

Introduction to BPCA's Deep Green Veterans Project



The Building Performance Contractors Association (BPCA) and the Cooperative Development Institute (CDI) have formed a partnership to create jobs for returning veterans through the development of cooperative worker-owned business that perform energy efficiency remodeling services.



There are two significant problems we intend to address:

- Veterans are returning from war with very few real opportunities to re-enter the workforce in a meaningful way, which often leaves them isolated and causes hardship for their families,
- Rampant energy waste – and the export of our US dollars for energy - is hurting both our environment and our economy.

Background

Veterans that have recently returned from Iraq and Afghanistan indicate that they have tremendous difficulty re-integrating back into the workforce. They have difficulty adjusting to a life that is devoid of mission and support. They are used to working in teams, and their isolated integration into the marketplace tends to be even more difficult than usual as a result.

Our veterans have risked their lives on the battlefield so that we can continue to live comfortable lives in a free society where we are safe. Many veterans have experienced incredible difficulties at war, and they return to live amongst us with very little support or appreciation. They quietly try to adjust but often they face even greater difficulties integrating back into the workforce. They deserve our support and our sincere appreciation for their sacrifice.

In response, we have developed a plan to support the creation of new jobs for returning war veterans by helping them to form worker-owned cooperative businesses that offer energy efficiency remodeling services in areas that are underserved by contractors doing this work.

These are jobs that provide a regular paycheck

as well as equity in the company. These are businesses that will grow as the price of energy rises. We plan to create these jobs / businesses in areas of New York state that are underserved by energy efficiency remodelers - before branching out into underserved areas around the country.



This project will help our veterans to conduct a “war on energy waste” to address issues of environmental degradation, climate instability, and economic sustainability while providing a meaningful vocation for returning veterans that will bolster self-worth, exhibit high moral values, as well as stewardship for earth and community. This will lead to sustained improvement in the lives of many veterans and their families.

Two long-standing organizations with distinct missions (but similar tactics) are coming together on this:

- CDI's mission is to build a cooperative economy through the creation and development of successful cooperative businesses and networks.
- BPCA's mission is to build up the energy efficiency marketplace and help energy efficiency related businesses grow through market transformation for energy efficiency services.

CDI has the resources to deliver the business development training necessary to create these businesses. BPCA has the resources to perform the technical training necessary to create these jobs. Working together, we believe this to be a replicable model that's also scalable - after we build out an infrastructure containing the components necessary to make this happen.

As energy prices become more volatile and the “energy audit” becomes part of our lexicon, a new market is emerging for residential remodelers and building contractors to provide affordable, clean, secure energy efficiency services. This work is not always easy - especially in existing housing stock, where energy efficiency remodeling becomes a highly choreographed melding of diagnostic evaluation, production, craftsmanship, and technology. But this work is important to the environmental and our economic well-being.

Recent war veterans are uniquely positioned to take on this work:

- Used to working as a team
- Used to using a combination of mind, body, and technology to get things done
- Used to a high level of coordination and discipline
- Not easily deterred by adverse conditions (eg: the attic of a 140-year-old building)

The combination of up-front cooperative business development support - and intensive technical training that includes onsite field training and mentoring for the first several jobs - will allow for a high success rate amongst the groups of veterans that choose this path.

More than a job, a co-operative is a worker-owned business that offers long-term equity as well as a regular paycheck. Every co-op will start as a small group and expand as the business gains traction in the marketplace. Because veterans are uniquely qualified to take on this work - and because it's difficult to find suitable employees for this work from the standard workforce pool - we anticipate that this



momentum will continue to create jobs for more veterans over time. New York has literally seen hundreds of energy efficiency contracting companies go through this process of growth over the last 10 years, and yet there are still several parts of the state that are underserved by this type of business. Energy efficiency is still a market with plenty of long-term growth potential as the price of energy is expected to rise.

In addition, the cooperative values of self-help and self-responsibility, combined with the ethical values of social responsibility and caring for others, are at the core of this project and are the basis for how veterans will find a way to help themselves by helping each other and society.

What Needs to Happen

Each group of veterans comes with some resources, and certain skills. BPCA has been reaching out to veterans across the state to identify those that understand our mission and are positioned to take steps towards engaging other veterans to take advantage of the market opportunities presented by the need for energy efficiency. Although the momentum for each group needs to come from within, BPCA and CDI are working to support those that are stepping forward.

BPCA and CDI are actively looking for additional partners and funding - and interested veterans - to continue building out the infrastructure for this effort. Our goal is to raise funds that will support outreach, training, equipment, and support for establishing at least three cooperative worker-owned energy efficiency contracting companies in underserved areas of New York.

With an initial round of funding, CDI and BPCA are supporting one core group of veterans that have established their energy efficiency renovation contracting cooperative. We will turn their success into leverage that will interest other veterans to take on the business model in different areas. We will set up the infrastructure for a replicable and scalable enterprise that can continue to grow cooperative businesses for veterans over the years. We expect that the infrastructure we create will lead to an ongoing effort that can be expanded beyond the borders of New York state, carried forth by a national interest in supporting our veterans and reducing energy waste.