

# How to Work in the Alternative Energy Industry

Explore this Article ■ [Getting Your Education](#) ■ [Finding Employment](#) ■ [Excelling in Your Field](#)  
■ [Tips and Warnings](#) ■ [References](#)

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For many people, changing the world is a dream. For the millions of workers in the field of alternative energy, it's a daily reality. Launching a career in clean energy is a rewarding way to build a healthier planet, and one that grows more important every year. After completing your primary education and developing a unique skillset, you can begin making inroads that will help you land a job where you can make a real difference.

Part  
1

## Part 1 of 3: Getting Your Education



**1 Identify your skills and interests.** There are many different types of jobs in alternative energy, including positions in solar, wind and marine energy. To know which path would be the best fit for you, take into account what you most enjoy doing, along with your areas of expertise. You can then compare your skills to those that are in demand and think about where you might be able to fill a need.<sup>[1]</sup>

- A few of the various roles industry leaders are looking to fill include laboratory researchers, engineers, human resources liaisons and on-site technicians.
- You don't have to know much about alternative energy to break into the field. If you have an interest in chemistry or communications, for instance, you could use that interest to land a relevant position.



- 2 Go to school for an applicable degree.** Certain academic subjects can go a long way in preparing you for the demands of a job in alternative energy. Degrees in STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) are particularly valuable to employers, since they show that you already possess relevant skills and knowledge.<sup>[2]</sup>
- Look into schools offering programs that will translate directly into the career path you've chosen.<sup>[3]</sup>



**3 Channel your education into an industry role.** Even non-science and technologies students may be able to find work in alternative energy as accountants, marketing directors or IT support staff. Though they're sometimes overlooked, these employees are indispensable when it comes to managing facilities and handling the business aspects of producing clean energy.[4]

- It can be a good idea to take a few science classes on the side so that you'll have the foundation you need to understand key concepts and terms.[5]
- Almost any degree has the potential to be useful in alternative energy in some way or another.



**4 Obtain special certification.** In addition to higher education, there are also training programs you can complete that will give you a leg up when first embarking on your career. The Renewable Energy Professional certification (REP) is one of many such courses that are designed to prepare you for the unique demands and challenges of the industry. With focused training and specialized certification, you'll go further, faster.

- To be eligible for programs like the REP, you'll typically need to have either a four-year university degree in a related field or two year technical degree, along with a predetermined amount of experience in the energy industry.
- Other training programs and groups that may be worth looking into include the North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners (NABCEP), the Solar Professionals Certificate Program (SPCP) and any number of certifications from the Renewable and Sustainable Energy Institute (RASEI).<sup>[6]</sup>



**5 Work on certified green projects.** If you already work in a profession like construction or plumbing, you might be able to seek out projects that are carried out using specialized codes and procedures. With credentials like this under your belt, you'll stand out to employers and be much more likely to be selected to work on other green building projects in the future.<sup>[7]</sup>

- Public facilities, housing development projects and businesses that work closely with the federal government are often green certified.<sup>[8]</sup>





**1 Apply to work for different companies.** Research alternative energy opportunities in your area and submit your resume, along with other credentials like certifications or relevant volunteer work. Focus on companies offering positions you think you'd be a good fit for. You may have to build up your work experience in a related field before you can be considered for a position with a respected company.

- You'll have the most luck finding a job in places that rely heavily on renewable energy sources.
- Be prepared to relocate to another city, state or district, if necessary. Though more and more jobs are created every day, the alternative energy is still an up-and-coming industry, which means you might not be able to find many openings on a local level.



**2 Look for opportunities with major corporations.** Many established companies are going green by changing the way they operate. Corporate giants like Walmart, McDonald's and Coca-Cola are all switching to more efficient methods of production that focus on reusing materials, reducing waste and minimizing the harm being done to the environment. You may be able to get in on the ground floor of one of these companies.[9]

- Review the career options listed on a company's website to see whether they have positions available in the energy sector.[10]
- The competition to work for big, profitable companies like these is stiff. The more schooling, certifications and practical experience you have under your belt, the better your chances of standing out from other hopeful applicants will be.



**3 Sign on with a nonprofit organization.** Smaller privately funded companies are also beginning to get in on the action. Nonprofit work is centered around benefiting the world's communities rather than competing in the marketplace. One of these startups may be a great place to apply your talents, especially if you're interested in the ecological or project management side of things.<sup>[11]</sup>

- Along with more scientific duties, nonprofits make use of coordinators, grant writers and spokespeople to raise awareness about clean energy and make building projects safer and more sustainable.
- Nonprofit organizations want employees who are passionate and driven. When interviewing for a position, take the time to explain how and why you want to make a difference.<sup>[12]</sup>





**4 Complete an internship.** Another possible inroad to a career in green energy is through internships and apprenticeships. With an internship, you'll get the chance to learn more about one of the many types of jobs in the alternative energy sector while receiving valuable on-the-job training. You may even be offered a permanent position once your internship comes to an end.<sup>[13]</sup>

- If you live in the US, the Department of Energy's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) is a good place to start looking.<sup>[14]</sup>
- National laboratories that specialize in clean energy research may also offer internship and apprenticeship opportunities.



**5 Look at postings on job sites.** Browse job listings on websites like GreenBiz and Energy Jobs Portal and see if you meet the criteria outlined in each. Online job boards are a useful resource because they group together jobs from different sectors of the industry, like wind, solar and marine. This allows you to view and apply for them all from one convenient hub.

- Openings are constantly being posted and filled, so be sure to check back frequently.



**1 Be willing to work hard.** In order to succeed in the alternative energy industry, you'll need to have a positive attitude and a strong work ethic. Energy operations are often round-the-clock enterprises, which may require you to work long or irregular hours. Other aspects of the job will present challenges that will test your problem-solving abilities. Stay focused on your underlying goal of delivering safe, clean energy to the world.[15]

- You may also be expected to learn new skills and procedures as industry standards continue to be updated.[16]
- There is plenty of opportunity for advancement. Promotions are typically accompanied by higher salaries and more responsibilities.[17]



**2 Secure contract work.** One of the best ways to gain crucial experience is by competing for high-profile government contracts. The federal government is on the frontline of renewable energy, and is always looking for capable workers who can meet their projects' rigorous standards. Doing a job will put you in the running for other important projects later on.<sup>[18]</sup>

- Before going out for a contract, you should have the expertise necessary to do a satisfactory job, and be able to articulate that expertise as part of your pitch.<sup>[19]</sup>
- Because of the high-stakes nature of government contract work, it probably isn't the best way for those who are just learning to break into the field.





**3 Follow what's going on in the industry.** Stay up to date on new developments, technologies and standards to make sure you're evolving with the fast-paced alternative energy sector. Reading the news and industry publications is a good way to find out more about advances in clean energy around the globe.

- Get involved in continuing education at the places where you received your degree or specialty certifications. Continuing education that will keep you at the forefront of the field you've chosen.
- Attend conferences and seminars whenever possible. There, you'll have a chance to meet with key industry figures and learn more about major events and breakthroughs.[20]



### Tips

- Visit government job fairs in your area to see what opportunities are available near you.
- Many green energy companies are seeing a shortage of applicants skilled in science and mathematics, so becoming educated in these and other STEM subjects will be to your advantage.
- If you're still in high school, you may be able to enroll in a junior apprenticeship and summer program that gives students a chance to lay the foundation for a career in alternative energy.
- Begin familiarizing yourself with the kinds of terms commonly used in the industry. Upgrading your business vocabulary can give you a decisive edge once it comes time to ace an interview.



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