



Executive Summary

Citizens for Local Power (CLP)'s approach to the EmPower Kingston project has been cooperative, working with -- not for -- the City of Kingston to engage communities in the process of moving Kingston to 100% clean energy. In this first phase of the project, the objective was to canvass community leaders for their knowledge and ideas about the best ways to reach and engage the people they serve. In the process, we wanted to inform them about the EmPower Kingston campaign, invite their participation, and begin to align everyone with the city and CLP in advocating and acting for success. We reached out personally to the leaders of Kingston's many grassroots organizations, churches, service organizations, and arts groups. Altogether, we met with 38 individuals, including a subgroup of contractors and a forum for young people at the YMCA. In coordination with these "leadership meetings," CLP is also developing a broader agenda that responds to what we are learning. Overwhelmingly, our interlocutors have stressed the importance of jobs, especially green jobs training, and the need for new financing mechanisms that make it possible for community members to invest in the changes that are needed. Many helpful ideas were shared about the best means for reaching diverse community members.

The initial response to these meetings was warm and enthusiastic beyond even CLP's hopeful expectations. Kingston community leaders are already well-versed in the problems regarding the climate crisis and have ideas for potential solutions. Basically every group is already taking some action toward a just energy transition -- from installing solar or LED lighting, upgrading buildings and creating examples (RUPCO's net zero Energy Square!) to expanding educational/job training opportunities. Even if organizations or local businesses cannot fully commit at this moment they offered services such as PSAs, radio time, holding events in their spaces, and circulating event announcements through their group's social media channels and mailing lists. In the meetings, we asked participants whether their organizations would join the EmPower Kingston campaign, and although there were no formal commitments requested, the response was unfailingly affirmative.

Approach to Organizing EmPower Kingston Meetings

CLP's invitees represented a comprehensive list of local stakeholders. We issued invitations to at least two, usually more leaders, and aimed to mix categories of groups. Meetings that took place over lunchtime, with refreshments, proved most successful. Most meetings were held at our storefront at 702 Broadway, but we also had meetings at the Good Work Institute, Nobody Leaves Mid Hudson, and the YMCA. Find the full participant list attached [here](#).

The meeting agenda here [[insert link](#)] summarizes the project and approach and was circulated in advance.

Methodology

CLP generally employed a circular dialogue technique, which means that the facilitator would open the conversation and then ask for feedback on the meeting overview questions, giving each attendee time to talk in counter-clockwise order. The meetings would start with introductions, then proceed to reports on what they are already doing within their organizations or groups, and conclude by asking for their support and ideas for moving forward. In order to keep everyone informed and maintain momentum, CLP created a ListServ including all participants, and sent minutes for each meeting with a call for corrections and comments. This was a means of ensuring accuracy and solidifying cooperation. It also provides a handy means of reaching out to all of the participants and sharing information beyond this first stage of the project.

Key Themes

There are a few key themes that emerged from the EmPower Kingston Leadership Meetings. They are as follows:

Housing

The theme of housing covers a range of issues including landlord/tenant issues, the need for additional low-income housing, the urgent need for repairs - both basic (mold eradication) and major (sealing, installation of renewable technologies). Other issues include the serious lack of trained people to do these repairs, language barriers for tenants and homeowners, and a general lack of resources (people and funding) to execute needed repairs and make Kingston more efficient.

Suggested Solutions:

- The Local Contractors Group that we formed in the course of the project is committed to bringing more people into the field, including mentoring and the creation of internships, so that hands-on experiences are available; ideally these can be coordinated with formal training.
- Find ways to inspire people about energy efficiency and transitioning to clean energy -- "Make it about how we conceive to each other as part of a community."
- Landlords are not using energy-saving techniques; start with "good landlords" as examples.
- Make sure improvements don't affect only one demographic.
- Repurposing existing buildings is costly -- and necessary. More funding is needed to make this possible. Explore new ideas about home improvement loans that are based in the community.
- Be sure to include storage with solar.
- Improve code enforcement.

Education and Outreach

CLP heard repeatedly that the groups these leaders serve do not have much extra capacity to focus on environmental issues. We need to communicate to people how to improve their energy usage affordably and in a way that shows how it will be beneficial to them. We need to find a way to engage and communicate with low and middle -income communities and people with language barriers, who have not been traditionally reached out to. They typically have the least amount of time or attention to pay to these issues.

Suggested Solutions:

- We can organize more hands-on learning experiences for all ages and income status.
- Offer "before and after" tours of buildings.

- Use creative outreach techniques to reach communities not traditionally targeted for information on these issues, for example low-income and Spanish-speaking communities.
- Publicize examples of progress (think of the “Kingston Green Trail”).
- Find ways to encourage competition and reward/recognize good examples.
- “Hang out” and win people’s trust by getting to know them individually. Prioritize one-on-one or one-on-some exchanges.
- Make issues personal -- show how changes will affect people and their families directly.
- Provide events that are free and fun, with food and childcare. “Reaching kids is a good way to reach families.”
- Ensure that CLP’s office space is inviting and open -- make it a center of info and exchange.
- Hold events and open office hours in other groups’ spaces -- take the information to the people.
- The B-Corp model (SunCommon) includes presenting info to schools or community groups.
- Be able to give concrete information about costs and benefits.
- TMI can work on stories of individuals who have worked or have other experience in this area (examples include going through green jobs training, people with displacement experiences...).

Job Training

According to the contractors CLP met with, there is a need to train a veritable “energy efficiency installer army” of workers to fill the demand in the industry for construction and green efficiency improvements. While the city has access to several green jobs training programs (at BOCES and the Green Jobs Academy at SUNY Ulster), there is a lack of connections between this training and apprenticeships and hiring opportunities. There is a lack of information about these opportunities and they could ideally be located at more easily reachable locations, for example in Midtown.

Suggested Solutions:

- Groups involved in EmPower Kingston can publicize and help contractors find candidates for apprenticeships.
- CLP is seeking funding for apprenticeships and ancillary costs (like transportation).
- Include a strong mentoring component as an essential part of the training.
- SUNY Ulster Green Careers Academy & BOCES courses are not well marketed -- we can help.
- Involve community organizations -- take advantage of their interest and support.
- It’s important that youth and others be paid fairly for internships and other work. Payment can include wages, stipends, HV Currents.
- Arrange field trips for students from local schools so that they can view and gain an understanding of ongoing energy efficiency work, such as a solar panel array or geothermal.
- Work closely with groups offering career pathways and support, such as Fresh Start for Women, Go Beyond Greatness, the YMCA, and KHS.
- Look into awarding formal credits with transferability.
- Offer materials in Spanish -- even if youth are fluent in English, Spanish-language materials may be important to gain families’ support.
- Encourage women to enter this field!
- Consider offering courses at a Midtown location.
- Involve food pantries and other local sites, such as restaurants, in the campaign and training.
- Develop a ride-sharing program.
- Community Choice Aggregation (CCAs) should build in local resilience & recruit local workers.

Funding

A key problem that came up in virtually every conversation is funding. Many home improvements and other energy efficiency strategies (like geothermal or heat pumps and solar installation) are cost-prohibitive without substantial upfront funds. We don’t want people to get caught in a debt cycle.

This issue also ties into the need for job training and paid apprenticeships, mentioned above. Several nonprofit groups have cited the desire to install solar arrays on their properties, but need funding.

Suggested Solutions:

- We could work with a credit union and/or create a community bank, community investment fund, or revolving loan fund that would give residents the opportunity to make these investments at a very low interest rate, and/or partner with existing local banks to make energy efficient improvements more affordable.
- We could pursue state funding and grants for all of the above.
- Provide a “hand-holding” service to help people take advantage of available funding (NYSERDA and other grants).
- Community Development Block Grants could be an option.
- Look into mortgage inclusion as a strategy.

Group Outreach Initiatives

Throughout the course of this EmPower Kingston Leadership Meeting project, CLP decided to focus on three core groups for engagement on different tracks.

Local Contractors

In the course of this campaign, CLP met three times with local contractors and formed a Local Contractors’ Group. Moving forward, the group will meet regularly at the CLP office, with the intent of developing and supporting a youth apprenticeship and hiring program -- the program will also be open to other interested people.

Spanish-speaking Community

The Spanish speaking community is often overlooked when developing programming on these issues but represents a high percentage of Midtown residents. CLP has hired a bilingual coordinator who, as part of her responsibilities, is translating materials -- from the website to event flyers -- in order to better connect with these communities. Events going forward will also generally have translation as needed.

Youth engagement

CLP has started working with community partners that host youth and children’s programming in an effort to understand youth concerns about climate change, engage youth in guiding them toward actions they might take to help, and direct interested youth toward green job training apprenticeships and job opportunities. One leadership meeting on February 5th was a “Teen Focus Group,” held at the YMCA. CLP plans to hold future focus groups to get their feedback about these issues and will invite young leaders to help organize and lead events and offer suggestions on how to reach this crucial group.

Next Steps

Community leaders have expressed a willingness to cooperate under the “Empower Kingston” logo and umbrella. The next phase of “Empower Kingston’s” launch is planned to include the following:

- We are currently producing a video that showcases leaders and examples of energy efficient work in the community.
- We are planning educational events about energy, which will be co-hosted with other organizations including the Kingston Library, the Good Work Institute, and the African Roots Library, among others.

- These events will all provide childcare support and light refreshments. Among many wonderful suggestions from meeting attendees, was to stress the importance of food and childcare when hosting events, as well as bringing the event to where people are.
- We are also unrolling a canvass program, and have started an intern to help facilitate. Canvassing will mainly be organized around events, as a way to bring people out and inform them whether or not they attend. CLP will be seeking to grow its intern program as well.
- CLP plans to hold a few larger meetings with participants so far, to check in with progress and keep us all engaged.
- CLP is consulting with city leaders and others about how to make initial planning results public and engage broader communities in making the energy transition.
- We will formulate strategy and tactics in the form of an engagement plan for 2020, including outreach, communications, and events, including Spanish-language events and materials.