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FORUM



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Next Gen 2021-2025 Impact Report





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Executive Summary

After four years of implementation, New Building Institute's Next Gen program demonstrates that targeted, equity-centered workforce development is essential to meeting the growing demand for clean energy talent. Next Gen is designed to address current industry gaps by preparing emerging leaders from underrepresented backgrounds with the skills, networks, and confidence needed to enter and thrive as professionals in the clean energy and green building fields. The program's impact is clear: most participants entered with little familiarity with clean energy or green building concepts, yet 100% of the surveyed alumni remain interested or involved in the field after completing the program and the vast majority are actively pursuing internships or jobs in the sector. Students consistently cite the program as a transformative experience that expanded their understanding of careers in the field and strengthened their professional readiness. Mentors also report high satisfaction, emphasizing the value of relationship-building and the program's inclusive approach.

Building on these successes, **Next Gen is entering its next phase of growth and needs your help.** In response to participant feedback and evolving workforce needs, the program is shifting towards a place-based model to forge more localized and deeper connections to peers, mentors, and careers. [A donation today](#) means a stronger pipeline of diverse, talented individuals to your clean energy business tomorrow.

Thank you to our partners and sponsors over the past four years.

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About this Impact Report

After four years of running the Next Gen program, New Building Institute (NBI) felt that it was essential to evaluate its efficacy, quantify impact, and highlight successes and learnings.

1. What is Next Gen?

New Building Institute's [Next Gen program](#) prepares diverse college students for the clean energy and green buildings industry, focusing on populations traditionally underrepresented in the energy sector, such as women and people of color. We recruit promising students and provide them with resources to help them succeed as they enter the workforce, fostering the next generation of industry leaders. In turn, we pave the way for young talent to bring diverse perspectives, value, and impact to clean energy organizations. Next Gen works by:

1. Providing mentorship and guidance from experienced leaders.
2. Building a trusted network that cultivates peer-to-peer support and exchange, as well as connections to energy professionals, organizations, and job opportunities.
3. Offering sponsored professional certifications to deepen subject matter expertise and boost resumes.
4. Providing sponsored conference attendance at the GTZ Forum with 300+ practitioners and thought leaders advancing clean energy and high-performance buildings
5. Helping participants see the possibilities the clean energy and buildings industries offer, not just as jobs, but as futures they didn't know were available.

2. Next Gen Meets a Documented Need for Clean Energy Talent

Preparing emerging leaders is crucial to growing this industry. Through Next Gen, we:

- Address the growing talent challenge:
 - In 2024, **clean energy jobs grew** by almost **12%**, compared to the total US job market that grew by just **8%** ([WRI, 2025](#)).
 - However, **74% of employers** in the Professional and Business Services sector reported that **hiring qualified workers** was **difficult**. ([US DOE, 2025](#))
- Help talented young professionals learn the realities and benefits of a clean energy career:
 - **Clean energy careers** are widely **misunderstood**—from salary ranges to types of careers and positions
 - **Early-career professionals** often **lack** peer support, mentorship, and clear pathways for growth.
- In a December 2025 Next Gen survey of program participants, **72%** of respondents said they felt **more prepared** to pursue internships, research opportunities, or jobs in or outside of sustainability after completing the program.

The industry needs diverse clean energy professionals.

- A survey of over 6,500 building industry professionals found a **lack of minority and female employees** in the buildings sector—only **18%** of respondents identified as people of color and **31%** as female ([NIBS, 2023](#)).
- Data shows that an organization's **diversity** is **crucial to its success**; employee performance and retention are **12% higher** in diverse organizations than nondiverse organizations ([UNC Pembroke, 2021](#)).

Participant Perspective:

"I really like the diversity [focus]...I feel like that is not talked about that much in the building industry."

– Aatith Biswa, 2025

Next Gen Is Part of the Solution

Next Gen is **directly responding to the needs outlined above**. The rest of this report will show what we have accomplished so far, the lessons we have learned, and the program's future direction.

3. Overview

Since 2021, Next Gen has hosted four program years, for a total of 119 students, with a range of cohort sizes. When evaluating applicants, NBI prioritizes students from underrepresented groups. Other key factors for selection are demonstrated interest in building and clean energy industries and commitment to completing the program.

Among Next Gen participants to date, **69%** are female or non-binary, **31%** are male, and **70%** are people of color or bi-racial. Most participants were based in the northeast, followed by the west.

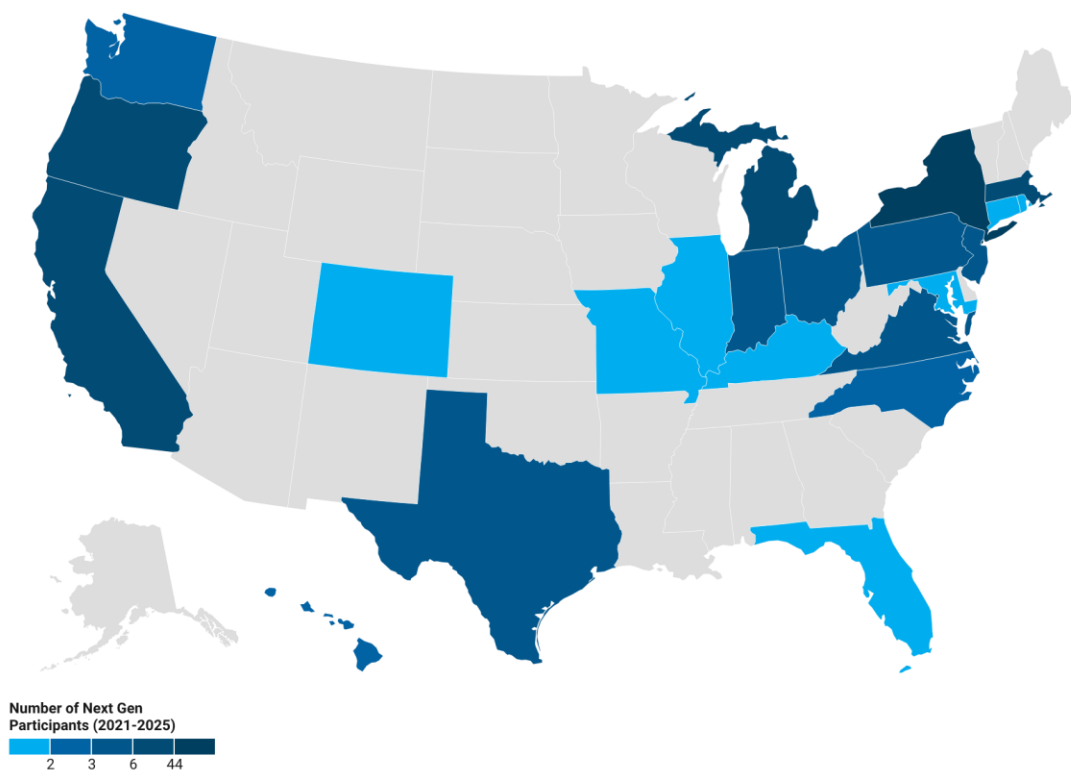


Fig. 1: Next Gen participant map by state, 2021-2025.

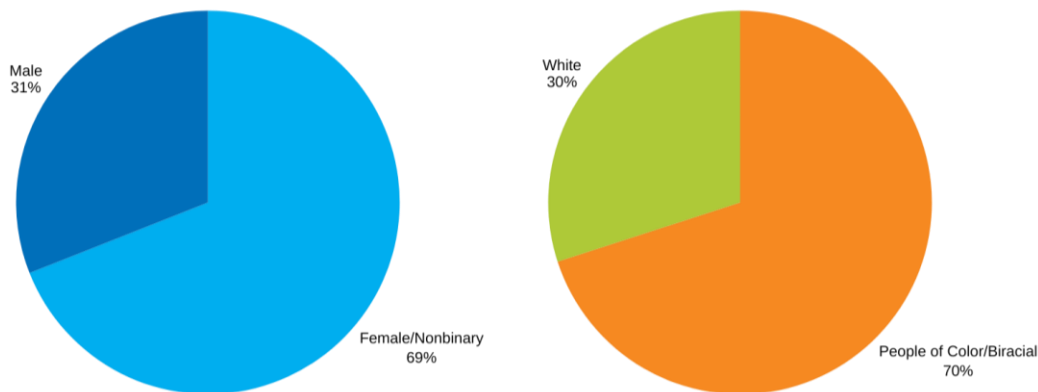


Fig. 2: Next Gen participant demographics, 2021-2025.

3.1 Data Trends

Program Impact

We offer students across disciplines **access to career paths** in clean energy and green buildings, providing guidance they might not receive in standard courses for their major.

- Of alumni survey participants,
 - 53% were in engineering
 - 21% were in architecture
 - 16% were in construction management
 - 10% were in policy / planning
- These students have received little information on clean energy careers; **70%** of Next Gen students had little or no familiarity with resilient building or clean energy concepts.

The Takeaway:

We are helping students navigate careers in clean energy and green buildings. In the December 2025 survey, **100% of respondents** said they have remained interested and/or involved in resilient building and clean energy since completing the program, and **89% of respondents** said they are pursuing **internships, part-time, or full-time positions in the sector**.

3.2 Opportunities in the Buildings Industry

The median wage of energy efficiency jobs is higher than the overall US median wage, offering great potential for students looking for a well-paying career.

- The energy efficiency sector employed 2,381,700 workers in 2024, with a median wage of \$59,390 (**20% higher** than the overall median wage in the US, \$49,500). ([2025 US Energy & Employment Report](#))

A majority of people in the buildings industry believe the industry needs more diversity.

- In the NIBS 2023 Built Environment Workforce Survey, **63%** of respondents from nearly 30 different organizations believe that **increasing diversity** in the buildings industry is important.

3.3 Student Programmatic Feedback

Each year, we collect feedback from students and mentors to assess their experience in the program, the success of the program, and how we can make improvements. Using a combination of surveys and live feedback sessions, we have identified the following strengths, challenges, and areas of improvement for students and mentors.

What students value most by program component:

Monthly Discussion Groups

In an intimate setting, students appreciate real-world perspective from industry leaders presenting and engaging on clean energy and green building topics and career paths.

Mentorship

Mentorship is consistently one of the highest rated components of the program. Each student is paired one-on-one with a mentor based on their career interests and lived experiences.

Participant Perspectives:

“I was grateful to be paired with Scott, a clean energy professional whose guidance has been incredible in helping me **refine my career goals** and understand the different pathways into grad school and the field.”
– Ryan Pham, 2025

Participant Perspectives:

“I will carry with me the **generosity** and **openness** of my mentor, especially how she took the time to **connect me with others**. I realized that while knowledge is important, building the right relationships can open just as many doors.”

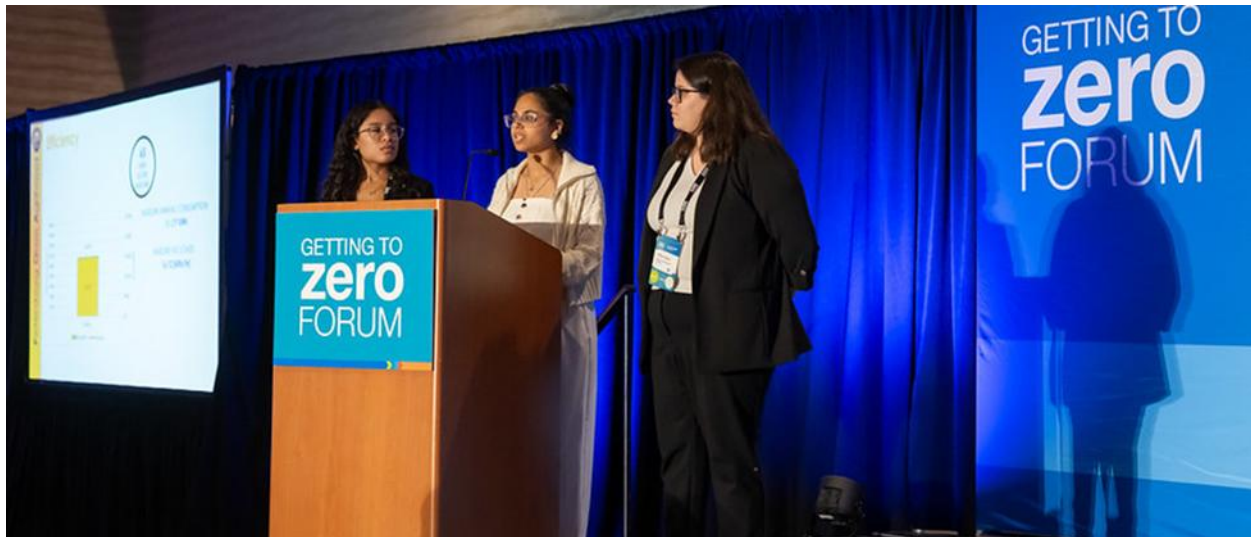
– Ivana Krsteska, 2025)

Professional Certifications

The program sponsors professional certifications and study materials, such as the LEED Green Associate certification, as an additional learning opportunity and career development tool for the students. Students value the opportunity to add a professional certification to their resumes.

GTZ Forum

The program sponsors students to attend NBI’s GTZ Forum, including lodging, food, and activities. The Forum is consistently the highest rated program component, with students citing it as a pivotal learning experience and chance to connect with fellow participants, their mentors, and industry professionals in person.





Participant Perspectives:

“I am so appreciative and glad that I took the chance of going to GTZ! It was hard to get the days off from work and school but it was so worth it.”

– Destiny Martinez, 2025

“[GTZ Forum] allowed me to meet my fellow Next Gen Program participants, and to network with many professionals in sustainability... I am really grateful that I was able to learn a lot of new information during the breakout sessions and open my eyes to current issues that we are struggling with in motivating sustainability.”

– Maasia Apet, 2024

“The experience of attending a conference for the first time and networking with my peers there was very valuable. I loved getting to know everyone and I think my professional certification will help me get a job in the field.”

– Ryan Pham, 2025

Image at top: The 2022-2023 cohort at the 2023 Getting to Zero Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Informational or Mock Interviews

Students get to practice their interview skills with industry professionals who currently have open entry-level positions or anticipate having openings in the future.

Participant Perspectives:

“It was a great experience. The feedback was specific and actionable, and it helped me feel more confident about future interviews.”

– Ivana Krsteska, 2025

“I had a great time talking to some interviewers and it opened my eyes to what I need to work on.”

– Omar Lubis, 2025

Peer-to-peer Cohort Building

Students build peer networks over the course of the program, which are greatly strengthened by in-person connection at the GTZ Forum. Students often provide feedback that the relationships they form with each other and sense of community they offer are among the biggest benefits of the program.

3.4 The Mentor Perspective

The program mentors are consistently satisfied to very satisfied with their experience in the program, with common highlights being their bond with their mentee and the value of the mentorship and equity training at the start of the program.

When asked why she chose to participate in the program, Sarah Talkington, an engineer with the City of Austin, was a mentor to the 2025 cohort. She praised the opportunity to support “inclusivity for people with different perspectives and goals working together to grow the industry.”

4. Opportunities for Growth: Our Plans for the Future

One of our main goals is to be **adaptable** and **responsive** to the needs of the students we serve. We use feedback from the students and mentors to adjust program processes and offerings. But **our vision requires consistent funding to make the program as impactful as it can be.**

Overall, we’ve learned that students are looking to Next Gen for career guidance that they aren’t receiving elsewhere. They value the real-world examples they get of energy careers in action.

Based on lessons learned since Next Gen’s inception, we are shifting from a national to a place-based approach, where we will establish regional cohorts of students. Regional cohorts will allow us to provide targeted career guidance, pair students with local or

regional mentors, and take advantage of local and regional in-person industry events. This year, we will pursue a place-based approach in New York, Oregon, and Washington states.

Previously noted data showed that students felt **more prepared** to pursue internships, research opportunities, or jobs in or outside of sustainability after completing the program, but there is room to grow!

Program direction in the near-term:

- Establish a baseline for success of the place-based approach and widen scope to explore strategic states or regions that also connect into a larger national cohort
- Increase opportunities for students to connect with each other and exchange ideas
- Prioritize in-person connection for students to meet at local and regional events, as well as enhancing student activities during the GTZ Forum
- Shift topical discussion group focus areas to highlight career pathways and provide concrete examples of existing careers
- Provide more structure and events for mentors throughout the program and offer a way for them to share resources and networks and crowd-source questions together

Long-term direction:

- Build consistent and sustainable funding, allowing more time to be spent on program components rather than fundraising
- Operate five regional cohorts that participate in community-led clean energy projects and in which students are provided stipends for their work
- Expand on program data to inform database on diversity in the buildings industry, which is currently sparse
- Strategically disseminate lessons learned with industry players and agencies who benefit from early career workforce development



The Takeaway:

In **just four years**, Next Gen has proven that when equity, mentorship, and industry-aligned training come together, the **clean energy sector becomes stronger and more inclusive**. As the program evolves into a place-based model, **Next Gen is poised to deepen its impact** by connecting emerging talent to local opportunities and employers who are shaping the future of the built environment. We are deeply grateful to our partners and sponsors whose commitment over the past four years has made this progress possible and whose continued investment will ensure a resilient, diverse workforce for years to come.

Donate to support the clean energy and green building leaders of tomorrow.



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