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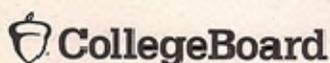
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A Ray of Sunshine for the US Economy

The solar-power industry in the United States has seen dramatic growth during recent years as energy consumers have sought to become more self-sufficient, diminish their environmental impact. And lowering their energy bills. As a result of increased demand for solar energy, the solar-power industry now offers one of the fastest-growing career paths in the country. From 2010 to 2014, the overall number of solar jobs in the US economy held steady, with the addition of approximately 80,000 jobs in manufacturing, sales and distribution, installation, and more.

Comprising just over half of solar jobs in 2014, installation is the largest single sector of the solar-power industry. Job opportunities in installation have soared: from 2010 to 2014, the number of solar-installation jobs increased 121 percent, to 20,185 jobs in 2014, more than the number of manufacturing jobs. These jobs are open to people at a variety of experience levels. While many solar installers have taken courses at technical schools or community colleges, the only requirement beyond a high school diploma is usually an apprenticeship or other on-the-job training. With California leading the country in solar jobs, jobs in this sector of the solar industry are quite profitable. In 2013, solar installers’ wages averaged \$23.63 per hour, comparable to those of skilled electricians and plumbers.

Solar Jobs by Sector, 2010–2014				
Sector	2010	2012	2014	Growth rate, 2010–2014
Installation	43,934	57,177	97,031	121%
Manufacturing	24,916	29,742	32,490	30%
Sales and distribution	11,744	16,005	20,185	72%
Project development	N/A	7,988	15,112	N/A
Other	12,908	8,105	8,989	N/A
Total	93,502	119,016	173,807	85.9%

Changes in the number of jobs in “Other” over the years are not necessarily a reflection of actual increases or decreases in employment but may instead be due to changes in the types of jobs included in this category.

Adapted from The Solar Foundation, National Solar Jobs Census 2014. ©2015 by The Solar Foundation.

The rapid proliferation of well-paying jobs in solar installation are largely attributable to: the falling price of solar energy. Technological innovation has made components less expensive, while tax subsidies and other governmental incentive programs have offset some of the costs of installation for businesses and individuals. Also, the efficiency of solar-installation companies has increased as the industry has matured, reducing costs still further. All of these factors have driven down the cost of equipment and installation for solar-power systems, which fell by more than 50 percent between 2010 and 2013. Solar power is now competitive with other energy sources in many markets.

This leads corporations, utility companies, and private homeowners to use it. Indeed, the primary reason most consumers cite for installing new solar-power systems is not to benefit the environment but to save money.

Because some power companies don't provide information about saving money over helping the environment, technological and economic developments in the solar-power industry ensure they are doing both. Consumers are not the only ones for whom solar power is a win-win scenario, though as a result of their own efforts, industry employees can meet demand for an environmentally friendly service while also making a good living for themselves.

