



June 20, 2018

GRID Alternatives Bay Area comments on the EBCE Local Development Business Plan

GRID Alternatives is a not-for-profit organization based in Oakland with a mission to make renewable energy technology and job training accessible to underserved communities and a vision to help create a transition to clean, renewable energy that includes everyone.

GRID's mission and vision is aligned with the stated mission and vision of East Bay Community Energy and there are many laudable elements of EBCE's Local Development Business Plan (LDBP). However, we are troubled by the following recommendation in the workforce development section of the document: "Ensure that training programs are not displacing paid employees. Be cautious in partnering with organizations that rely on volunteers for work for which people get paid, such as installing solar panels."

It is conceivable that this recommendation could be used to preclude EBCE from partnering with GRID Alternatives since our organization invites volunteers and job trainees to participate in solar installations for low-income families alongside our paid staff. Yet it would be inaccurate to claim that volunteers are displacing paid employees in GRID's business model. The reality is that if GRID Alternatives Bay Area were to stop inviting volunteers and trainees to our solar installations tomorrow, we would actually need fewer paid staff to accomplish the same amount of work we do for low income families. This is due to the fact that using real-world solar installations as opportunities to teach volunteers and job trainees hands-on solar installation skills is incredibly time consuming and resource intensive.

GRID is not choosing to work with volunteers and trainees because it saves us money and allows us to hire fewer paid staff; working with volunteers and trainees costs us significant time and money. On the contrary, GRID is choosing to employ additional resources to work with volunteers and trainees because we want to give people from underserved communities and local residents opportunities to get hands-on training in solar installation, access to solar industry jobs, and the chance to give back to their communities and planet in a tangible way.

GRID Alternatives works hard every day to get people jobs in the solar and renewable energy industry, and to make these workforces be more diverse. Moreover, the fact that GRID invites volunteers to work with us is an asset to EBCE's workforce development goals rather than a detriment since our flexible training model allows more and varied opportunities for interested individuals to get hands-on experience in solar installation. Volunteers and trainees can adapt GRID's training offerings to their own needs and can also access our training through partnerships with local job training organizations. Therefore, GRID Alternatives respectfully requests that ECBE strike the recommendation noted above from its Local Development Business Plan.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Renée Sharp".

Renée Sharp
Bay Area Regional Director