

# MULTIPLE CITIES

## Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Training Program


### Dovetailing the American Rescue Plan

In March 2021, President Joe Biden put forward his American Rescue Plan, a sprawling, \$2 trillion piece of legislation. It's the crux of the administration's broader Build Back Better program, a proposed series of investments to revitalize American infrastructure and help curb inequity and climate change along the way. Coupled with the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (also known as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act), signed in November 2021, these programs would create a groundswell of green infrastructure investments.


One major piece of the plan is a \$15 billion federal investment to build and deploy 500,000 electric vehicle charging stations, hastening the transition away from vehicles that use fossil fuels in the United States. The plan identified the [Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Training Program \(EVITP\)](#), a nationally recognized training and certification course, as a potential standard for electricians working on federally-funded charging projects to ensure safe and high-quality installations.

Betony Jones, the founder of Inclusive Economics, a research and strategy organization focused on the economic effects of climate policy, saw an opportunity to elevate city action on economic inclusion: If the American Cities Climate Challenge could fund the training courses and ensure broad participation of women electricians and those who were Black, Indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC), participating cities would be perfectly positioned to ensure that the federal funding for EV charging stations would support cities' jobs, equity, and climate goals.

A number of factors were already in play to support the Climate Challenge EVITP effort, starting with a newfound desire among cities to support racial equity. "Last year a lot of decision makers really started to take seriously systemic racism and the structural barriers to inclusion," says Jones, whose organization spearheaded



The Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Training Program (EVITP) is a national training and certification course for electricians installing electric vehicle supply equipment.



the effort. “It’s not acceptable for the benefits of clean energy or the jobs created to accrue only to those already able to access these benefits.” EVITP training as the proposed standard also meant that the Climate Challenge could rapidly support getting more electricians certified across the country, in all Climate Challenge cities.


The effort also faced barriers. Existing levels of electric vehicle demand influenced each city’s interest in the training. In some places, electric vehicle infrastructure—and the capacity to train electricians for it—had barely emerged. Other cities had different training priorities that left them without the capacity to immediately host the classes the Climate Challenge wanted to support. To overcome these challenges, Jones worked rapidly, partnering with the EVITP and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) to enroll and train electricians in a matter of weeks during the Climate Challenge’s six-month extension in 2021.

### Engagement, Fast

Taking full advantage of growing interest in electric vehicles required acting immediately to leverage the federal opportunity. “We didn’t really wait,” says Jones. “We knew that cities wanted to align with the Biden administration, but nobody specifically asked for training support for EVITP.” To promote that alignment, NRDC and Inclusive Economics worked with Bernie Kotler, the executive director of Sustainable Energy Solutions, to engage the National Electrical Contractors Association and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers on the training opportunity. Kotler and EVITP reached out to local Joint Apprenticeship Training Committees in all 25 Climate Challenge cities, offering to pay for a series of EVITP certification courses—as long as at least 50 percent of participants were BIPOC and/or women electricians and the training happened that summer. Of the 25 Climate Challenge cities, 19 immediately signed up to offer the training in their jurisdiction, with the other 6 cities interested but unable to immediately commit.

With financial support from the Climate Challenge, EVITP certification courses were offered to cities across the country, training 1,330 electricians. In an industry still disproportionately white and male, half of the electricians trained were women and people of color. “We’re seeding the labor force so that half of the people qualified to install EV infrastructure will be women and people of color,” Jones says.

To reach the greatest number of electricians, Climate Challenge staff partnered with the EVITP governing organization and turned to the IBEW, a 725,000-member union representing electrical workers, to



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provide the training. “A huge way to accelerate this and make this possible in a couple months was working directly with the national IBEW and EVITP partners, who have those local relationships in all of the cities,” says Jones. In doing so, they were able to avoid having to build relational infrastructure from scratch. By relying on local IBEW chapters, whose membership is made up of area electricians, classes were also able to reach women and BIPOC electricians quickly. Those organizations and trainings promote the “good union jobs” the Biden administration has centered its economic policy on.

Additionally, many IBEW chapters have launched initiatives in recent years to increase diversity in the newest generation of electricians. “Their apprenticeship classes are more demographically diverse than the journey-level workforce,” says Jones. Potential participants were often electricians finishing their training in the same facilities offering EVITP certification—something of a captive audience, much easier to reach than electricians years out of school.

Aside from its funding source and emphasis on under-represented groups, the Climate Challenge–tied EVITP certification courses are typical of electrician training programs. Courses tend to take around 20 hours. Electricians in the labor force typically complete the program over the course of five sessions of four hours each; for apprentices still in classroom training, certification takes less than a week.

The scale of support depends on the city. In Los Angeles, where large capacity exists to provide EVITP courses, the Climate Challenge offered its scholarship to 80 people. Smaller cities trained between 10 and 20 people with the scholarship. But even in cities with a lower capacity for training, the pivot toward electric vehicles is becoming palpable. “A lot of signs are pointing to the electric vehicle market being on a pretty serious upswing,” says Kelly Blynn, an NRDC electric vehicle technical strategist. “There are all these automaker commitments to go all-electric by certain dates, and the same big automakers are investing billions of dollars in electric vehicle development.” Policy is also driving the transition, with states like California, for example, announcing plans to end sales of vehicles using conventional fuel by 2035.

## The Challenges

IBEW’s long-standing role as the labor union for electricians permitted Inclusive Economics and NRDC to leverage its vast member network. Yet for much of its 130-year history, membership has skewed White and male, the exact imbalance the Climate Challenge’s scholarship seeks to remedy. Though IBEW has taken strides in recent years to be more inclusive, some questioned the Climate Challenge’s choice of partner. “We’ve heard that in some cities, there’s real animosity between IBEW and minority contractor groups or electrical training organizations serving an under-represented population,” Jones notes. Given the time constraints, there was value in working with IBEW as a national partner with local affiliates. It was also a way to align with President Biden’s goal of supporting labor union involvement in climate action. “We want to work with IBEW and other unions,” Jones says. “And we need to continue to look for ways to make the clean economy and its jobs more accessible to people who’ve been long excluded.” Setting aside 50 percent of the scholarships for women and BIPOC IBEW apprentices allowed them to advance both goals.

## Looking Ahead

Like many of the other Climate Challenge initiatives, the EVITP equitable training effort represents a new approach to confronting climate change. “We haven’t gotten very far with our own arguments, with our own voices,” says Jones. The state of the environment is an existential affair, but for stakeholders with a much more immediate set of needs, that framing doesn’t always connect. “We know that to build the political will necessary to get more aggressive action on climate change, we need to build better coalitions,” she says. The clean energy transition needs to be designed and executed in a way that doesn’t only confront climate change, but also addresses threats to racial justice and income inequality that are often much more tangible to people. In making the electric vehicle economy something that everyone can benefit from, those dual goals of climate resilience and equity can both be served.