



INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOT:

White Earth Tribal and Community College

Seeking to address a “critical gap”¹ in locally accessible training programs in the rapidly growing field of solar energy, in 2020 WETCC partnered with the Rural Renewable Energy Alliance (RREAL) to create a solar energy certificate training program hosted by the college for White Earth Nation members and other area residents.² The 50-hour, hands-on program teaches participants the basics of the solar photovoltaic field so they can then pursue “family-sustaining careers” in this high-demand regional occupation.³ Participants learn on the job working on projects under development by local energy companies both on and off-reservation.⁴ To ensure its program graduates are highly marketable and well-positioned for career advancement, in 2022 WETCC completed a rigorous process to become a North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners (NABCEP) testing site, enabling program graduates to then take a NABCEP certification exam for Solar Associates that will “allow them to earn higher wages” without having to leave home (when graduates become NABCEP certified – which is considered the “the gold standard for solar installers”⁵ – they can more than double their wages from \$20 to \$43 per hour).⁶ Recognizing “clean energy and energy sovereignty go hand-in-hand”⁷ WETCC’s Customized Education Department works closely with the White Earth Nation government and its weatherization task force to coordinate development of a Nation-wide clean energy plan and grow the tribal labor to implement it. To further expand its multi-tiered professional development approach in the field, WETCC is partnering with a state-based clean energy non-profit to secure state funding to build a state-of-the-art Trades Building – complete with a renewable energy design lab – on its campus to train students in a variety of high-demand, skilled careers including solar, energy auditing, HVAC, plumbing, electrical work, and traditional Anishinaabe trades.⁸ According to WETCC, the building will advance the college’s commitment “to keep Indigenous students, post-graduation, in surrounding communities that struggle with limited wages and a lack of resources.”⁹

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RELATED RESOURCES

[White Earth Tribal and Community College Customized Education](#)

[Clean Energy Economy Minnesota: White Earth Tribal and Community College’s Solar Program](#)

[Canary Media: White Earth Tribal College becomes a bright spot for solar energy job training](#)

[Fresh Energy: This tribal college is making clean energy careers accessible in northern Minnesota](#)

[Clean Energy Economy MN: White Earth Solar Training Program \(video\)](#)

[NABCEP Solar Associate Credential Program](#)

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- ¹ Isak Kvam, “This tribal college is making clean energy careers accessible in northern Minnesota,” Fresh Energy, April 24, 2025 (<https://fresh-energy.org/white-earth-tribal-and-community-college>, accessed June 13, 2025).
- ² Rural Renewable Energy Alliance, “Solar Education & Training for the Growing Clean Energy Economy” webpage, undated (<https://www.rreal.org/solar-education-and-workforce-development>, accessed June 13, 2025); Clean Energy Economy Minnesota, “White Earth Tribal and Community College’s Solar Program” webpage, undated (<https://www.cleanenergyeconomymn.org/success-stories/white-earth>, accessed June 13, 2025).
- ³ Kvam, “This tribal college is making clean energy careers accessible in northern Minnesota,” April 24, 2025. According to Fresh Energy, a WETCC partner, “Minnesota needs skilled workers to power its clean energy transition. We need lots of tradespeople – electricians, solar installers, HVAC technicians, and energy auditors – to build the clean energy systems for our electric grid, homes, businesses, and transportation systems. With tradespeople in high demand, especially in rural Minnesota, we need more certification programs and job training opportunities to grow clean energy workforce development. That’s where WETCC comes in” (Ibid.).
- ⁴ Rural Renewable Energy Alliance, “Solar Education & Training for the Growing Clean Energy Economy” webpage, undated.
- ⁵ Clean Energy Economy Minnesota, “White Earth Nation & RREAL – a new twist on building a clean energy economy,” May 27, 2021 (<https://www.cleanenergyeconomymn.org/blog/white-earth-nation-rreal-new-twist-building-clean-energy-economy>, accessed July 8, 2025).
- ⁶ Andrew Hazzard, “White Earth Tribal College becomes a bright spot for solar energy job training,” Canary Media, October 27, 2022 (<https://www.canarymedia.com/articles/enn/white-earth-tribal-college-becomes-a-bright-spot-for-solar-energy-job-training>, accessed June 13, 2025); Clean Energy Economy Minnesota, “White Earth Tribal and Community College’s Solar Program” webpage, undated.
- ⁷ Bridget Guiza, Customized Education Coordinator, White Earth Tribal and Community College, quoted in Clean Energy Economy Minnesota, “White Earth Tribal and Community College’s Solar Program” webpage, undated.
- ⁸ Kvam, “This tribal college is making clean energy careers accessible in northern Minnesota,” April 24, 2025.
- ⁹ Mike Moen, “MN tribal college looks to be key player for skilled labor training,” Public News Service, April 11, 2025 (<https://www.publicnewsservice.org/2025-04-11/higher-education/mn-tribal-college-looks-to-be-key-player-for-skilled-labor-training/a96230-1>, accessed July 8, 2025).