all this great climate work that's happening, workforce development and really making sure that, you know, just like you mentioned, they're like now that the, the funding is there, it's also about doing it well so that we understand that there's a lot of like, you know, need for interagency partnerships at the federal and state levels, collaborations to make this happen and really federal leadership to really tie all these pieces together. So if anybody in the audience is really interested, that's a good avenue to, like, start down that project. And I think we're going to do some kind of follow up as part of this discussion. So I'm sure we can connect some kind of contact for the partnership for this thing.

Joseph Kane [00:43:58] Yeah, that's great, Brent, and I, I've been hearing the same thing. I'm kind of like looking at Emily of like, is this what's playing out right at the state level? Like, hey, there might be eligibility for all of this, but I don't like without clear spelling out like what programs or what, like, I don't even know where to start. Like, but, but you shouldn't have to remake the wheel either, right in the sense that like you're already doing some of this, like how can that hopefully get additional capacity? Are you running across this too Emily as, as you're navigating all this?

Emily Beltt [00:44:28] Yes. I would say our bigger challenge right now is just the wait time, because we spent a long couple of months really trying to engage our service provider network, as well as a lot of community groups and unions and utility companies. I mean, we've we spent a long time really trying to gather a full picture so that the grant submission we proposed was as equitable and truly representative of what communities were voicing as needs as we possibly could. That said,

we're still waiting on approval, like most states, and we're just eager, chomping at the bit to get started on that. The ramp up is going to be real for everyone across the board. I think it's going to take a little time for people to get hired up to capacity to take on some of these extra challenges. I know we are personally a little short staffed at the moment, but I'd say that's some of the biggest challenge is is not so much the funding piece because we just wrote it into our plan that we're going to continue this and continue putting money towards this where it's very important to us.

One of the bigger challenges that I think we're seeing is just getting it from the point A to point C. We've we've had a little bit slower of a ramp up than we would have loved to see. But with the service providers we have that have taken on AmeriCorps members, we've just heard amazing things about how they're you know, this is the thing they want to do and they're potentially going to stay on and work for this service provider after their, their service trip. So it's not to say that the program is unsuccessful, but that piece in your, your introduction about more funding isn't always a direct correlation to more success, right, that it's definitely a growing pain moment and it's growing pains in the right direction. But we are very much excited and waiting and hoping for the next steps to come soon.

Joseph Kane [00:46:18] Yeah. And Dylan, did you want to close on this? I feel I feel like you're, you're also, you know, dealing, obviously, with the direct sort of implementation. Like we're all about implementation here of like, hey, there's all this money, but how do we implement it? I mean, how what's your experience so far?

Dylan Kelly [00:46:35] For sure. So I would say one thing you'll hear from a lot of organizations around AmeriCorps programs is that there's a match requirement to the federal dollars that needs to be met at the local level, and that can come in different ways, sometimes it can come from the state, it can come from private grants and so on. But one of the big things I think that happened at the federal level across any agency is they're going to be engaging in climate work through these bills, would be to issue a formal letter that says those federal dollars can be used for matching grants for AmeriCorps rights.

We're at this really great time where AmeriCorps, the agency, is now really kind of turning its focus towards workforce development. I would say that traditionally it has been more of an organization focused on those project level or what happens during the service term. And now there is a shift happening where workforce is becoming a larger and larger focus of the agency itself. So we

can get those, those federal levers, level, sorry, federal letters from the agencies to say that those dollars can be used for a match, that will just smooth the process so much better for making these partnerships happen across the board.

Joseph Kane [00:48:01] Yeah, you're probably right with both letters and levers, actually, by the way. So you don't have to correct yourself on these things. Emily, it looks like you, do you want to add something to that.

Emily Beltt [00:48:11] It's a little bit of an offside, but as a personal comment, Dylan and I have been talking a lot about just how we market some of these jobs. Right. And I think the green sector across the board has a history of very technological, very kind of old school STEM style marketing. And we really need, if we're going to be branding and moving towards this 21st century new, new era of employees and workforce, we really need to figure out how to appropriately market to them. So that's though it's a, it's an offshoot, it is something that I am like very dedicated to and figuring out how do we better brand this program so that it's not something that's outdated from the 1990s? Like, our images should look a little updated, they shouldn't only feature white men, they should have communities represented that we're working with every single day. And I want to see these members being highlighted more for their work because it's, it's just an awesome time. But marketing and branding, I would say, is another thing that funding is like, we need to put some funding towards that so that we can get a better image for ourselves.

Joseph Kane [00:49:22] Yeah, no. And that's actually a good lead in to, I've already looked at my clock and I'm like oh my gosh, we only have 5 minutes. So that actually answers a couple of the, the audience, we got a tremendous number of great questions from the audience. And so I think you kind of answered one, Emily. I mean, Dylan, you should add to that of like, how do we get more visibility, you know, and outreach and messaging around this stuff? Because it's just a lot of just like they don't understand, right? Like prospective workers, I mean, don't even understand what their careers are here, which I think does limit the talent pool.

One, one question, though, that I should say, several questions we received, I'm kind of bundling them all together here, and I'd love kind of, you know, like a lightning round here of like your best take on this. It's, it's not easy. But know, I think clearly, you know, maximizing federal funding and scaling these programs is not just focusing on the next 5 to 10 years, but it's about creating, you know, durable pathways that last for longer. And that must connect with issues of equity, you know,

reaching more women, people of color and other, you know, historically underrepresented and disadvantaged individuals. And, and I think, you know, in the environmental space, unfortunately, in the past, maybe there hasn't exactly been precedent of, of, of doing that. And that kind of reinforces in some ways, some inequities, both in the physical infrastructure, but in many ways the careers and in the space.

So, you know, I kind of open it to all of you, whoever wants to take this first. But, you know, how are you measuring and acting on these equity goals? I mean, you know, how are you holding yourselves accountable? Right. I mean, I know these are big questions that even, you know, federal agencies are trying to figure out at the moment. But I'm just curious, what, what are some of your thoughts on this?

Dylan Kelly [00:51:08] To jump in. And one thing I really think is important when measuring equity is making sure you're using mixed methods of evaluation and they are not just focusing on numbers themselves. There's lots of really great tools we have out there for looking at quantitative data and trying to understand those perspectives. But if we really want to be doing quality environmental justice work, I think people's stories are incredibly important and so participatory methods like Ripple Effect mapping, where we're bringing in partners in order, and partners and members in order to kind of understand their own telling of what the success of the program has been, is one way we're trying to understand that.

We're also holding it in to training in terms of there being elements of justice and environmental justice trainings and discussion where we're bringing people who are working in rural, suburban and urban areas with people from all sorts of different demographics to share their time and experiences, but also be able to talk about what they're seeing and how their communities are different. That's all part of that building a movement part, right? It's not just the on-the-job technical skills but having had this shared what we hope is a transformational learning experience to launch their careers so that that network and that time spent learning about those issues will be something they carry with them as they're decision makers in those fields, you know, five, ten, 20 years down the line.

Joseph Kane [00:52:37] Yeah, easier said than done. But you got to start somewhere. Yeah. Brent, do you want to go for, like, a minute here?

Brent Kossick [00:52:43] Yeah, this is my lightning round response to this, but, like, there's a lot of work to be done in the national service sector as well. But I really think that this is a part where service can really infuse some great things into the energy efficiency sector, like what we're seeing within like the environmental clean energy kind of corps is that generally 50% of those members are of, you know, represent populations of color. And then also 40% of those serving are also female. So I know that this is a great value add for, you know, the industry as a whole.

And so I guess one thing I want to paint the picture of is like service year programs don't want to partner with just any employers. We want to partner with employers that have that mission alignment that, you know, Dylan's talking about. So there's a lot of, I really challenge everybody to examine like really like the equity and inclusion pieces of this. And that's going to, what leads then to the diverse workforce that you're looking for. I've been involved with the Interstate Renewable Energy Council, the National Clean Energy Workforce Alliance, and I think that's a great group that's really like having these discussions on a common basis, really highlighting some employers that are doing this well. So I think that's something that like hopefully folks from the call could think about engaging in as part of they're like, they're part of this institute as well.

Joseph Kane [00:53:57] Yeah. Emily, do you want last word here? You're going to—.

Emily Beltt [00:54:02] I have 30 seconds worth. The state has I mean, our Weatherization Assistance Program has always been an equity-based program, primarily focusing on lower income folks. So I think we have an inherent, exciting challenge ahead when we look for this bill funding and the opportunities that it poses to reach even further disadvantaged communities or reach deep dive into the data and figure out where perhaps any of our services have maybe not quite hit the, hit the mark. It gives us a big opportunity, but data is definitely our big focus right now. We don't want to do heavy throwing of darts at the board and just hope they stick, we're really trying to do this in an appropriate way that is based on data. So I'd say collecting the data and finding out ways that we can even analyze it to appropriately make those next steps has been a pretty big challenge, and I'm proud of our state's progress, but it's going to take a little longer.

Joseph Kane [00:54:57] Yeah. No, I, I appreciate the, the words of wisdom here. Emily and Brent, Dylan, all of you. And thanks again for the tremendous conversation and for all your insights. I mean, just speaking for myself, I know I've left with a ton of takeaways, too many to go over here in

the short time we have left. But, but obviously, you know, continued coordination, experimentation are crucial here and so on. So, you know, really many thanks. Thanks again.

So next, I'd like to welcome our closing speaker, Robin Fernkas, the deputy administrator of the Office of Workforce Investment at the U.S. Department of Labor. I know Robin and DOL more broadly is at the intersection of many of these infrastructure and workforce needs at the moment, especially given all the issues surrounding implementation of the infrastructure law of IRA and other federal legislation. But, but even beyond the current moment, obviously DOL has enormous role to play, helping workers, employers and others support more accessible and durable career pathways. So I could go on. But Robin, thanks so much for being here and I want to pass it to you.

Robin Fernkas [00:56:10] Well, thanks so much for including me and the Department of Labor in this conversation. I feel like we do have a lot to contribute here. And I also just so heartened to hear, you know, the alignment that and hopefully you will be too of Nicole's remarks as you hear mine, because the administration's really working across federal agencies to implement these funding bills and to build this pipeline of a well-trained and highly skilled workforce. And so it's, it's great that you're going to hear very similar themes. I think, as Nicole mentioned, you know, we really feel the Labor Department, there's an urgent need to emphasize diversity, equity and inclusion and accessibility within these investments. And as we're looking to build this workforce and talent pipeline, we think, you know, this is really an opportunity to, for our nation and the public workforce system, to ensure that these new resources create pathways to good jobs, good paying jobs for all Americans, jobs where workers are paid fair wages and benefits, that they have a voice in their workplace, and that the entry level positions provide pathways to growing skills and career advancement.

So it's great to hear you all talk about, you know, how the, the opportunities that you're creating could go on to create more sustained pathways. We did recently develop a framework to encourage the public workforce system to engage in workforce development planning and train, training activities around these infrastructure investments. To the extent this could be helpful to all of you, the framework really reflects three primary activities, and again, you're here, you've been hearing these throughout today's program, but partnership, development, planning and designing and delivering proven workforce strategies and programs. And so for us, you know, that partnership development is so key of engaging, convening, you know, linking our key demand side and our supply side workforce partners together with the programs that you're offering, we provide funding or the

Department of Labor provides funding to state and local workforce boards and a network of some 2000 American jobs centers.

And so if you're looking for workers or you're looking for folks who could help with workforce planning, we would definitely if you're not connected to your workforce boards, we would, we would encourage you to get connected. And we do have some online ways of doing that that we can connect you. But we look at, you know, really aligning those infrastructure projects and funding with, with these proven development, workforce development practices that are going to lead to high quality jobs. And so we're looking for us that includes registered apprenticeship. And I know apprenticeships have been one of the strategies that's come up several times this afternoon.

But we are looking, you know, in the energy sector, energy employers are increasingly turning to registered apprenticeship to recruit and train and retain their, their workforce. So in 2020 alone, we had 12,000 registered apprenticeships in the energy sector and that was almost double over what we've had for the past nine years, so we see that just in, you know, it's going to continue to increase. We do have several clean energy related registered apprenticeship programs. And so if you're, you're not aware of those, you know, it includes hydroelectric station operators, machine operators, wind turbine technicians, geothermal operators. So a ladder emerged, you know, across this emerging industry. What might dovetail to these service opportunities are pre-apprenticeships that are designed in collaboration with our registered apprenticeship sponsors.

So we just encourage you to again, apprenticeship dot gov is a resource that can help you find these, these apprenticeship sponsors and help you connect to people who could help you develop programs. We did, folks have been talking about YouthBuild and if you're not connected to YouthBuild, we strongly recommend that you get connected. It's a community-based pre-apprenticeship program that provides job training and educational opportunities. It does also provide community service, as folks have mentioned here. And community service and youth leadership are core aspects of the YouthBuild model. So we, and if you didn't see, we just published our latest YouthBuild funding opportunity yesterday. And so I don't always get to say that when I come on these that we have a funding opportunity available, but the funds are out there, and Youth Service Conservation Corps are explicitly named as eligible applicants for this funding. So please take a look at that.

We also have our Job Corps, I'm kind of going really fast here, sorry, we have our Job Corps programs and again, we train about 50,000 students through that. They're located in both urban and rural areas. And they also, every center provides, you know, community service and center leadership opportunities. So if you haven't connected with Job Corps, you might want to take a look at that, too. But finally, just community and local level involvement is really paramount, you know, for these infrastructure projects and so we really want to see communities coming together to assess their needs, their vulnerabilities, their gaps, resources and, you know, connecting with their workers, employers and getting everyone at the table. So by building out a strong national network of these partnerships, we, we really feel like that will ensure that the federal funding is tied to meaningful outcomes. And for us, that's good jobs for all members of the community who need the most. So thank you again for your time today. We really appreciate it.

Joseph Kane [01:03:31] Thanks so much, Robin, and I can't think of a better way to close. I mean, just a ton of resources out there. We know we still are only scratching the surface of some of these issues just through this conversation. But I think many, many clear takeaways and hopefully many clear next steps here in the months and years to come, especially in the rollout and continued rollout of all this federal funding so that equity and climate can be prioritized in helping more and different types of people access careers. So on behalf of the Brookings team and, and Service Year Alliance, I want to thank everyone for tuning in today. And, and please stay tuned. We're going to be continue to do a bunch of work on this and, and looking forward to continuing the conversation. So thanks again.