

## Industry Experts Weigh In

Excerpt from, "Making Energy Work 2016: Your Questions, Answered!"  
Posted on Tuesday, November 8, 2016

### **Making Energy Work, October 4, 2016:**

#### **Advancing Clean Energy with Untapped Resources**

Moderator: Andrea Braswell, **NC Sustainable Energy Association**

Maria Kingery, **Kingery & Company, LLC**

Randy Lucas, **Lucas + Tax Energy Consulting**

Marilynn Marsh-Robinson, **Environmental Defense Fund**

Jose Perez, **Hispanics in Energy**

Larry Yon, **B&C International**

**Question:** "How can we incorporate "geographic inclusiveness?"

**Marilynn:** "When we think of diversity and inclusion, geography is a part of that because urban and rural landscapes and resources are very different. Though nationally and in NC, there is more rural land mass, focus is often put in concentrated urban clusters. When thinking of opportunities, obstacles and resources, you have to think about both differently. For instance, if you are thinking about energy efficiency program logistics for a rural vs. urban landscape, there are several things to consider: the type of utility may be different (Investor Owned Utility [IOU] vs. cooperative), # of rate payers per square mile, workforce needs (would a rural community have the local workforce), educational/training support and availability (this may be more stressed in a rural area), economic development opportunity (how much this may be felt in a rural community vs. urban), ability to pay for upgrades (rural communities tend to have lower median incomes and this may need additional consideration) and program approval (an IOU is regulated by the Public Utilities Commission)."

**Question:** "Many minorities and poor people are renters. Landlords have few incentives to improve energy efficiency in their properties, leaving the poorest with the highest utility bills. What incentives do you recommend to encourage landlords to invest in energy efficiency (EE)?"

**Marilynn:** "A few incentives for landlords to invest in energy efficiency include 1) EE investing in your property increases the comfort of your property and can be advertised to potential renters as energy efficient; 2) Making the upgrades can also increase the overall property value; 3) Allows low-income residents to have some relief in utility bills and increase their chances of paying the rent on time if they do not have to contend with high utility bills; 4) Allows the landlord to do what is needed and not be regarded as a landlord that does not care. It shows community investment."



**Question:** "How can we do a better job of "meeting people where they are" and avoid alienating groups by using jargon? Often we don't even realize we have an "elitist voice."

**Maria:** "I agree that this is a problem. The most important thing is that we remember to focus on what's important to the people we're talking with, not what's important to us as an industry. Of course we need regulators and legislators who will support particular initiatives, and for them to do that, we need citizens who care and are bought in to a clean energy future. When we talk to people about this policy or that regulation, we lose them – and that's our fault, not theirs."

**Larry:** "Listening, and making an effort to understand the various factors that affect how one defines their challenges will give a better indication of the messaging to use to relate to that individual. As a part of our Inclusiveness Initiative, NCSEA will work with organizations in the North Carolina clean energy industry and beyond that have existing relationships and an established channel of communication with target populations; we will leverage those relationships to help us make the story of clean energy more relatable. These partnerships will help create opportunities for energy literacy programs, and enable us to collect data that will better inform us on the impact energy has on underrepresented groups."

**Question:** "What factors attracted you all to the clean energy industry and what barriers did you specifically encounter in getting to work in the industry?"

**Jose:** "I got involved in this industry in 2001, when my publication company, *Latino Journal* began covering a lot of energy issues. During that time, California's largest investor owned utility was filing for bankruptcy. My team organized a forum with the key policy makers and stakeholder groups in the energy industry, to talk through the challenges they were facing during that time. The most noticeable barrier to me was the lack of knowledge among those not directly involved in the industry. It also became apparent that there was not much supplier diversity in energy. In 2003, I co-founded the California Utilities Diversity Council (now a national organization). I wanted to help create economic development opportunities for emerging communities, bridge the gap of energy literacy, and provide workforce development solutions."

**Randy:** “As corny or mushy as it may be, I actually was attracted to sustainability and the clean energy industry after being inspired by the book “Hot, Flat, and Crowded” by Thomas Friedman (2009). In reading this book, I realized that while energy issues are global issues, the United States can and must play a key role in the sustainable future. Furthermore, I recognized that with my experience in corporate tax consulting, I can be a unique support in the marketplace to advise and assist companies in developing strategies to capture the available tax incentives and benefits of the clean energy economy through energy efficiency, renewable energy, and/or alternative energy investments. As for barriers, I believe there are a few, but not as many as may be perceived by someone who has zero knowledge of how energy is produced, distributed, and consumed. This is a great opportunity for NCSEA and all others in clean energy to ‘pull in’ an inclusive audience to the industry as vendors, customers, innovators, policymakers, investors, etc. through education and sharing.”

**Marilynn:** “I came to the sustainability and energy space from corporate America after realizing that communities of color were often adversely impacted yet hardly engaged on solutions. Historically, African Americans have not been engaged by the larger environmental organizations but this is changing. Organizations are engaging more diverse audiences to broaden the size of the tent, understanding it will take more people with different perspectives to win on these important issues.

Regarding barriers to clean energy investments, issues are often discussed separately. Communities need silos to be eliminated and the topic of clean energy or sustainability to be connected to “kitchen table” issues, such as jobs, the economy, health, savings and economic development. Second, different levels of educational opportunities, workforce availability, economic development opportunities and financing options exist in rural and urban landscapes. Also, the availability of land dictates what type of investment is available and should be made. I also think that the lack of diversity in the field is a barrier to maximum penetration here and abroad.”

**Question:** “Can you give us some special examples of how to “pull people in”?”

**Maria:** “For a start, those of us who work in the clean energy industry need to do a better job of engaging people in our networks. People are influenced by the people they know. It sounds simple, but a good start is sharing our enthusiasm for what we and our companies are doing! Clean energy is still perceived by many to be an aspirational “alternative.” We need to create an understanding of what it really is: an urgent imperative for the economic and environmental stability of our communities. We have to figure out how we can help people understand that we already have everything we need to transition to a clean energy economy – we just need the will (policies, long-term investment, etc.) to make it happen. We are making progress, however slow. To build momentum, we need to make it personal and share more of what’s working for clean energy, as well as focus on what’s possible, not what’s holding us back.”



**Larry:** “Education, mentorship and exposure are powerful tools that go a long way. It is also important to share success stories that people can relate to. “Pulling people in” in this scenario can be compared to encouraging people to vote. We have to help people realize the power of their voice and the power of their advocacy to drive the changes that will improve the lives of all people.”

**Randy:** “We can all certainly engage within our networks using an ‘inclusive lens’ with the intent to reach out particularly to audiences that may have been marginalized or not included in the past. I believe that NCSEA’s Making Energy Work 2016 this month illustrated a very good example of inclusivity in the panelists, facilitators, award recipients, and presenters throughout the entire conference, including the lunch gathering of women in the clean energy industry. Steps like these will ‘pull’ others in to what this industry is capable of accomplishing. Increased efforts to educate across all communities we serve, partner with, and support will help the clean energy economy to grow and meet its vision and mission.”

**Marilynn:** “I agree with the aforementioned points. Education is needed on a broader level. People don’t know what they don’t know. Accessibility to affordable capital is also needed in order to “pull people in.” I worked with a utility cooperative that told me in the winter and sometimes summer months, it is not uncommon to have people with utility bills higher than their mortgage or rent payments. This is due to lack of insulation or other efficiency measures. Often times, people need access to loan programs with low interest rates and alternative credit guidelines such that they can lower bills and begin to enjoy utility savings.”

**Jose:** “It’s important to assess the level of understanding of people in the community, and we must present the information to them at their level. Very few people know what goes on behind the scenes after they turn on their light switch. Additionally, there are barriers to monetizing clean energy – this issue is largely related to the fact that not many clean energy companies have diversity in their organizational leadership; we need to make sure that people who understand the needs of diverse communities are involved in the discussion of an energy future.”