What is needed to grow a local and regional Green Economy (GE) that brings good jobs with good wages, benefits, and secure careers?

- There is a need for greater knowledge and awareness about what the GE is, what qualifies as a green job, and why it is important. Due to the lack of knowledge, job seekers are not asking for green jobs training, and workforce developers are not offering training specific to green jobs. As a result, there is a misalignment between green markets and green jobs.

- The cycle of funding for green jobs needs to move away from a boom and bust tendency. For example, a surge of funding in 2008 from both ARRA and TVA led to a boom in green energy-related training (e.g., solar installation and weatherization), which consequently led to a bust in 2012 when funding dried up. Boom and bust funding creates unstable markets and unsecure jobs.

- There is a need for stronger labor participation. There are plenty of unions and members, but they do not have a strong voice.

What current strategies address these needs?

- Several workforce developers are teaming up with each other and industry to better align training with employer needs. For example, CAC Workforce Connections, Pellissippi State Technical Community College, Chattanooga State Community College, and Roane State Community College recently teamed up to apply for a U.S. Department of Labor grant to develop an E. Tennessee apprenticeship network.

- Initiatives like the Smarter Cities Challenge, KUB’s Round It Up, and TVA’s Extreme Makeover are ramping up jobs in construction (i.e., weatherization). This work will promote awareness about energy efficiency (and even climate change), particularly among the least educated and most vulnerable populations. However, many of these programs are funded with one-time grant money, and there is concern this will contribute to the boom and bust cycle. KUB’s Round It Up program and its sustainable funding stream was praised as an exception.

Assets- what other current activity can be leveraged to support specific strategies in place?

- There are a variety of training providers: STEM and magnet academies offer career paths and provide project-based learning for 8th-12th graders; training centers offer adults several employment services, such as occupational skills training, resume-building workshops, and job search assistance; community colleges offer workforce development programs and provide employment-related services to both students and businesses; and, universities provide more advanced skills training and educational opportunities.

- The 2015 Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) entered into force this summer. WIOA is less restrictive, in terms of age and income, than it’s predecessor, the
Workforce Investment Act, resulting in a larger segment of the population eligible for training services. WIOA also mandates trainers to demonstrate career pathways, pushing core agencies, such as the Department of Education, Job Corps, Families First, and several others, to better align interests and goals. There is also a greater emphasis placed on business engagement and on-the-job training (e.g., apprenticeships).

- The State’s Drive to 55 is creating more opportunities to develop a skilled workforce and drive economic growth through three initiatives: (1) TN Promise offers two years of tuition-free community or technical college to recent high-school graduates, as well as dual enrollment and credit for those still in school; (2) TN Reconnect provides continuing education for adults; and, (3) TN LEAP provides grant money to workforce developers and industry to form “alignment groups” that address skill gaps.

Obstacles- what keeps these assets from being more successfully pursued at this time?

- Overall, there is a lack of training specific to green jobs. However, workforce developers are motivated to learn, because they see its value and green is marketable.
- Perhaps because of the large number of trainers, there is redundancy in services provided. There is no formal assessment of who is providing what services, and there is no measure for consistency among or effectiveness of the various programs. This makes it difficult for jobseekers to know where to go for what services.
- Despite the number of initiatives set to ramp up jobs, particularly in construction (described above), there is concern the jobs will not go to local residents. Furthermore, there is concern that those that do will not be sustaining, because most are funded with one-time money.

What are some suggested strategies?

- Increase awareness of green jobs by strengthening the link between GE and STEM jobs. STEM has already successfully done a lot of boundary work, and the GE would benefit from aligning efforts. Many local and regional organizations have already partnered with STEM academies.
- Develop a green jobs aptitude test and/or curriculum to help training facilities assess jobseekers propensity for green jobs. This would educate both trainers and jobseekers and aid in conformity among training programs.
- Develop a database of jobseekers and employers to better match up the two. This would raise awareness among jobseekers about the opportunities available, especially in the trade industries like construction and manufacturing.
- Increase local and regional employment by creating provisions (e.g., in grants) that prioritize work by local residents.

Action priorities- what to do and in what order? Stay tuned for the breakout session.