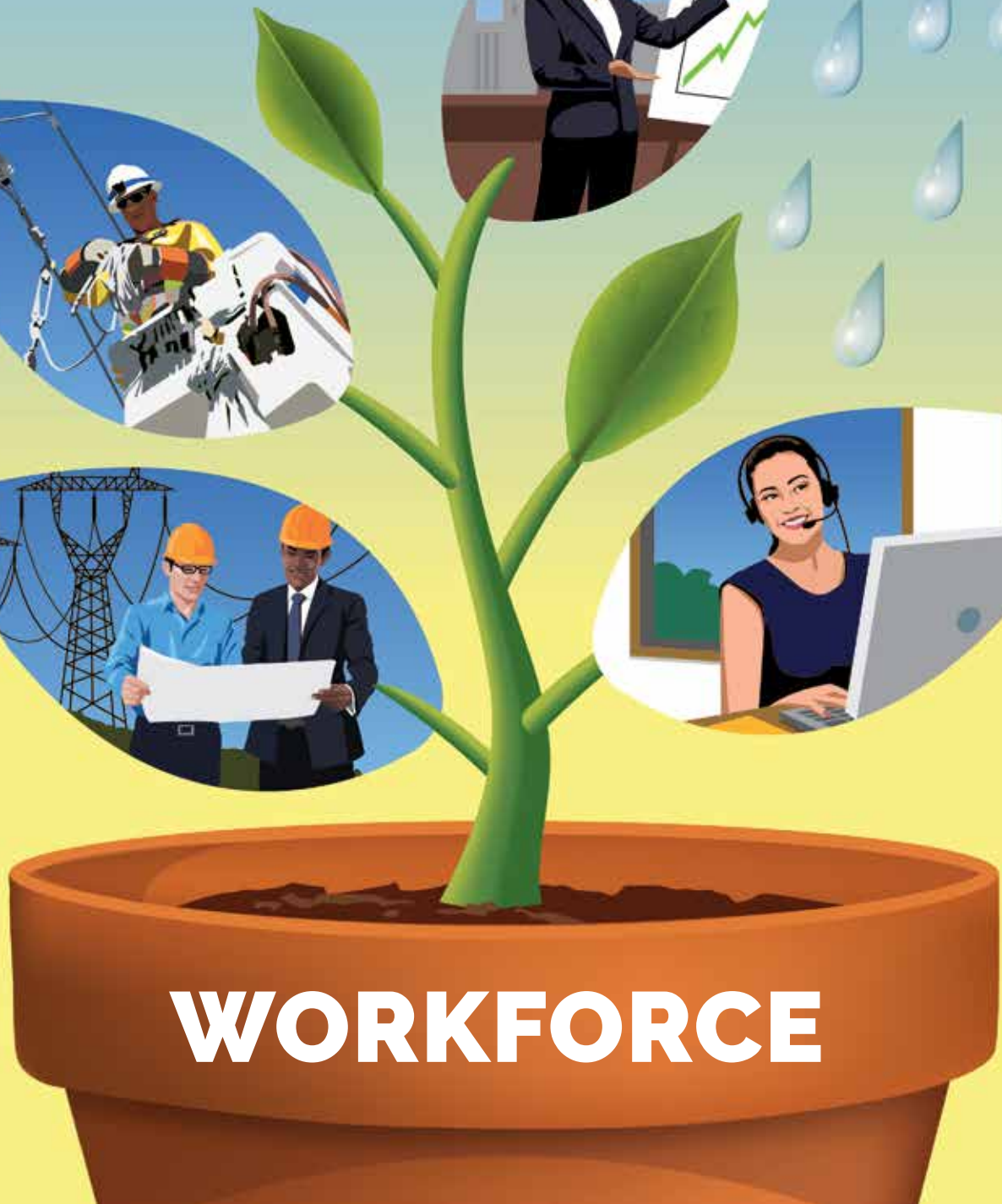


MAY/JUNE 2022 • VOL. 80 / NO. 3

PUBLIC POWER MAGAZINE

AMERICAN PUBLIC POWER ASSOCIATION



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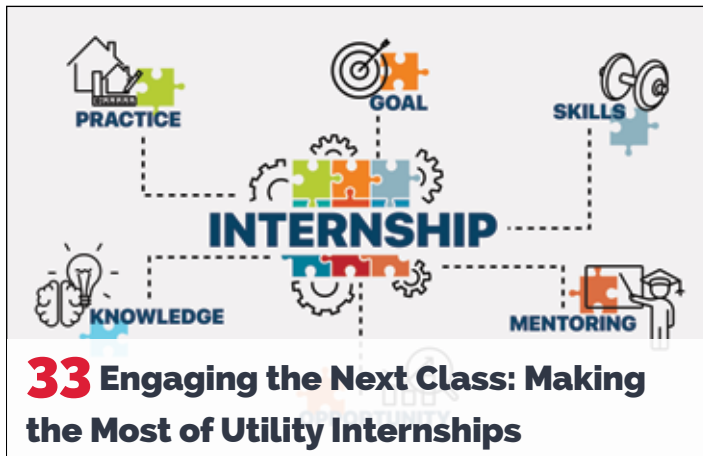
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Modernizing the Public Power Workforce

BY JOY DITTO, PRESIDENT AND CEO,
AMERICAN PUBLIC POWER ASSOCIATION





The challenge of meeting utility workforce needs is one public power has wrestled with for the last two decades. The baby boomer generation is well into retirement, a trend that will continue for another decade. Meanwhile, demands on the industry are changing. As local utilities maintain and rebuild electric distribution infrastructure, they are installing grids characterized by sophisticated electronics and a sturdy resilience better able to withstand harsh weather. The need to scale up

intermittent renewable resources and enable electric vehicles also requires distribution equipment capable of handling generation and load at a more granular level.

The pandemic introduced new staffing challenges to an industry that simply cannot lock the doors and stop operating. Then came the Great Resignation. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the trade, transportation and utilities sector of the economy has been second only to the leisure and hospitality sector in losing personnel to the Great Resignation.

Events of the past two years have magnified the challenge of renewing our workforce. We can think of the work done to meet the early years of baby boomer retirements as preparation for the 2022 requirements.

But the challenge presents an opportunity

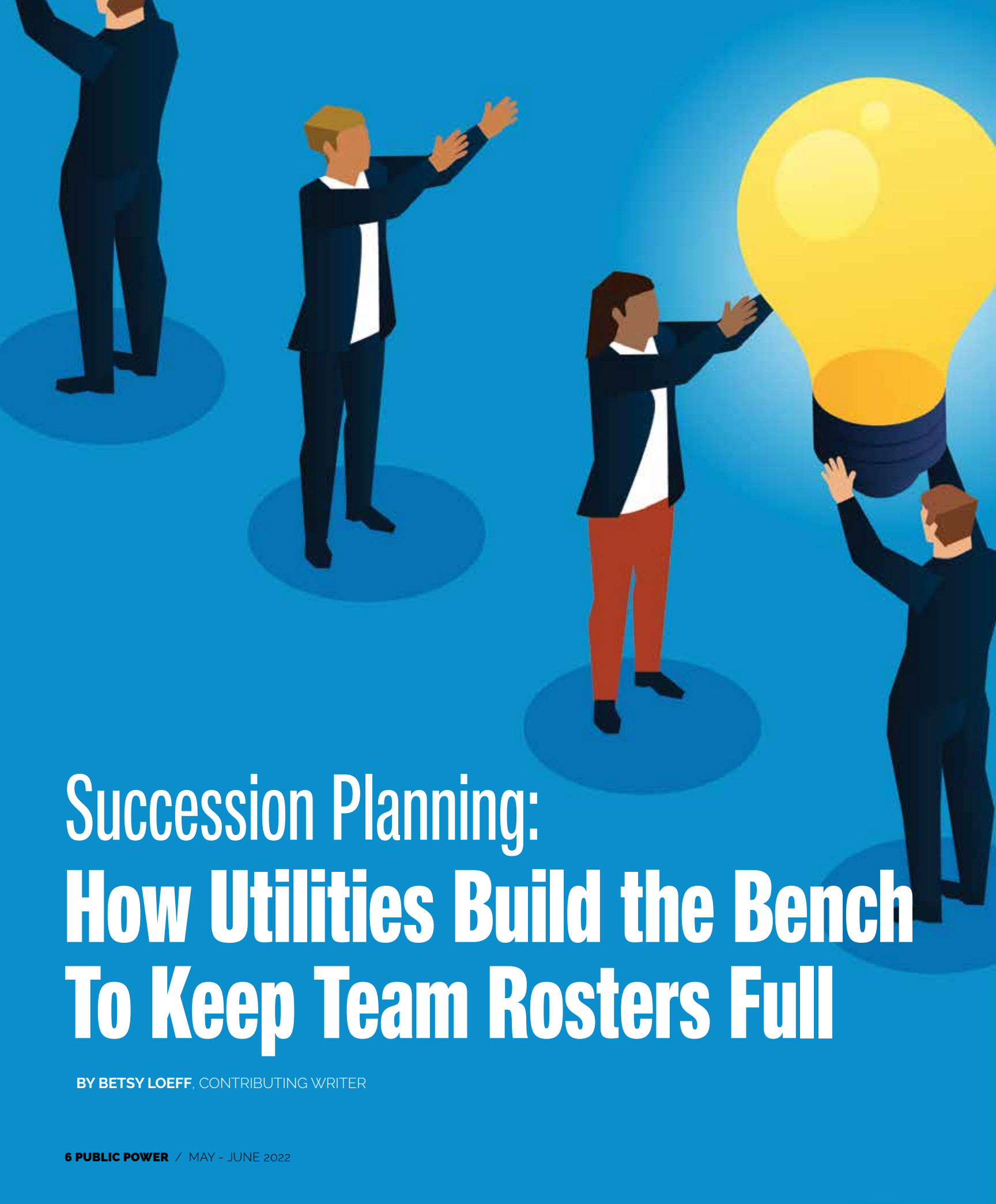
to re-shape our staffs to meet new technology requirements and new ways of doing business — the latter dramatically shaped by the pandemic. The lockdown imposed by COVID 19 on many office staff — whether for a shorter or longer duration — forced employers to continue delivering service without traveling each day to an office. That experience proved that some desk jobs can be handled as effectively from a desk at home as from a desk in a central office.

Several years ago, I asked one CEO of a small municipal electric utility how he was meeting the looming challenge of retiring baby boomers. His strategy: “I recognize that engineers want to be close to their mamas.” At the heart of his tongue-in-cheek solution was an approach every public power utility should embrace: think locally. He cultivated and maintained a close relationship with customers. College-bound kids knew that solid career opportunities awaited back home where they could reconnect with their families. As quaint as his response to workforce development seems, it speaks to key components of every utility’s needs. Your utility’s workforce needs to meet the needs and reflect the demographics of your community.

Public power utility partnerships with local colleges/trade schools are potentially one of the most effective strategies for developing your evolving workforce. As utility distribution systems become more sophisticated, it is incumbent on the utility to take steps to ensure that local educational curricula match evolving technical needs. The article, “Nurturing the Roots,” in this issue (page 42) talks about EPRI’s GridEd program, which recognizes and addresses this need. Several public power utilities participate in this program and the effort is a model and a resource for smaller communities.

These efforts should not stop with technical needs. In their efforts to address workforce needs, two utilities — Keys Energy Service in Florida and Paducah Power System in Kentucky — recognized that communication skills are a top priority. “Whether it’s interpersonal communications, written and verbal communications or just human interaction in general, the most common skill deficiency our organization sees comes down to soft skills,” said Julio Terrado of Keys Energy Services. For more on that, read the article here on succession planning (page 8).

The continuing shift in how people are thinking about work — and what they want out of work — is an opportunity for us to think differently about our workforce and to shape organizations that appeal to and nurture our most important resource, our employees. Public power’s mission — providing reliable, affordable, and sustainable electricity to our communities — cannot be overstated as a motivation for some employees and job seekers. Along with competitive wages and benefits, opportunities to learn and advance, and being treated with respect, this mission can provide public power utilities with a leg up in this challenging job market. Public power utility jobs offer exciting opportunities for the next generation of employees. It is up to us to be sure that newcomers to the workforce are aware of these opportunities and are prepared to help us move forward.



Succession Planning: How Utilities Build the Bench To Keep Team Rosters Full

BY BETSY LOEFF, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



SUCCESSION PLANNING PROTECTS INSTITUTIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND KEEPS AN ORGANIZATION'S PLAYERS AT THE TOP OF THEIR GAMES.

When Key Players Go

In its latest Gaps in the Energy Workforce report, the Center for Energy Workforce Development noted that retirement attrition in the industry in 2021 was at its lowest level since 2014. However, nearly 29% of the workforce are baby boomers, people born between 1945 and 1964. The youngest boomers are less than 10 years away from eligibility for full retirement. This may be even more acute within public power, as earlier versions of the CEWD report showed that the public power workforce was on average older than other parts of the energy sector.

For the Brownsville Public Utilities Board in Texas, four of seven directors (57%) are ready for retirement. Across all management levels, 18 of 39 employees (49%) are eligible to retire.

Institutional knowledge is not the only thing that can walk out the door when a key employee or leader leaves. "Loss of leadership creates issues," said Marisa Gaytan, manager of training and development for Brownsville. "Employees have a sense of security and stability when there is a person in the leadership role with experience and tenure. In times of new leadership, it is common for employees to experience insecurities and potential turf control battles," she said.

The turmoil that may result when one established leader exits and another steps in often stems from fear of the unknown, Gaytan said. Newcomers often force teams to re-experience the stages of team development, which may include resistance, competition and conflict, before the team settles in and begins performing at peak levels. But change can also bring new ideas, innovation, and energy, she said.

Planning to Pass the Baton

In Kentucky, Paducah Power System has made succession planning one of its five strategic priorities. The utility asks all supervisors to identify all individuals who might retire or otherwise leave in the next few years. The utility instructs supervisors to specify how much training a new person would need while the existing employee is still on the job and to identify any issues that may need to be covered while the new employee gets up to speed, said Andrea Underwood, director of human resources and community relations for Paducah Power.

"Once you have all that laid out, it's easier to see the big picture," she said. This planning allowed the utility to see that all three foremen leading the utility's three line crews might retire within the next five years. "We were able to hire apprentices and get them in the loop to become first-class linemen so that our people who are already first-class linemen will have a chance to move into leadership roles," Underwood said.

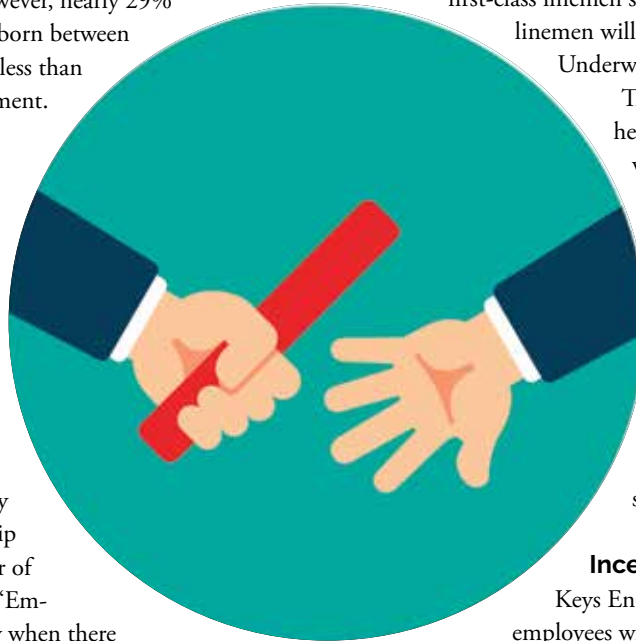
This proactive approach to seeing who is likely headed out the door also let the utility know when the lead payroll clerk was going to retire. "A little over a year from her retirement, we went through the hiring process with in-house candidates," she said. That allowed the utility to get a replacement lined up and provide ongoing training for an entire year. "The person moving into the role was able to see those big events that occur over the course of a calendar year, like open enrollment," Underwood said.

Incentivizing Notice

Keys Energy Services in southern Florida rewards employees who give plenty of notice about their retirement plans.

"A few years ago, we were getting very short retirement notices from employees, some of whom had been here 20 or more years," said Julio Torrado, director of human resources and communications for the utility. "It's a big decision, and some people were keeping it close to the vest. We were having people give anywhere from 30 days notice to just two weeks."

To address this, Keys Energy implemented an early notification program for employees who have 15 or more years of continuous service or who are at least age 60 and have 10 years of service. "If people are eligible for the program, they have to give a minimum of eight weeks of written





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SUCCESSION PLANNING: HOW UTILITIES BUILD THE BENCH TO KEEP TEAM ROSTERS FULL

notice of the intent to retire to be compensated for that advance notice,” Torrado explained.

The rewards grow if the employee gives 16 weeks notice, and can change depending on a number of factors. Some employees can choose to take a day off each week that does not accrue to paid leave and lets them transition into retirement via a reduced work schedule. Some who otherwise would not be compensated for accrued sick leave are permitted to take it on the way out as a cash bonus.

The utility piloted this program from October 2019 to December 2020. The nine employees who retired during that time provided an average of 120 days of notice. “In the three years preceding the pilot, the average notice was around 30 days. We definitely saw an increase in advanced notice as a result of this program,” Torrado said.

Growing Future Leaders

Along with actively addressing upcoming retirements and resignations, utilities also prepare existing employees to move up the organizational ladder.

“We are constantly trying to grow what I call ‘future leaders,’” said Torrado. Keys Energy Services offers annual seminars to help employees fine-tune skills that encompass “the nuts and bolts of being a supervisor,” he said. Prior to the start of the pandemic, employees who expressed interest in the program would attend multi-week training courses that Keys



Energy put together with local vendors. Topics included things like how to write a disciplinary memo, how to handle a disgruntled employee, and effective communication skills. These programs are being reinstated as pandemic restrictions wind down. The most recent seminar offered was for all employees.

Paducah Power uses annual reviews to help employees see what, if any, skills would help them grow with the company and where they might want to wind up. “We make sure managers have good, thorough conversations to find out what roles employees see themselves taking on in the future and what we think they need to do to meet those goals. Then we follow up with appropriate training,” Underwood said.

The Paducah team also has people help train their successors with or without overlap in employment through guidance documents, referred to as “bibles,” prepared by the prospective retiree. “We had an administrative assistant who left and when her replacement came in, this “bible” covered everything the person in the role had to do. It was all documented and laid out in a way that the replacement could follow it through the calendar year,” Underwood said. The device was so helpful, the utility now encourages others to document their responsibilities and the “how-to” information that would let another person pick up the book and know what to do.

“Succession planning often becomes an afterthought for organizations because of the rapidly changing work environment,” said Trish Holliday, vice president of human resources and corporate services at Nashville Electric Service in Tennessee. Creating a talent pipeline is a strategic necessity for utility leaders, she said. “Studies indicate that top talent want good leadership, to be a part of the decision making at some level, and to be developed for future roles.”

“While every employee enters the workforce with a set of skills, it is important for an organization to proactively manage how they develop and grow those skills throughout their tenure,” said Halliday. “Investing time and resources in continuing education and employee development pays dividends. Not only does it ensure the workforce is constantly growing and evolving, but research suggests it can also contribute to employee engagement and retention.”

Holliday noted that employees appreciate when employers support their professional development and foster an environment where employ-

“We are constantly trying to grow what I call ‘future leaders,’” said Torrado.

SUCCESSION PLANNING: HOW UTILITIES BUILD THE BENCH TO KEEP TEAM ROSTERS FULL

ees have opportunities for growth and where career paths are multi-directional. This approach helps individuals to grow and creates a learning culture that drives innovation and promotes inclusion. Organizations can also attract and retain high performers and remain competitive in the race for top talent.

Brownsville does emerging-leader scouting and is now rolling out a Middle Management Leadership Academy for employees in middle management and those identified as having the potential to grow into a supervisory role. “We cover emotional intelligence, conflict management, coaching, mentoring, critical thinking, strategic thinking and decisiveness,” said Gaytan. The program is built around two-hour classes delivered twice per week for a total of 24 hours of training.

Along with formal training, Brownsville uses more casual approaches to finding individuals who show leadership potential. The utility has a lending library for leadership-focused business books and runs a Toastmasters club that’s open to 25 employees each year. At every meeting, 10 to 12 of those employees will need to step up and handle some role, such as leading the table topics, being the grammarian for the meeting, or serving as an evaluator. To keep the club running, a few employees must raise their hands to be a club board member.

“Those are great examples of employees showing leadership skill. They understand that for us to have a successful meeting, we need them to be active members of the club,” Gaytan said. “It also helps us identify what skills people have.”

What Is Needed for Tomorrow

Cultural and ethnic diversity is essential for future leadership teams. “It’s easy to build relationships with people who are like-minded, but it’s more challenging to do the same with people who think differently,” Gaytan said.

“More diverse and dynamic workforce ecosystems can be pivotal to an organization’s ability to thrive but likely require revising management and talent practices,” Holliday said. “Utility leaders should consider how best to represent the communities they serve within the workforce.”

Communication is the top skill worth developing. “Whether its interpersonal communications, written and verbal communications or just human interaction in general, the most common skill deficiency our organization sees comes down to soft skills,” Torrado said.

Underwood agreed: “At the end of the day, most business is done through interaction with others. If people are going to lead, they need to have a good understanding of how to work with and nurture other people,” she said.

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CULTIVATING TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE: LEADERSHIP ADVICE FROM PUBLIC POWER'S 2022 AWARDEES

BY SUSAN PARTAIN, SENIOR MANAGER, CONTENT STRATEGY,
AMERICAN PUBLIC POWER ASSOCIATION



Q&A with select individual recipients of the American Public Power Association's 2022 Outstanding Public Power Leaders. View a full list of this year's recipients at PublicPower.org/Award-Winners.

Responses from:



- **DEREK BROWN**, City Administrator, City of Albany, Missouri, and 2022 recipient of the Larry Hobart Seven Hats Award



- **GEORGE MORRISSEY**, Director of Public Works, Cuba City Light and Water, Wisconsin, and 2022 recipient of the Larry Hobart Seven Hats Award



- **CRYSTAL CURRIER**, Controller, Vermont Public Power Supply Authority, and 2022 recipient of the Mark Crisson Leadership and Managerial Excellence Award



- **DAVE OSBURN**, General Manager, Oklahoma Municipal Power Authority, and 2022 recipient of the Mark Crisson Leadership and Managerial Excellence Award



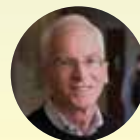
- **AL FISHER**, Administrator, Village of Pioneer, Ohio, and 2022 recipient of the Larry Hobart Seven Hats Award



- **CHUCK RALLS**, City Manager, Comanche Public Works Authority, Oklahoma, and 2022 recipient of the Larry Hobart Seven Hats Award



- **WES KELLEY**, President and CEO, Huntsville Utilities, Alabama, and 2022 recipient of the Mark Crisson Leadership and Managerial Excellence Award



- **STEVE WRIGHT**, General Manager (retired), Chelan Public Utility District, Washington, and 2022 recipient of the Alex Radin Distinguished Service Award



- **ANGIE LUNA**, Director of Power & Public Works, City of Acworth, Georgia, and 2022 recipient of the Robert Roundtree Rising Star Award

What does it mean to you to be a public power leader?



OSBURN: It is an honor and a huge responsibility. It doesn't matter whether you work for a joint action agency or a municipality, you have been entrusted with the stewardship and care of a very valuable asset - possibly that community's most valuable asset. The performance of your organization directly impacts the lives of the community or communities you serve.



CURRIER: I have the opportunity to share with my staff and colleagues my experiences, what I have learned, what has worked and what hasn't, in the hope that they will be able to use that knowledge to make public power stronger and explain to others the difference public power can make in their communities. Being a public power leader provides a certain amount of gratification. People go to work every day and while the work they do makes an impact somewhere (typically a financial impact), knowing that my role has a direct effect in the communities where our members work and live is satisfying.



KELLEY: Public power is public service. We must never forget that we are stewards operating on behalf of others. We are in positions of trust. The public trusts us to build, operate, and maintain assets that empower their lives and enhance our communities.



WRIGHT: It's the fulfillment of a lifetime objective. I believe serving the public interest provides meaning and purpose that is tremendously rewarding. Public power is the essence of serving the public interest because we start with a focus on serving our customers and enhancing our communities. We have great challenges in terms of big picture global and national issues like climate change and cybersecurity protection. We also have local issues that provide an opportunity to make significant differences in the quality of life. It's been a tremendously rewarding experience to be in public power.

What are the benefits of working for a small public power utility?



FISHER: Having a job in the same town you were born and raised is something very few individuals get to experience. When this job involves serving customers, most of whom you know on a first name basis, it makes the experience that much more special.



RALLS: I have worked for large corporations and you feel very disconnected. I love knowing all of my employees as well as their spouses and children. You are [also] able to know your customers. It allows me to meet with them and be more empathetic to their needs, which allows for better customer service.



MORRISEY: The benefits of working for a small utility are plentiful, rewarding, and humbling. There is an immense sense of pride individually and community-wide when you see the fruits of work daily. There is a sense of community buy-in to the project(s) at hand, whether it is a distribution rebuild, electric extension, water and sewer upgrade, street reconstruction, or improvements in our parks. The fact that our staff (five employees between all departments - electric, water, wastewater, streets and parks) is responsible for these duties and takes pride in all their work makes my job that much easier.



BROWN: With a small staff that invariably comes with working for a small system, every employee is at some point faced with a situation that they aren't always equipped or trained to deal with. Over time, and with both good and bad experiences, this creates a more dynamic staff that contributes to the system being better able to serve the needs of our customer-owners. It also doesn't hurt that you personally know most of those whom you serve.

What attributes shine through (or do you try to foster) in the public power workplace culture?



WRIGHT: Fostering a culture that is focused on serving the public interest. For-profit companies have as their primary duty a fiduciary responsibility to their stockholders. Non-governmental organizations need to meet the desires of their donors. Sometimes governmental organizations can be overly focused on their specific mission without seeing the larger picture of how their actions fit into the mosaic of improving the quality of

life in their community. The goal should be to think deeply about how to enhance the quality of life for the people who live in our communities, while keeping an eye on the bigger picture of how we fit into making our state, country, and world a better place.



CURRIER: The employees who work in our member utilities wear multiple hats and are pulled in many directions. If the VPPSA employees can understand that day-to-day pull on our member managers (and their employees), they can do a better job of helping to meet their needs. Knowing that your work is helping the communities where our members reside is very different than simply working to earn a profit.



LUNA: People who serve in the public power industry are first of all servant-hearted. They wake up every day with a strong desire to make life better for others. These are people who are creative, confident and bold. There is a very strong family culture in public power. All of these attributes together are what makes working in public power unique and enjoyable. You have a sense of belonging and a sense of home at work. You are working toward the greater good for the community and each other.

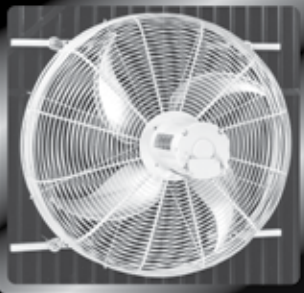


RALLS: Through fostering customer service skills, we are encouraging all employees to engage with the public. We have been seeing a changing trend on social media where they thank us for no outages after a storm and thanking [crews] for enduring the weather while they are out on an outage. They have even taken them coffee or thanked them by name. This is a positive culture shift.



BROWN: I have always tried to implement a culture that stressed the importance of family and community endeavors. We have implemented liberal time-off systems that allow employees to engage in a healthy and robust life outside of work. We believe it increases productivity and job satisfaction, but most of all it is just the right thing to do.

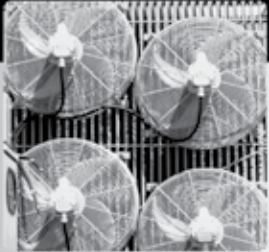
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CULTIVATING TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE: LEADERSHIP ADVICE FROM PUBLIC POWER'S 2022 AWARDEES



MORRISEY: I do not go the team route; I go the family route. Small towns and small workforces need the sense of family and self-value, these values increase productivity and increase longevity in any work environment.



KELLEY: We owe it to our community to get better every day. That doesn't happen if we aren't deepening our knowledge and learning from those around us. We must always consider what's best for the customer and the community—not our convenience.



OSBURN: Public power is unique in its closeness and relationship with the customer. I have always tried to operate under the model of doing what is best for your customers, not necessarily what is best for you. In many public power communities and joint action agencies, the customer or member can be very involved and want to have a say in the practices and operations of the utility. Here at OMPA, I operate as if I have 42 bosses. When I was at Richmond (Indiana), I used to say I had 30,000 bosses. [Customers] don't get that kind of access to top management from private corporations. The other trait that typically shows up is "fairness." Do what is fair, and right, even if it means admitting you were wrong.

What skills do leaders of small utilities need to be able to master?



BROWN: Organized and focused communication skills. I have no public information or marketing staff and on occasion have struggled finding the time or expertise to effectively communicate with the public, governing board members and employees. A close second would be highly effective employee engagement. A small system leader cannot afford to sacrifice teamwork just because the team is small in numbers.



MORRISEY: The ability to empathize with your customers and community members. In the small-town setting everything becomes personal, and the ability to relate to and understand an individual's concerns or comments is paramount. In a lot of cases those concerned individuals may have children in your child's class or be on the same sports teams. The

ability to promote and foster citizen participation and buy-in is also a critical skill that becomes invaluable. I believe the future for current and future people in these positions is to be active in the community and lead by example. This demonstrates your personal buy-in and belief in the direction that you are promoting for your community.



FISHER: Communication, trust, and compassion. Citizens need to understand they can approach you with their issues and concerns. Sometimes you can solve their issues and sometimes you cannot, but if they trust you have listened to them with empathy for their circumstance, then almost always an amicable solution can be found.

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RALLS: In a smaller utility, you are often making the decisions and then required to implement those decisions. A small utility leader must be able to multi-task and manage time well. You must also understand the entire process from the financials, the planning and engineering, and the implementation or installation. I could not do this job without all the knowledge I have gained from mentors throughout the years. The next generation needs to understand the importance of a good mentor and develop a strong leadership network they can call on when they have questions. The best skill you can have is the ability to find answers when you don't have them.

What skills does the public power leader of the future need? How/where can rising leaders attain these skills?



LUNA: Public power leaders must have the skills necessary to grow strong workplace culture, encourage and motivate employees, and attract talented people who want to be a part of serving their communities. Leaders need to have strong skills in influencing their people: communication, motivation, humility, collaboration, creativity, flexibility, empathy, adaptability, employee development, etc. Many of the skills that are necessary to lead their staff are also the same ones needed to create the partnerships and working relationships with other departments and community organizations to ensure staff has the resources needed to perform their work safely and efficiently. Everyone on our staff has taken the DISC assessment which is a tool for understanding each person's strengths and weaknesses as well as their personality type. This has helped tremendously with being better able to communicate with each other and

balance everyone's strengths and weaknesses to the highest level. The skills can be attained by anyone who is willing to learn and work toward growing their own personal development. There are many and varied ways to attain the needed leadership skills such as conferences, webinars, courses, and training seminars. I regularly read leadership books [and] conduct book studies with my leadership staff.



OSBURN: I have always felt good leaders exhibit the following traits: knowledgeable of business/industry, has a vision of where the company should be heading, is a good communicator of that vision, and is passionate. In recent years I have added another trait – flexibility. Our industry is changing at a rapid pace, along with our customer's and staff's expectations. You must be able, and willing, to adapt. Think of leaders you have worked with before and try to emulate the positive traits you admired about them. It is also helpful to have someone who is willing to challenge you and keep you centered. Regarding industry knowledge and vision, take advantage of any opportunity to stay current on trends and changes in the power industry. APPA has been a great resource for me over the years.



CURRIER: Technology, innovative ideas, adaptability. Our member utilities have been around for decades (some more than a century), and while the basics of the utility infrastructure have not changed, the way it works and the demands placed on the industry have. Public power leaders today need to be abreast of technological advances in the industry and utilize them to make their utilities stronger. They must bring innovative ideas to the table and be adaptable. The regulatory and environmental landscape changes constantly and leaders need to be in a position to make those changes benefit the utility rather than seeing it as an opposing threat. Using resources such as joint action agencies, APPA, local training centers and mostly learning from our industry colleagues is key to success.

FLYING HIGH: INCORPORATING BVLOS INTO AN EXISTING UTILITY UAS PROGRAM

The global unmanned aerial systems (UAS) industry is experiencing explosive growth, with the utility application alone expected to reach \$2.8 billion by 2028, according to a recent Adroit Market Research Report. Common uses of UAS in the utility industry as part of operations and asset management activities include digitizing asset information, identifying and categorizing defects on power lines, analyzing vegetation encroachments, performing emergency response/restoration activities and executing pre/post-construction site mapping.

All of these are critical functions that must be effectively executed to power our communities and optimize our nation's infrastructure. The application of advanced UAS technologies to modernize these activities has resulted in more responsive, efficient, and safe operations.

Many utility companies have already invested in building high-tech drone programs as a more efficient and safe means of maintaining the integrity of the

electric power transmission infrastructure. However, despite some achievements, most in-house solutions are still struggling to fully realize the potential of using drones to manage thousands of miles of power lines, particularly across remote and rural areas that may be dense with vegetation or at high risk of weather damage.

NEXT-LEVEL UAS SOLUTIONS

Beyond-visual-line-of-sight (BVLOS) UAS technology allows operators to fly drones further than what is visible to the human operator depending on the landscape and terrain. As part of a broader drone program, BVLOS operations enable utility companies to substantially increase the efficiency and effectiveness of long-linear inspection and vegetation management activities. For example, the opportunity to capture, process, and provide images and data from large sections of the grid in real-time can dramatically increase the value and immediate impact of a drone program. Further, BVLOS operations allow

utilities to perform more frequent and demand-responsive inspections, leading to a more predictive maintenance model resulting in a decreased risk of outages. Unfortunately, most internal utility UAS programs do not have long-range BVLOS capabilities due to the complex regulatory requirements, capital investments, and operational considerations.

CHOOSING A COMPLEMENTARY BVLOS PARTNER

The existence of an in-house drone program without BVLOS capabilities does not have to be a limiting factor for a utility company wanting to expand UAS inspection operations to include long linear infrastructure. Offering a unique complementary solution, Spright delivers end-to-end BVLOS drone inspection services that enhance in-house programs by supplementing localized inspection operations to include advanced BVLOS flights. Pairing a BVLOS-capable partner like Spright with an existing in-house program provides

comprehensive asset coverage that maximizes the use of UAS technology for safer, greener, more efficient inspection activities.

AVIATION EXPERTISE APPLIED TO INDUSTRY DEMANDS

Recently launched as the drone division of leading air medical operator Air Methods, Spright maintains a state-of-the-art utility drone fleet with nationwide presence to enable scalability across the U.S. Aviation-based service providers like Spright are uniquely able to leverage existing Part 135 and other operator certificates, as well as FAA relationships and regulatory expertise, to effectively deliver a solution designed to further enhance the success of UAS as a key driver in streamlined asset management operations.

For more information on Spright utility inspection services, please visit www.sprightutility.com or reach out to eileen.lockhart@gospright.com.

spright



WRIGHT: Explaining the value of public service in terms of pursuing meaning and purpose in a way that will allow public power to recruit and retain great talent. We have a unique advantage in public power that we could do more with to encourage bright people to engage us as an employer, particularly given the importance many young people place on issues like climate change and making a contribution to their communities. Also a willingness to engage and consider the impacts of new technology. The rapid evolution of technology is rapidly changing other industries. That change is coming to the electric industry, although exactly how that plays out is unclear. A willingness to consider how new technologies will provide value to customers, even if it varies from our current business model, will be necessary to avoid being disrupted by the disrupters.



KELLEY: While our business can be complex, public power leaders should explain the factors impacting decisions so the community can understand. Our job is to provide clear, thoughtful responses to questions or concerns. As such, public power leaders need strong communication skills—with attentive listening abilities and the gift of focus and clarity.



FISHER: On-the-job training is second to none, once you have established a positive culture amongst the team. Leaders in small utilities need first and foremost to understand the team approach to problem-solving as well as serving the public. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses—a leader must look over his/her team and manage the weaknesses and amplify the strengths.

What's the biggest challenge you face in recruiting or retaining talented staff?



WRIGHT: First, finding people with STEM [science, technology, engineering, math] skills, particularly engineering, who are ready to take on difficult duties today. Second, defining the best work-from-home path that allows us to recruit and retain great talent and serves our customers. Many employees want [to work from home] because it best serves their needs and for the most part they can get their work done. But substantial work from home also leads to losing important value for our customers in terms of encouraging creativity, developing teamwork, incorporating new employees, and establishing culture. There are also issues with which jobs reasonably can work from home versus those that cannot and everything in between that can lead to internal resentment.



OSBURN: The workforce of today and tomorrow is much more mobile and looking for different things from their employers. Besides the traditional pay and benefits, the newer workforce is looking for a sense of purpose, flexibility, and a company whose mission they can get behind. Public power is in a great position to provide that sense of purpose and service. We constantly reinforce the assistance we provide to our smaller, rural members and how much they appreciate it.



CULTIVATING TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE: LEADERSHIP ADVICE FROM PUBLIC POWER'S 2022 AWARDEES



RALLS: As a smaller utility our greatest struggle is finances. We are successful at recruiting people with little or no industry experience. We have developed great training methods to quickly acclimate new employees to the industry. Unfortunately, we can't afford to pay them what they are worth once they are trained and they are quickly recruited by larger cities or local co-ops. Even with recapture agreements, we fail to retain. Since we have a smaller revenue base we can't use the scale of volume to pay higher wages.



KELLEY: Everyone values meaningful work, but the rising generation seems to appreciate purpose more than ever. This means we must illuminate context, listen to broad perspectives, and provide equitable solutions for workplace decisions. If done well, we bring value and purpose to every decision.



CURRIER: Potential recruits have the edge when it comes to employment in the current environment and that puts all employers at a disadvantage. In the utility industry, this is further compounded by the fact that there are very few recruits that are already knowledgeable of the industry because it is more of a trade and not something typically taught or even encouraged at a school level. Helping new (and existing) employees find that enthusiasm to work in a complicated, demanding, and ever-changing industry can be challenging.



MORRISEY: Talent needs to be rewarded and appreciated. The job opportunities for talented individuals in any field are almost unlimited. Therefore the appreciation and respect of your current and potential future employees cannot be overstated. Wage is always a factor in career decision-making but it is NOT the most important. We promote a healthy work environment and a family-friendly work schedule. Our ability to be flexible with our employees seems to have struck a good balance of work and family time.

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FISHER: Retaining great employees is not as much about dollars as it is about self-worth. In Pioneer, we take great pride in building a team culture where positive motivation, sense of accomplishment, and respect for each other as well as the customer is an everyday occurrence. Highly motivated employees who work as a team to accomplish great things will normally not look elsewhere for employment.

What can today's public power leaders do to support tomorrow's leaders?



KELLEY: The best thing we can do for future leaders is give them strong shoulders to stand on. We must do our jobs well—achieving high standards of professionalism—so the next generation rises above our accomplishments without the burden of repairing our mistakes.

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CULTIVATING TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE: LEADERSHIP ADVICE FROM PUBLIC POWER'S 2022 AWARDEES



CURRIER: Pass on the knowledge they have. Help tomorrow's leaders understand the past so they can use that knowledge to shape the future.



WRIGHT: Inspire pride in public service that causes people to be excited about the opportunity to be leaders in public power because of what it means for their ability to contribute to their community, the country and the world.



OSBURN: First, try to be a good example. Exhibit high ethical standards. Second, give them the opportunity to grow professionally, encourage independent thinking, but be there for support when they need it. Give them something to take ownership of and see what they can do with it.



LUNA: You have to be relentlessly dedicated to each of these actions. Serve and lead them well. Lead by example. Invest your time and resources in them, develop them, help them grow, care for them and show them you do, pray for them, be their biggest cheerleader and supporter even when they are not looking.

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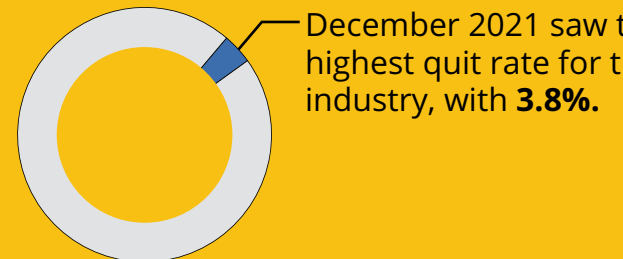
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How Have Utilities Been Affected By the Great Resignation?

47.8 million U.S. workers quit their jobs in 2021 – an average of about 4 million employees per month. (BLS)

The Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that the transportation, trade, and utilities sector saw a **higher than average quit rate** in 2021, with monthly rates between 3.0% and 3.8%. The quit rate for all occupations was between 2.8% and 3.0% for most of 2021.



Those who quit cited low pay, lack of opportunity to advance, and a disrespectful environment as their top reasons for leaving.

The highest rates were seen in workers between **30-45** years old. (HBR)





Other Losses...

Individuals employed in the energy, energy efficiency, and motor vehicles sectors in the United States declined by about 10% - nearly 840,000 jobs from the end of 2019 to the end of 2020 (USEER).



However, the utility-related portions of the sector experienced less loss - with transmission, distribution and storage jobs down only about 4.4% and electric generation jobs down 7%.



...And Expected Gains

From 2015-2019, the energy industry added 915,000 new jobs - representing 11% of all U.S. job growth. (USEER)

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The Center for Energy Workforce Development forecasts a need for more than **150,000** utility jobs through 2026.



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This includes **44,000** workers for key positions including technicians and linework, and 94,000 for general organizational functions, including customer service and human resources.

ers

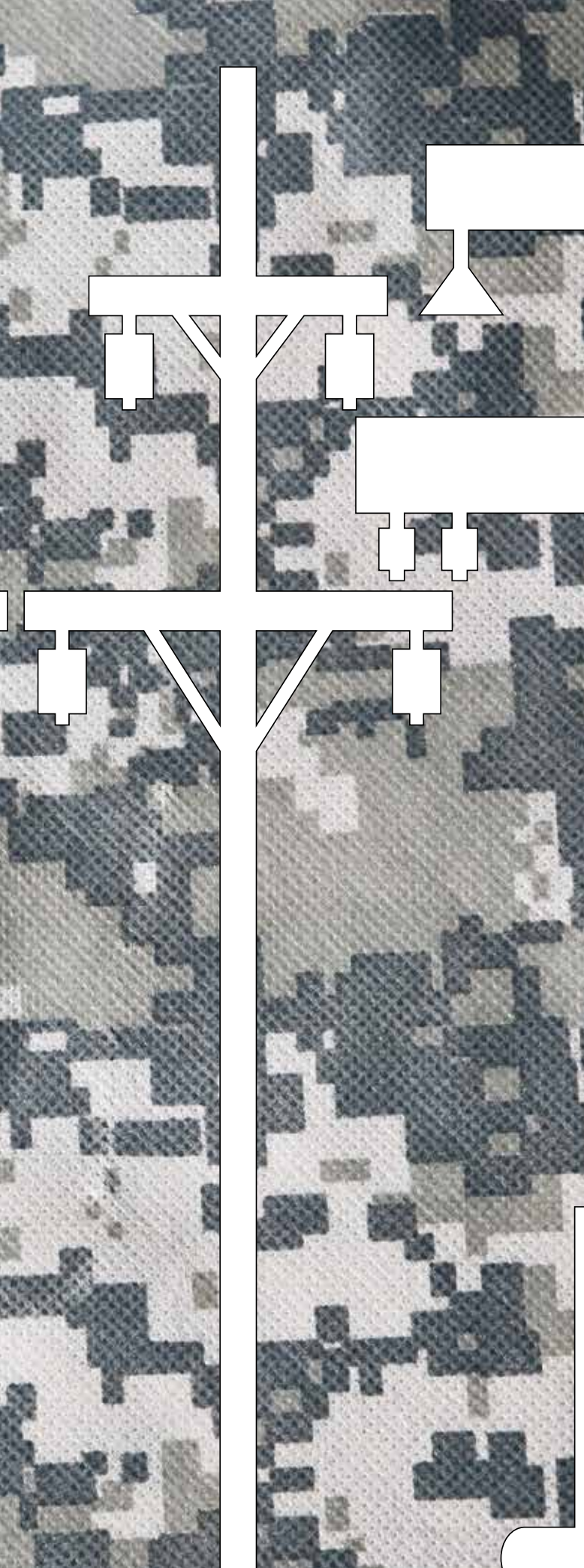
Job growth is also expected in the broader energy sector due to funding made available through the **Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act**.





Military Veterans And Utility Jobs

BY STEVE ERNST, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



Wayne Young retired from the U.S Navy 15 years ago, but he's never stopped looking out for his fellow veterans. Young is vice president of environmental services at JEA, the public power utility that serves Jacksonville, Florida. While the utility actively recruits personnel who are transitioning out of the military, Young tries to be a one-man recruiting service.

MILITARY VETERANS AND UTILITY JOBS

“I make it known that if you are serving now, I will do anything I can to assist you in your transition. Just let me know,” Young said. “It’s happened numerous times, that somebody who knows somebody who knows somebody, gives me a call and I welcome that.”

Young is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and spent 26 years in the Navy, retiring as a captain, before joining JEA in 2006. The Jacksonville area has the third largest military presence in the country and is home to two naval stations. The naval submarine base Kings Bay is just up Interstate 95 in nearby St. Mary’s, Georgia.

JEA recruits veterans by holding job fairs at military bases and has partnered with several veterans groups in the area to spread the word about job openings at the utility.

About 20% of JEA’s workforce is made up of veterans, said Charna Flenny, manager of talent acquisition services at JEA.

Every year, approximately 200,000 men and women leave U.S. military service and return to life as civilians, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. Since 2012, the Center for

Energy Workforce Development has operated a program, Troops for Energy Jobs, to help veterans find work. The program serves 53 natural gas and electric utilities and 70 energy contractors and suppliers.

The United Service Organization, or USO, has two programs to help veterans transition to civilian work. The USO’s Project Next STEP and Pathfinder Transition program can also help veterans find work in public power.

In 2021, roughly 8% of the utility industry’s workforce was made up of veterans, compared to 5.3 percent of veterans in the general workforce population, according to the Center for Energy Workforce Development’s 2021 annual report.

But one of best ways to reach transitioning veterans is still word-of-mouth, Young said.

“We have job fairs and we put the word out in the veterans community that we’re hiring,” Young said. “You don’t cut the cord when you retire from the military, so word of mouth among the veterans community here is very important.”



MILITARY VETERANS AND UTILITY JOBS

Young's first step in counseling veterans who are looking for civilian work is to help shape their resumes. "There's a different jargon in the Navy and the military, period, and one of the biggest challenges for those transitioning is to translate that experience into something that can be interpreted by any industry," Young said.

Young edits the resumes and sends retiring soldiers, sailors and airmen announcements for job openings. "It gives me tremendous pleasure," Young said of his work with veterans.

Rich Wallen, general manager of Grant County Public Utility District in eastern Washington, enlisted in the Navy before graduating from Ripley High School in West Virginia in 1988. He served 10 years aboard the USS Enterprise as a nuclear machinist mate, before earning his bachelor's degree from West Virginia University.

"I am instantly drawn to them," Wallen said about veterans transitioning to civilian work. "I think about my younger self, and not having money to go to college right away. I always think, 'I know your story,' even though I don't know you, but I have a pretty good idea of what you've gone through."

He says public power can be a great fit for veterans transitioning to civilian life, because there's a clear sense of "mission" in the work. "You're there for your community, you're there to help make things better and help people," Wallen said. "You work so closely with the community that you naturally feel that sense of responsibility and commitment to the customer-owners – very much the same way you felt in the military."

Garrett Clary, a former Army paratrooper, found a job in public power in 2021. He now works as an IT architecture analyst in cybersecurity operations with Energy Northwest, a joint action agency that serves 27 public utility districts and municipalities across Washington state. Roughly 30% of the 1,200 people who work at Energy Northwest are veterans.

Clary enlisted in the Army after graduating from high school. He spent seven and half years with the 173rd Airborne Brigade. He spent 27 months, over two separate deployments, in Afghanistan. He was awarded an Army Commendation with Valor for his actions during a firefight in the infamous Korengal Valley in 2007, and a Bronze Star for his service in Afghanistan. He had planned to spend 20 years in the Army before injuries forced him to retire.

"To be honest, I didn't start thinking about a job outside of the military until they told me I had to," he said. Clary enrolled at Columbia Basin Community College in Pasco, Washington, in 2014 thinking he'd get a degree in business administration, because it would be "useful and general enough that I could get a job," he said.

But a computer class started Clary thinking about a career, and not just a job. He earned a degree in cybersecurity in 2019 and found work as a contractor for Energy Northwest in 2020. In January 2021, he became a full-time employee at Energy Northwest's Columbia Generating Station, a

1,207-megawatt nuclear plant near Richland, Wash.

That course that changed Clary's life was the first computer class he had ever taken.

"I would tell anyone getting out of the military to go beyond your comfort zone. You're not sure what you'll like and you probably don't know what all you can do. I had never had a computer class - I didn't join the military to sit behind a desk," said the former paratrooper. "You have to listen and be open to new things, and not limit your options."

From his first interview for the contractor position at Columbia Generating Station, Clary said he knew the organization was different. "I left feeling very encouraged. They were a really motivated group and seemed like people I could work with."

He was attracted to cybersecurity initially, because he said he "understood the language of defend and protect" that drives the field. After several rocky years of transitioning to civilian life, Clary says he found a place with Energy Northwest.

"It's not just the employees, but the culture and the work itself," he said. "We are constantly striving to improve and do the right thing, and there's a big emphasis on that. I had that perspective from my service, and it translates really well here. We're all focused on the same goal, it's a very similar atmosphere to the Army."

Energy Northwest actively participates in the Troops to Energy Jobs Initiative, which is designed to establish and maintain outreach to groups and companies around the country to assist in recruiting veterans. The public power consortium also works with the Washington state veterans hiring initiative YesVets.

Wallen, the general manager at Grant PUD, said his utility has done some outreach with Joint Base Lewis McCord in Washington state and also worked through the Troops for Energy initiative, but he thinks the pool of transitioning veterans is a largely untapped resource for public power.

"I think we're missing an opportunity to partner with all the service branches," Wallen said. "Rural Washington is very much like rural West Virginia in that there aren't that many opportunities for young people, so many leave high school and enlist. We need to let them know that when they come back to the area, the PUD has a range of opportunities for them."

Wallen said "if he had the invitation," he'd be at every base in the Northwest. "We should be selling our brand and helping them transition," he said. "I think it would be a win for public power. We are mission-based organizations that serve our communities. Veterans understand that and we have opportunities for them."



Working Together:



How Joint Action Supports Workforce Development

BY TANYA DERIVI

One of public power's latent strengths is helping neighbors in their time of need. The industry's national mutual aid program has shown repeatedly how working together in an emergency gets the lights back on quickly. That "neighbors helping neighbors" arrangement has been used successfully to bolster utility workforces too. Public power's joint action agencies operate a variety of shared workforce programs to help small utilities meet hiring and retention challenges.

Beyond Mutual Aid Agreements

The Missouri Public Utility Alliance uses the mutual aid construct to connect cities facing staffing shortages. The organization's members include municipally owned electric, natural gas, water, wastewater and broadband utilities.

A long history with mutual aid agreements makes it easier for member cities to work together to meet a wide range of services, said Connie Ford, MPUA's chief member services officer. "Our role is helping to connect cities facing staffing shortages, which really takes mutual aid to the next step," whether temporarily for cities waiting to hire staff or a separate agreement to address an ongoing need. "Short-term, we can pull together resources for members to fill vacancies or identify cities that might be able to help. Longer-term, we will need a multi-pronged approach such as recruitment assistance, advanced utility training, succession planning, or more cooperative service agreements with our staff or outside contractors," she said.



WORKING TOGETHER: HOW JOINT ACTION SUPPORTS WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Addressing Skilled Trades Shortages

Lineworkers continue to be in high demand but short supply. Retention issues led MPUA to stand-up its own electric line services crew to help cities that need project assistance or to handle all operations. A two-person crew will start this summer and a four-person crew will start next year. The effort is likely to grow because more member utilities have expressed interest in the service, Ford said.

Skilled trades training continues to be a high priority. MPUA's line-worker apprentice program had record-high enrollment this year. MPUA has expanded the training to address needs for water, wastewater, and natural gas training. To ensure that training can continue year-round – through very cold Midwest winters – MPUA built an indoor training center. "People can even dig in the dirt and instructors can watch work on poles from a perimeter catwalk," Ford said.

Workforce issues have been a top challenge for members of South Dakota-based Missouri River Energy Services for many years. More than

20 years ago, several smaller MRES-member utilities struggled to retain lineworkers when neighboring investor-owned and rural electric utilities enticed them away with higher wages. In response, MRES developed a distribution maintenance program to fill member staffing needs and to maintain reliability on local electric distribution systems. Crew personnel work for MRES, but the public power utility owns the equipment and stays engaged by directing work plans.

That program has expanded in recent years to meet additional member utility needs. MRES now provides a variety of supplemental services, which include:

- On-call and stand-by services
- Management services to support system planning, budgeting, reporting, purchasing, etc.
- System assessments and recommendations for needed improvements
- Project-specific services, such as service extensions or replacement of aging infrastructure

"For many years, Barnesville contracted with a neighboring investor-owned utility for distribution maintenance services," said Guy Swenson, manager of the telephone, electric and cable utility in Barnesville, Minn. "But they only provided us with bare minimum service. There was no help in determining what maintenance work needed to be done, no recommendations for improvements, and we were very low on their priority list for doing system upgrades."

"When we started using the MRES distribution service, it was like night and day," Swenson said. "The MRES crew assessed our system, identified the problems, and laid out a plan and budget to bring our system back to where it needed to be. I sleep better at night now."

MRES now provides full-time distribution maintenance services to six member utilities and one associate member, and supplemental services to 13 members and one associate. "Most of the requests for supplemental services have come to us in the past three years," said Terry Wolf, vice president of power supply and operations for MRES. "It is getting harder all the time for small communities to attract and retain workers. The supplemental service agreements have helped fill the gap created when long-time employees depart by providing needed expertise from experienced distribution maintenance staff. MRES will do everything we can to support our members and help them be successful in providing reliable and affordable electric service."

Leveraging Shared Learning

Succession planning and shared learning efforts are ripe strategic planning areas for joint action agencies. In Missouri, MPUA is developing a succession planning process to share with members. "We have so many dedicated, long-term employees leaving, and we need a way to capture in-



“We started to ask ourselves how we could provide these services when we have members who either couldn’t afford it or didn’t have enough resources to do it,” Mahlberg said.

formation from these human databases before they retire,” Ford said. It is especially hard for small utilities when that one person retires who knows everyone and where everything is – but it’s all in their head. Ford said the process will address the need to recruit new staff well beforehand, given how challenging it could be to backfill government positions.

Kansas Municipal Energy Agency has led development of shared services efforts to help staff across its 80 member utilities. In July 2020, after months of due diligence through the onset of the pandemic, KMEA’s

board of directors voted to acquire a small engineering construction company, Mid-States Energy Works, based in Salina, Kansas. KMEA General Manager Paul Mahlberg knew member cities needed lineworkers, engineering services, and financial forecasting for rates. “We started to ask ourselves how we could provide these services when we have members who either couldn’t afford it or didn’t have enough resources to do it,” Mahlberg said.

The KMEA/Mid-States engineering construction company has grown by one-third in just two years. “Now we have 12 people, including engineers, a former lineworker, operational experts, and people who can design and construct substations and transmission lines. The biggest challenge is successfully managing all the work from our members,” Mahlberg said. In addition, an agency staff member works on financial forecasting and rates.

Helping Smaller Utilities Succeed

KMEA also heard about the need for lineworkers from one of its smallest and most isolated public power utilities, in Dighton, Kansas. Dighton officials turned to the joint action agency for help, said Gerry Bieker, KMEA’s operations manager. The agency placed a two-person line crew in Dighton in 2020. “It was in line with what we were already doing with KMEA/Mid-States and it has been really successful; they’re extremely happy,” Bieker said. KMEA plans to expand the number of crews to cover a broader regional need.

Tyson McGreer, KMEA’s manager of member services, acknowledged that smaller cities are especially vulnerable when talent leaves. “Some are rotating through people faster than ever. It adds complexity to managing departments that are already under budgetary constraints and multiple resource demands, so we try to help them better understand what it takes to safely run and maintain a municipal utility,” he said. Needs may continue to grow as longtime employees retire, Mahlberg said. “They’re lucky if someone can shadow them for a while – but I also know we have the talent here to help them if we can build that trust.”

KMEA is examining how to share resources to address ongoing supply chain constraints. “We have been discussing the idea of building a centrally located warehouse with shared inventory across our 80 members,” Mahlberg said. “That way we can leverage bigger purchasing power by



WORKING TOGETHER: HOW JOINT ACTION SUPPORTS WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

buying transformers, poles, conductors – whatever those pain points are – in bulk.”

Succession Planning

Missouri River Energy Services has developed a suite of workforce resources to help its members succeed and adapt to future industry changes. Tammie Krumm, vice president of human resources and administration, created several new HR initiatives shortly after she joined MRES in 2017. She quickly realized that the policies, procedures, and templates developed for MRES could be valuable for member utilities, to assist them with recruitment, succession planning, and employee development efforts.

Succession planning is critical to avoiding extended and costly vacancies and assuring the stability of business operations. MRES succession planning resources include:

- Mapping when employees are likely to retire
- Evaluating strengths, weaknesses and readiness for succession
- Planning for individual development to make an employee promotable
- Identifying legal and diversity issues

- Identifying emergency positions without successors
- Planning for positions that cannot be filled internally

In addition, MRES provides recruitment templates and invites members to advertise job openings on the MRES website. “We are all in this together, so let’s share our pool of candidates and recruiting resources,” Krumm said. Working together, MRES and its members can keep qualified lineworkers in the MRES family versus the alternative of losing critical personnel. Krumm keeps a database of candidates and refers line-worker applicants to all member utilities when they have openings.

“Employees are a utility’s greatest asset,” Krumm said. “Most positions can be replaced from within if the utility takes the time to prepare, train and thoughtfully promote existing employees and MRES is here to help them through the process. We all need to grow our staff and build our bench, but we have better results if we do it together.”

Tanya DeRivi was formerly senior director, member engagement for the American Public Power Association. She left the APPA staff earlier this year.



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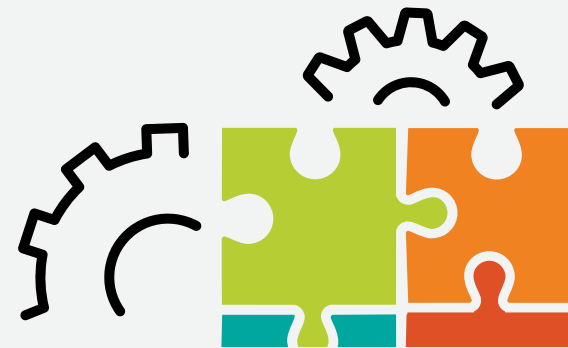
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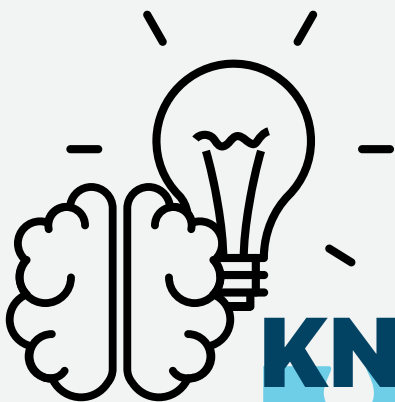
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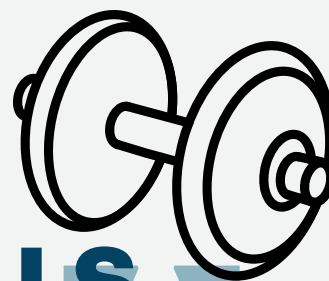
**Engaging the Next Class:
Making the Most of
Utility Internships**



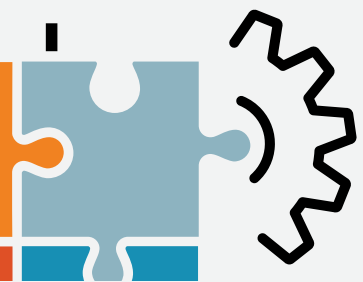
BY SUSAN PARTAIN, SENIOR MANAGER, CONTENT STRATEGY, AMERICAN PUBLIC POWER ASSOCIATION



GOAL



SKILLS



RELATIONSHIP

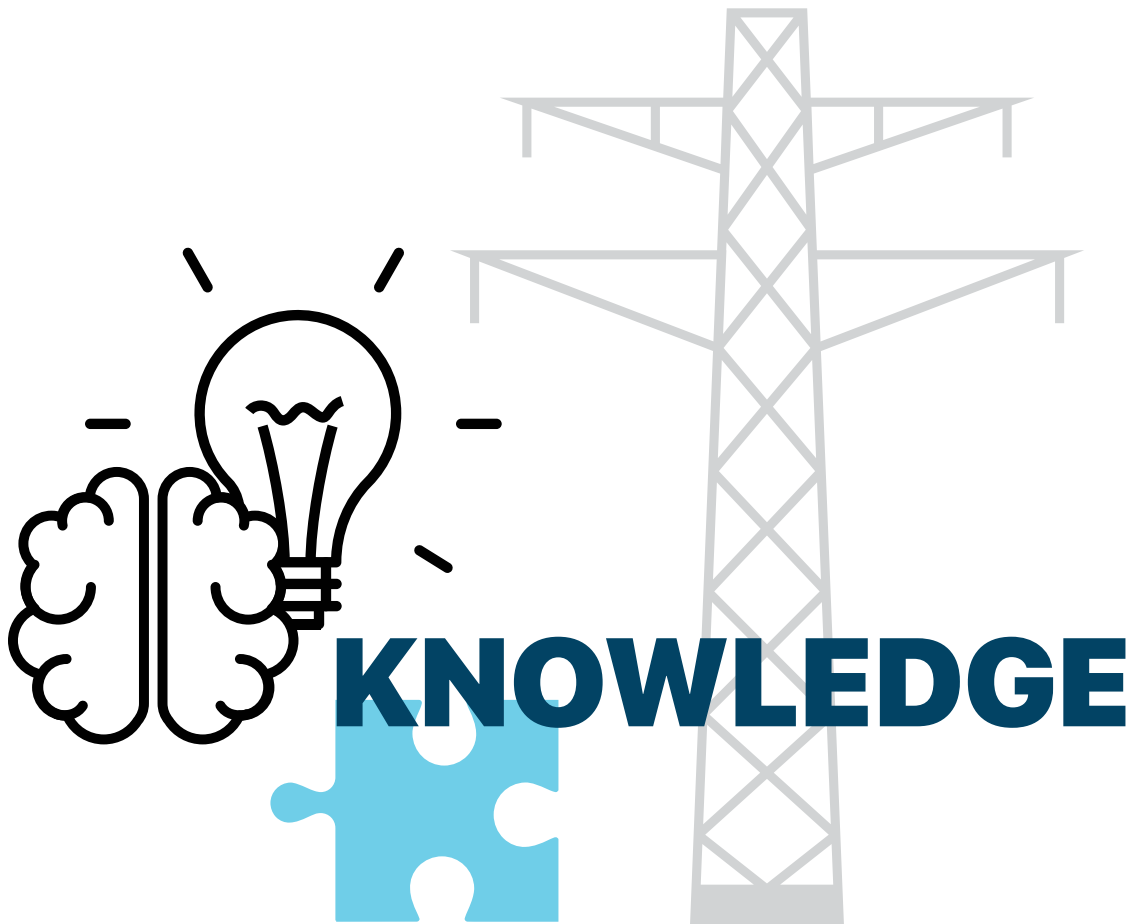


MENTORING



OPPORTUNITY

ENGAGING THE NEXT CLASS: MAKING THE MOST OF UTILITY INTERNSHIPS



Inspiring the next generation of talent to work in public power involves designing opportunities for individuals to learn what it means to work in the industry and showcasing the skills required for the jobs. From honing in on how to build interest in skilled trades to finding a way to match student interns' skills with organizational needs, public power utilities are taking a creative approach to recruiting workforce newcomers.

Creating the Right Fit

For Mike Noreen, conservation & efficiency coordinator at River Falls Municipal Utilities in Wisconsin, finding and hiring interns requires flexibility on the part of both the utility and the prospective intern.

Noreen has mentored a number of interns at the small utility over the past few years. River Falls has offered paid internships, thanks to financial support from the American Public Power Association's Demonstration of Energy and Efficiency Developments, or DEED, program. The interns River Falls hired have focused on a variety of projects, from energy efficiency programs to mapping and customer outreach.

Utilities almost always have staffing gaps, said Noreen. "The value goes beyond just engineering – there are places for a lot of different career paths and skill sets."

He recommended identifying a need or skills gap within the utility and having that need be the start of a conversation about what the utility is looking for in an intern. Those interests or needs could be anything from understanding GIS software to graphic design, grant writing, or using social media, he said. "You might be surprised by asking throughout the utility what are ways people could help," he said.

River Falls has developed a relationship with a local university that provides leads for interns each year, but utilities without a nearby higher education presence can find interns through other community networks, he said. Utilities can

work with local schools and other organizations, even those seemingly unrelated to utility work, when looking for internship candidates, Noreen said. This word-of-mouth approach has worked well for River Falls.

Casting a net for interns in the community has worked well for River Falls. "Usually someone comes up with a perfect kid for the job," he said. Conversations with prospective interns should revolve around how the utility can offer something tangible that aligns with a student's interests. Part of the process is selling the idea of utility work to students. "People aren't going into college saying they want to work for public power," he said. "Keep it flexible for what they are going to be doing, while introducing public power as a career path."

Students between their sophomore and senior years of college tend to need some direction on how they can apply what they are learning in school to a profession and how to grow as professionals, Noreen said.

"I want to give them opportunities to take on projects and give them a capstone project or two," he said. He tries to form projects that allow interns to build confidence in researching a problem, working with a variety of staff, and conducting analyses or compiling reports. Essentially, projects that show them how they will need to work with others, explore alternatives to a problem, and learn how to take feedback and constructive

criticism. Utilities should be open to flexible working arrangements, as interns likely cannot work 40 hours a week or be at a desk in the office to complete their work.

Hosting an intern requires a commitment from utility staff, but mentoring and managing interns can be rewarding for staff and the utility. “We’ve all had a lot of help in our lives and, at some point, it is our turn to offer help,” he said.

“You get out what you put into it,” said Noreen. “Don’t give them jobs that you just don’t want to do. Don’t give them something that will be ongoing for years, and you are only asking them to come in sometime in the middle.”

Noreen said public power opportunities can allow interns to be exposed to other aspects of city services and to network with people in other city departments. One River Falls intern learned more about job possibilities in the city’s wastewater system that aligned with her interest in conservation. Given public power’s community focus, this kind of exposure is helpful regardless of the intern’s later career path. Internship opportunities that show a viable pathway to a future career can be a way for young workers “to come to your small town – or prevent them from leaving it,” he said.

Outside of fulfilling skills gaps and workforce development, interns can be a valuable source of ideas and offer a new perspective on the utility.

“Some of these young people are so smart and think about things totally different than utilities,” he said. “We are a business that has not changed for a long, long time. Now we’re in a position of great change. Be open to what they’ve learned, the perceptions of what they have, and use those to your advantage or to know that’s a blind spot for you.”

Preparing Specialists

A little over five years ago, Kissimmee Utility Authority in Florida established the Reginald Hardee Electrical Lineworker Scholarship, which supports KUA internships for local graduating seniors who are interested in learning about electric lineworker careers. Interns in the program perform a variety of tasks, such as preparing pad sites, conduits, and related materials for installation, setting pad-mounted equipment, or supplying lineworkers with materials and tools while watching them perform a variety of duties. The linework interns have helped dig holes and trenches for installing poles and underground lines, checked the location of utility lines to ensure safe installation, and assisted in making terminations.

“Interns are often pleasantly surprised by the large amount of hands-on experience that they receive throughout the program,” said Brian Horton, KUA’s president and CEO. “Students who may not be interested in a traditional higher education model, such as attending a college or university, find the internship opportunity to be very attractive.”

KUA promotes the internship opportunity through a local education foundation and various local education enrichment groups. Preference is given to applicants with financial need.

In addition to providing local high school graduates the opportunity to have a paid internship, the program has helped KUA fill a gap in its pipeline of highly skilled trade professionals.

“A large portion of our workforce was aging out of the industry. We were looking for highly trained and specialized workers to help fill the gap,” said Horton. Since the program began in 2017, five interns have participated and two of those interns have gone on to become lineworkers.





OPPORTUNITY

Making Connections

While getting people interested in utility jobs is a goal of internships, showcasing the array of work and types of projects in public power should be part of the experience. That is the philosophy behind Energy Northwest's program to support its member utilities throughout the Pacific Northwest.

The joint action agency provides workshops, training, and other opportunities for interns at participating member utilities to learn about public power career opportunities, said Sarah Giomi, energy services specialist at Energy Northwest. Students work throughout the summer at one utility, where they have a mentor, but they participate in professional development training and activities with other interns. Students get to build connections with other utilities and share highlights of what they worked on with other students and staff of participating utilities.

Interns love having the opportunity to meet with other students, and learn how their projects tie into broader grid transformation efforts. They also like the value-added training and networking. "It creates a more diverse experience than the typical summer job," Giomi said.

The training programs also teach interns about the public power segment of the electric utility industry. Energy Northwest partnered with the Northwest Public Power Association to offer the interns training about the public power model and how it affects operations.

"When we are in public power, we assume that everyone knows what it is," said Giomi. But "giving them hands-on experience to show first-hand what public power is and to be able to be a part of it, they learn a lot about the utilities and want to come back." Giomi said the opportunity to help member utilities that serve rural areas was a major impetus for creating the program. "People see opportunities and want to stay," she said.

While staff at participating utilities handle day-to-day management of the interns and their utility-specific projects, Energy Northwest coordinates activities for the interns, including regular meetups (held virtually) and assists with recruitment and promotion of the internships. Promotional activities include attending career fairs, classroom visits, and meeting with extracurricular groups to talk about the internships and career paths in public power. These activities would be difficult or impossible for smaller and more remote utilities to do on their own, Giomi said. She also helps participating members with logistics, such as finding suitable summer housing for interns.

ENGAGING THE NEXT CLASS: MAKING THE MOST OF UTILITY INTERNSHIPS

Giomi herself was an intern at Energy Northwest and she drew from her experience to shape a program that would resonate with students. A big part of that experience is engaging them through various digital platforms, including social media, to strengthen connections among the interns and with mentors in the network. Giomi was an intern in 2019 and joined the Energy Northwest staff as a full-time employee in 2020.

The shift to more virtual learning and working due to the pandemic proved beneficial to the program design, as participating utilities were already using virtual training and networking sessions.

“We learned that we could serve more utilities and connect even more students,” said Giomi. The virtual format allowed for broader participation from across the region than would have occurred with in-person meetups.

Giomi hopes to expand the program to serve more students and more Energy Northwest members. As COVID-related restrictions are eased and

people can resume larger in-person gatherings, the internship program will continue to rely on virtual sessions to allow for more interaction among participants across the region. Giomi hopes to hold in-person sessions to start and end each internship period.

Five interns, all with engineering backgrounds, participated in the program's first year. They worked on projects ranging from working in hydroelectric facilities to broadband, solar, and data analysis. For summer 2022, the program has expanded to include seven utilities and 15 interns with a broader range of career goals, including business, marketing, IT, and safety.

All interns from the first year ended the program saying they wanted a career in public power.

APPA's DEED program contributed funds to support the program.

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NURTURING THE ROOTS

Utilities and research organizations work with colleges to groom the next generation of energy experts.

BY DAVID BLAYLOCK, DIRECTOR, DIGITAL CONTENT AND DATA ANALYSIS, AMERICAN PUBLIC POWER ASSOCIATION

In a time of market disruptors shaking up every incumbent industry, running an electric utility is also at a time of massive change. Coupled with the ongoing workforce crunch that has come about thanks to the retirements of the baby boomer generation, the skills transfers that once were learned on the job and developed through shadowing and apprenticeships are becoming less common.



NURTURING THE ROOTS

Today's utility employees must tackle their jobs with a constant state of learning and do so with the agility to learn new technologies and skills while also executing their day-to-day jobs. Now every function within a utility needs to make sense of new customer expectations and the ways they are pulling the utility into new endeavors, including support for electric vehicles, energy storage, distributed energy resources, and microgrids. These enhance the customer and utility relationship, but also introduce new complexities related to managing loads, data science, billing, and cybersecurity.

In 2013, the Electric Power Research Institute launched "GridEd" (The Center for Grid Engineering) to host the DOE initiative called GEARED, or "Grid Engineering for Accelerated Renewable Energy Deployment." GridEd is a partnership between EPRI, research universities, and industry advisers, to aid in creating the curricula and practices needed for both professional and academic education and training needs head on.

"The principle involved was that once these new technologies were ready, there would be new engineers coming through the university system with working knowledge," said Tom Reddoch, a principal technical executive at EPRI who heads GridEd. "We would address a new workforce that from their very fundamental training coming out as engineers, would be educated in the role of solar and how it would fit with the electric grid."

GridEd originally focused on solar and distributed energy resources, but it now expands further into new technologies as part of the "Grid-Ready Energy Analytics Training with Data," or "GREAT with Data," initiative, which focuses on five key technical areas: power system fundamentals, data science and predictive analytics, cybersecurity, information and communication technologies, and distributed energy resources integration.

This awareness of undergraduate education needs is coupled with awareness that the industry needed a retrofit for those already in the industry, he added. For this, GridEd and its partners roll out resources that leverage EPRI's programs to educate members on new technologies and their use in the electric grid. This training component has focused on electric utility employees, but, because it is funded by DOE funds, it is also open to the public.

A Special Role for Public Power

Public power utilities involved with GridEd include Austin Energy, Lincoln Electric System in Nebraska, the New York Power Authority, Salt River Project in Arizona, and Santee Cooper in South Carolina. The Tennessee Valley Authority and the Western Area Power Administration are GridEd industry advisers as well.

"Public power entities have been particularly involved with some of our outreach to increase engagement with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), which is a place where we really want to stress the importance of opening new opportunity," Reddoch said. All of the six HBCUs in GridEd are sponsored by public power utilities.

"At its heart, GridEd is about creating the workforce that we're going to need as our electric grid evolves and, moreover, continuing to support that workforce to be educated and trained in the new technologies that are driving all of the change in our industry," he said. "Every time we introduce a new technology, there is a disruption, and we need to make sure that we are both enhancing the electric systems while ensuring that the incoming and existing employees are able to continue as core members of a utility's workforce."

This is particularly important in public power, where employees whose jobs are disrupted — he uses the example of meter readers in the wake of grid modernization efforts — are not just loyal employees, but part of the constituency the utility serves as a community-owned utility.

Creating a Bond Between Industry and Higher Education

The undergraduate education program is built off analyses by partners of existing university curricula to determine gaps for those coming out of existing power engineering programs. These curricula, especially at the undergraduate level, struggle to keep up with major industry changes related to data analytics and machine learning and the impact of energy storage and flexible loads. Nor are undergraduate programs addressing new technologies like 5G communications, cloud and edge computing, and artificial intelligence.

GridEd-affiliated utilities can nominate universities to become affiliates of the program and receive resources developed through the initiative.

"One key to having this involve the universities and the utilities is that it bonds the places that need this from both sides," Reddoch said. "On one side is the source of the future engineers who are being educated in these principles and on the other is the industry that will hire them and need their knowledge in this, and where we'll continue to support them through our training courses."

"This is great for the utilities that take part in the partnerships with the universities because they've had an opportunity to have an influence on making the incoming workforce better before hiring them," he said. "It's letting the buyer improve the product before even buying it, you could say."

Boosting Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

BY TANYA DERIVI



BOOSTING DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

The energy industry has been described as “not very diverse.” According to the Center for Energy Workforce Development, utility employees are 78% male and 76% White.

How public power leaders foster diversity, equity, and inclusion (“DEI”) within their utilities matters both for employees and as a positive public demonstration. Utilities are working to create workforces that reflect the communities they serve. These efforts vary. Some utilities support increased STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) education for future employees. Many work to increase job opportunities for women, especially in the skilled trades. Local leaders make a concerted effort to appoint more diverse governing boards and senior utility management.

Yet the evolving DEI area has its own set of challenges. How public power leaders work to increase representation in leadership roles, recruit and hire diverse candidates, and then retain diverse talent is approached differently in every community. Advancing DEI initiatives could be as simple as revisiting long-standing practices. Job descriptions that use

gender-specific terminology (like “lineman” or “journeyman”) or require degrees and experience not necessary to perform a job could repel prospective candidates. This is especially true for skilled trades, where recruitment and retention has been difficult.

Lack of inclusion is a significant challenge for retaining diverse talent. The Snohomish County Public Utility District in Washington state has been intentional in creating an environment in which all staff can feel welcomed and valued. Through a partnership with RootWorks, LLC, the PUD has conducted a diversity, equity, and inclusion assessment and offered training for leadership. The utility has also used focus groups and one-on-one and group discussions with employees, and organized a cross-functional inclusion committee. The goal is to continue to invest in creating an environment and culture where the utility honors and respects differences and leverages the unique experiences and perspectives where everyone can feel welcomed and valued.

In Texas, Austin Energy designates employees who are encouraged to provide a DEI inclusion moment in meetings.

Public power utilities have also increased recruitment efforts for women and historically underrepresented people. Also in Washington, Tacoma Power has a dedicated program to advance women in the trades. Program materials tout skilled trades positions through the utility’s electrical apprenticeship program for women interested in working with their hands and who enjoy building and

creating projects. The utility has provided funding for the Trade Occupations Opportunity Learning Center, a general construction pre-apprenticeship program operated by Bates Technical College.

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power’s governing board recently approved a five-year, \$5 million research partnership with engineering schools at 15 historically Black colleges and universities across the nation. The initiative will coordinate technical and scientific research on behalf of the nation’s largest municipal utility.

“LADWP has incredibly challenging goals ahead of us, and guaranteeing that we have consistent access to high quality scientific research is an essential part of staying on target,” said Cynthia McClain-Hill, president of the utility’s governing board. The utility works with an organization, Advancing Minorities’ Interest in Engineering. The historically Black colleges and universities have a strong tradition of empowering African Americans who were long excluded from higher education and job opportunities, she said.

In October 2020, the Board of Water and Power Commissioners became the first all-female city commission in Los Angeles history.

“This initiative is an example of what the department’s development of a racial equity action plan and the creation of an Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion are meant to do — to create opportunities where there may not have been before,” said Martin

L. Adams, LADWP’s general manager and chief engineer. “As LADWP attracts top scientific talent for our next generation, we must also keep equity in mind to ensure we are reaching potential candidates who may not have been traditionally represented in our ranks and in the utility industry,” said Monique Earl, LADWP senior assistant general manager and chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer.

In addition to collaboration on research projects, LADWP will work closely with the schools’ research faculty and curriculum developers to enhance training on the diverse set of fields required to manage Los Angeles’s water and power utilities.

The Tennessee Valley Authority is also increasing DEI initiatives to help build strong communities. TVA has dedicated \$7 million in education grants to help 100 K-12 public schools make smart energy choices to improve the classroom learning environment. The federal utility is also spending more than \$3 million to ensure equitable access to services, economic empowerment, and energy and environmental justice. It is spending \$2.5 million to make the future low-carbon economy equitable, diverse, and inclusive, and it has developed training to guide suppliers through the contracting process. In 2021, TVA spent \$856 million with small businesses and \$365 million with diverse businesses.

Confronting Employee Burnout

BY SUSAN PARTAIN, SENIOR MANAGER, CONTENT STRATEGY, AMERICAN PUBLIC POWER ASSOCIATION



CONFRONTING EMPLOYEE BURNOUT

With the added stressors and uncertainty from the past few years, more attention is being paid to how employees — particularly frontline workers — may be experiencing burnout. For utility workers, burnout might stem from a constant pressure to perform or meet expectations, such as trying to ensure the highest reliability, feeling a need to improve customer service or call times, or a drive to keep outage times low.

Burnout is common — a survey from Catalyst suggests that 88% of workers have experienced some level of burnout, and 60% reported high levels of burnout.

The World Health Organization put out a definition for burnout in 2019 as a “phenomenon” of unmanaged chronic workplace stress characterized by exhaustion, cynicism or negativity toward one’s job, and reduced productivity. Notably, the WHO clarified that burnout is not a medical condition, but can be a factor behind underlying health conditions.

But burnout can lead to serious consequences. Prolonged burnout can spur depression, anxiety or substance abuse disorders. When an employee is burned out, the organization may suffer. Potential effects include a higher likelihood of safety violations, diminished productivity, decreased morale, and increased negativity in the workplace. There is also a direct financial cost. A Gallup survey found that employees experiencing burnout are 63% more likely to call out sick, and 2.6 times as likely to seek a different job. Lost productivity from workplace stress is estimated to cost employers in excess of \$190 billion annually.

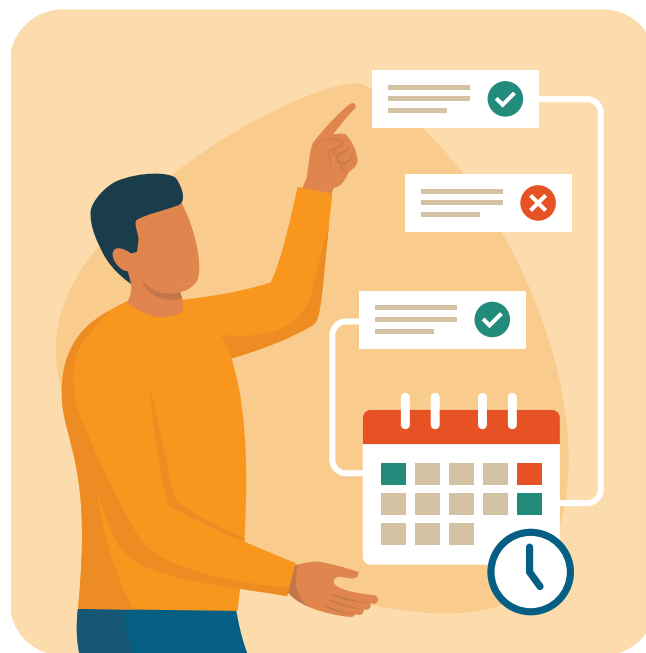
Organizations must change from thinking of burnout as an individual employee issue to thinking about it as a workplace problem, said Jennifer Moss, author of *The Burnout Epidemic* and keynote speaker at APPA’s 2021 Business and Financial Conference. She recommends organizations look inward to assess why the work environment lacks conditions for employees to flourish and to determine how to make it safe.

For employees such as lineworkers and plant operators, who must be available around the clock, simply changing a worker’s hours or allowing

an individual to take a few days off to rest does not address the underlying problems, which could include a mismatch of the employee’s skills and the role, or a feeling of being under-appreciated. In addition to considering flexibility for the employee, supervisors might want to consider how an employee’s roles can adjust to better fit individual skills or interests (and support another utility need), or how they might recognize employee efforts in a new or meaningful way.

Naz Beheshti, author of *Pause. Breathe. Choose. Become CEO of Your Wellness*, suggests that employers can combat burnout by involving employees in collaborative discussions, which can foster a sense of increased autonomy, and model transparency and fairness in making decisions. Public power organizations can strive to support a community connection and reinforce the shared values of the organization’s mission.

The American Psychiatric Association Foundation’s Center for Workplace Mental Health offers a suite of resources for employers on how to combat burnout in the workplace. The organization suggests surveying employees about factors that may be contributing to burnout and then creating a team to develop an action plan for addressing the identified factors.



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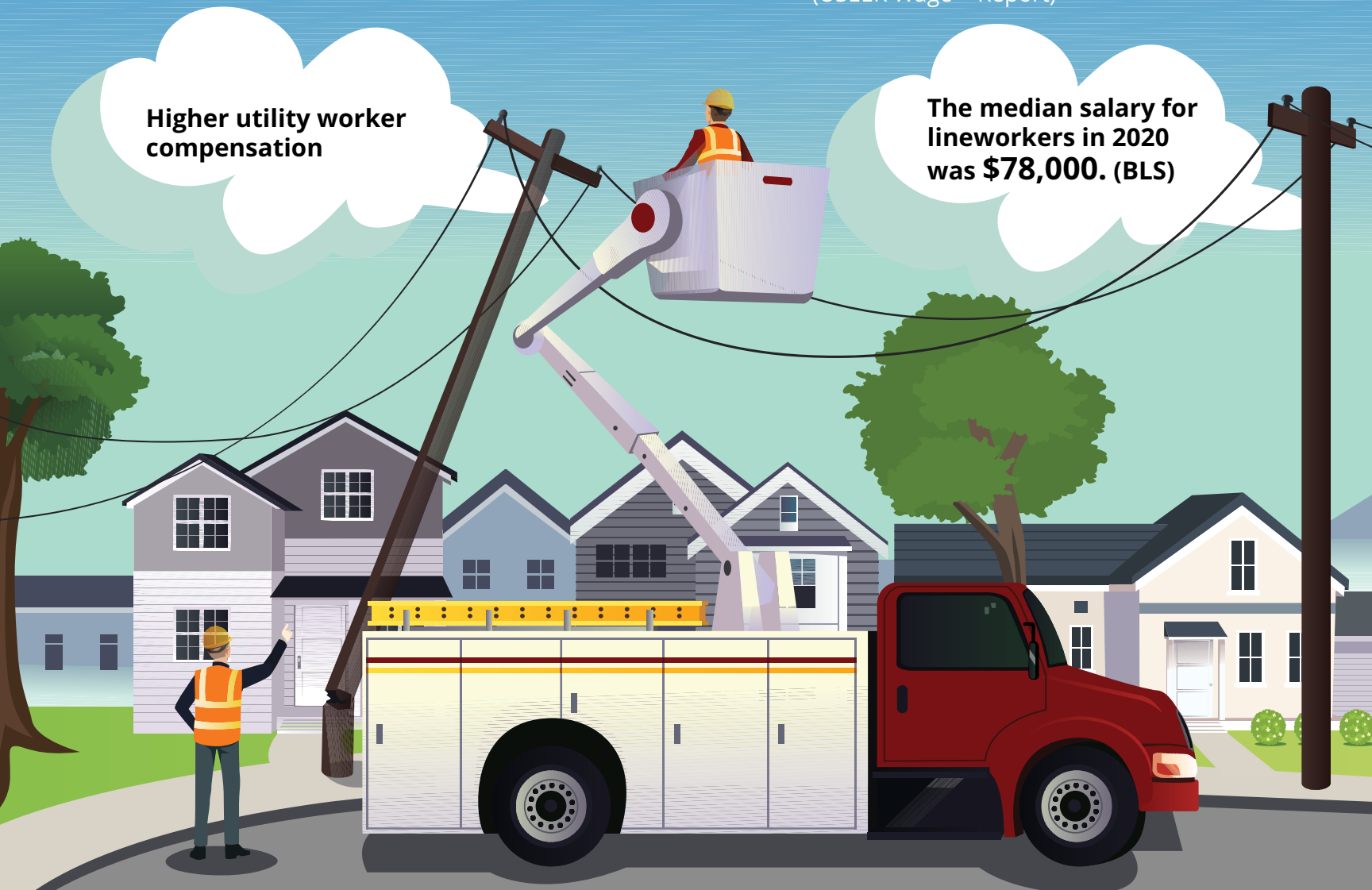
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- Utility employees earned a median hourly wage of **\$41.08 in 2020** — 10% higher than the industry average. (USEER Wage + Report)

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