The Donald Vial Center for Employment in the Green Economy has been selected as the lead consultant on workforce education and training for the California Investor-Owned Utilities' energy efficiency programs, beginning in June 2013. The Investor-Owned Utilities (IOUs) are responsible for implementing the state’s energy efficiency programs to meet California’s carbon emissions reduction goals. Although the IOUs have offered training and related activities for some years, the California Public Utilities Commission has increased its focus on workforce education and training (WE&T) in the last five years, directing the IOUs to enhance their efforts and elevate the importance of strategic planning for these programs.

The California Long Term Energy Efficiency Strategic Plan, created in 2008, identifies workforce education and training as essential to the successful implementation of energy efficiency programs so that savings goals are achieved. The Plan also includes the goal of equity and inclusion in workforce activities so that career opportunities created by ratepayer investment in energy efficiency are broadly accessible to Californians, including those from historically disadvantaged communities. In recognizing that many other entities in the state are involved in WE&T, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) has highlighted the need for a collaborative effort among state agencies, educational institutions, community-based and non-profit organizations, private industry, and labor to create a comprehensive and coordinated WE&T program for a new, energy-efficient economy.

In its November 2012 decision approving the IOUs' 2013-2014 energy efficiency program portfolios, the CPUC directed the IOUs to hire a consultant, in consultation with the California state government workforce agencies, to help design a comprehensive approach to the workforce development issues related to the energy efficiency portfolios. The Vial Center and its team of research partners submitted the winning bid for a $500,000 contract, which will be managed by PG&E on behalf of the other IOUs. The contract begins in June 2013 and will conclude in early 2014.

This project will build on our work for the 2011 WE&T Needs Assessment for Energy Efficiency, Distributed Generation and Demand Response, which was called for in the Strategic Plan to provide recommendations to the CPUC and other agencies on the workforce strategies needed to achieve the state’s ambitious energy efficiency goals. The Vial Center leads an experienced team that includes the lead authors of the WE&T Needs Assessment, as well as experts and practitioners with nationally-recognized experience in both workforce development and IOU energy efficiency programs. The team is led by Carol Zabin, director of the Vial Center and director of research at the UC Berkeley Labor Center. Partners include the Career Ladders Project, Estolano LeSar Perez Advisors, and the UC Berkeley Labor Occupational Health Program, among others.

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