

# TAKING BUSINESS TO SCHOOL:

## Pacific Gas and Electric Company

Several years ago, California-based Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) foresaw a challenge: In addition to providing utility services to a 70,000-square-mile service area, PG&E sought to create a steady pipeline of skilled applicants for its well-paying jobs. Recognizing the futility of addressing this challenge alone, PG&E collaborated with local community and four-year colleges, the public workforce development system, and unions, to develop an effective system to educate and train its next generation of employees.

### The Story

The impetus to create PG&E's PowerPathway program came from two converging workforce issues: a shortage of skilled applicants and an increase in retirements. By 2015, almost half of the utility industry's skilled workforce may need to be replaced due to retirements and attrition. For PG&E, almost 42 percent of its workforce would be affected. Additionally, PG&E was proactively seeking diverse candidates so that its workforce was reflective of the communities it serves. Recognizing that this combination of factors could be jointly addressed, PG&E approached its local Workforce Investment Boards (WIB)



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Electric Company*<sup>®</sup>



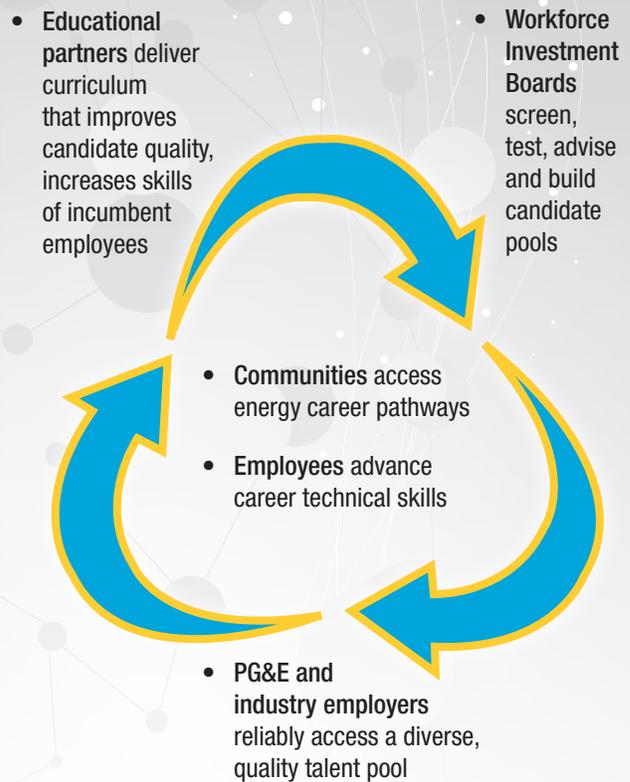
Association for Career and Technical Education  
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and local community colleges to discuss partnerships that would benefit the company and the community. From these discussions the PowerPathway program was developed.

## How it Works

“In 2008, PG&E began the PowerPathway program with a set goal of filling 70 vacant positions. When the program was first announced, more than 4,000 people applied for approximately 75 slots across three locations in PG&E’s service territory; Oakland, San Mateo and Fresno. This response proved that the public was interested in the program, even though there are no job guarantees for participants.

Individuals interested in the PowerPathway program must first apply to the program through the PG&E PowerPathway Web site. From there, the applications are screened. Then, a smaller subset of potential program candidates is invited for an in-person orientation and interested candidates are selected to pre-test at the local WIB. Candidates who pass the screening; score the highest on several assessments for math, reading comprehension and spatial reasoning; and also perform well on an in-person interview—are selected as finalists for the program. These students are then invited to enroll in a 10- to 12-week training course provided at several local community colleges. There is no cost to attend the Bridge to Utility Worker training and the WIB works with students to access other support services as needed. Coursework for the utility training program includes math, reading, physical conditioning, basic gas and electricity, safety and other subjects vital to workplace success. Upon successful completion of the program, graduates receive a certificate of completion from the community college and the PowerPathway program. These two certificates demonstrate that the graduate is a work-ready and competitive candidate for employment within the energy and utilities sector. Additionally, some community colleges offer credit for successful completion. When PG&E met its initial goal and realized that it would not be able to hire all the graduates, the company invited other California energy employers to consider those who complete the PowerPathway program as work-ready and competitive.



The PG&E approach to workforce development differs from other industry models because of a collaborative approach that includes community colleges, universities, WIBs and nonprofit training centers. This collaboration has been integral in creating successful pathways into energy and utilities careers, and each PowerPathway course or program is driven by the needs of the industry and that of the educational institution that is part of the collaborative. PG&E’s role differs depending on the needs of the partner involved; it may include curriculum design, train-the-trainer programs, technical assistance and employment opportunities for program graduates. The local WIB is an integral component because of its assistance with outreach activities, pre-screening program candidates and case management.

## STUDENT SUCCESS STORY

### The Results

Since the program's inception, approximately 340 individuals have been trained and graduated from 13 PG&E PowerPathway Bridge to Utility Worker programs. Of the students who have graduated from PowerPathway through the first quarter of 2012, 71 percent have been hired into industry positions, many with PG&E. The top five jobs in which students have found employment at PG&E are: utility worker, apprentice electrician, gas service rep, materials handler, and nuclear security guard. The issue of attrition has been positively impacted by participation in this program: 70 percent of those hired from the PowerPathway candidate pool progress into apprenticeships or higher job classifications within one year of hire. The rate of retention after six months is also significantly higher for those who have graduated from the PowerPathway program; 98 percent versus 88 percent for the same skilled craft classifications. In addition, nearly 90 percent of PG&E supervisors who have hired PowerPathway graduates said they were either satisfied or very satisfied with their performance.

PG&E has worked to provide opportunities for veterans by developing seven veterans-only Bridge to Utility Worker for Veterans programs, which so far have trained more than 150 military personnel. PG&E is also a pilot company for the Troops to Energy Jobs program, sponsored by Edison Electric Institute and the Center for Energy Workforce Development, and thus works to accelerate the training and employability of veterans in key energy positions. In a bid to foster diversity and give underserved youth an opportunity to enter and be successful in the energy and utility industry, 25 percent of PowerPathway's enrollment has been allocated to low-income, disconnected youth ages 18 to 26 in Northern and Central California. The goal is to help prepare these young people for entry-level careers.

### PowerPathway Expansion

In 2012, PG&E continued to collaborate with its partner network to provide training and skills for positions such as apprentice electricians, gas welders, power engineers, substation technicians, engineering and technical solutions managers. In response to feedback from the field and hiring supervisors, going forward, PowerPathway will be

### Ezekiel Robles



Ezekiel Robles joined the military right out of high school at the age of 17 and left at 22 to begin the next chapter of his life. Bent on starting his own business, Robles began attending the

University of Phoenix and was a semester shy of getting his degree when he got a job as an electrician apprentice. Since work demands on his time were prohibitive, Robles wasn't able to complete his degree; he would spend the next three years working as an apprentice.

All the while Robles, from San Jose, California, had another goal in mind: acceptance into the PG&E PowerPathway Program—a quest that would last three years. In June 2011, he was finally accepted into the two-month program and his boss allowed him to take two months off, without pay; the sacrifice paid off when he was employed by PG&E within two months of graduating from the program.

As an apprentice system operator for PG&E, he has a number of duties, including trouble shooting when there are power outages, upgrading lines, and other maintenance work. Today, at the age of 26, he has been in this position a year and a half and is delighted at the way things have turned out after what was a long journey. He says the road to succeeding in the program, as in life, comes down to one thing—persistence.

"Never give up," he says, "Don't get discouraged." He adds that prospective employees who are looking into a career need to be proactive: they need to find out what qualifications are required for their chosen career field and work toward getting the experience that will get them a foot in the door. Being part of a PowerPathway program gave Robles the experience he needed for a shot at his goal to work for PG&E, but it also gave him an opportunity to explore what area of the energy and utilities industry he wanted to work in, and what to expect in the workplace.

"What really did it for me in PowerPathway is that they gave me insight into what to expect from PG&E as an employee, how they expect you to act, and the opportunity to explore the different career options at the company...you learn a little bit of everything."

providing more specialized training programs to provide a more targeted pathway for graduates to join the ranks of the energy and utilities industry. Since its inception, PowerPathway has, on average, trained about 75 students per year. In 2013 alone, PG&E PowerPathway will expand to provide career and technical training to 250 residents in California, including 100 veterans, via PowerPathway's programs. The company will hire or place a majority of these workers into energy and utility industry jobs. Some of the programs planned for 2013, include:

- American River College, Sacramento: Bridge to Utility Worker for Veterans
- American River College, Sacramento:

- Pipe Welding Certificate for Veterans
- Laney College, Oakland: Pipe Welding Certificate
- Tradeswomen Inc., Oakland: Intro to Energy and Utility Careers for Women
- San Jose Workforce Institute, San Jose: Bridge to Pre-Apprentice Lineworker
- Fresno City College, Fresno: Bridge to Utility Worker

## LEARN MORE

For more information about PG&E's PowerPathway program, visit [www.pge.com/powerpathway](http://www.pge.com/powerpathway).



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