

OpenBlue Net Zero Buildings

There's a Climate Crisis. Where Are the Experts?

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Growing demand for expertise coupled with workforce shortages poses a significant challenge to achieving net zero. Partnerships will help.

By now, organizations know they need to achieve net zero emissions. Some have even excelled at devising high-level strategies to do so. But too often, the momentum stops there. That's because getting to net zero requires specialized workers with hands-on experience – a resource in low supply amid increasingly high demand.

Unfortunately, learning meaningful sustainability skills is not as simple as taking a course online or at a university, and becoming a true net zero expert requires years of on-the-ground experience. But we don't have years to correct our course. To achieve net zero and avert climate crisis, corporate leaders must summon every resource to overcome this labor shortage, both internally and externally.

We have to act now.

If carbon emissions continue to enter the atmosphere at the current pace, the planet will warm by at least 2.7 degrees Celsius

over preindustrial times, resulting in a global existential threat. To avoid this, companies and governments must act now and plan for the decades ahead. The Net-Zero Standard issued by the Science Based Target initiative (SBTi) lays out that companies will have to cut emissions by 90–95% and neutralize the remainder through carbon removals by no later than 2050.

Organizations are adopting net zero targets at an accelerated pace. At least 21% of the largest 2,000 public companies globally had committed to various net zero targets, as of March 2021. And many will soon push themselves even further to adapt their plans to meet the new, more ambitious standards issued by the SBTi last fall. The Race To Zero coalition, which includes at least 1,049 cities, 5,235 businesses and 1,039 higher education institutions, joined 120 countries to commit to net zero emissions by 2050.

You've committed to net zero emissions. Now what?

Exciting as the flurry of commitment to achieving net zero goals may be, the job at hand is challenging. Implementing changes to get to zero is not like flipping a switch but is instead a process of complex systemic change. It requires significant knowledge and expertise in new and developing fields such as renewable energy and digital solutions, as well as existing energy and engineering skill sets.

Unfortunately, a major labor shortage is stalling progress, with [numerous industries](#) competing for the same workers. People with sustainability skills are in high demand. In the past year, about [10% of job postings](#) globally required at least one green skill. Yet, the move into green jobs is [lower](#) than we need to make a difference.

We see far too few sustainability experts within facilities management, engineering, real estate, energy management and finance – business disciplines with the greatest potential impact on carbon emissions. We need sustainability specialists embedded across the corporate spectrum. The combination of technological acumen with climate experience, such as green software development, green network design, digital platforms for carbon accounting, will be particularly powerful.

What's more, every worker, regardless of role, must understand their employer's sustainability goals and how their own job supports them. Individuals must share the responsibility, whether that means gaining new skills or expanding their scope of work and responsibility.

Partnerships: It's easier together.

Companies and governments cannot hire enough sustainability experts to help them meet their net zero goals. They need to form partnerships, ones that are similar to the [Alliance to End Plastic Waste](#) but can assist with the hiring and training in the sustainability arena, while addressing the critical shortage of skilled sustainability workers.

Partnerships can follow two main paths: community and corporate.

Community partnerships are private-public collaborations in which government policies create future job opportunities, which are then supported by local businesses. For example, in February, New York state launched a statewide collaborative effort to support [New York's clean energy transition](#). The funds will train displaced workers in the fossil fuel sector and members of disadvantaged communities for jobs in the clean

energy sector. Similarly, Johnson Controls is using the private-public model, investing \$15 million over the next five years to support [nonprofit U.S. community colleges](#) to build associate degree and certificate programs related to heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC), fire and security, and digital building automation systems.

Corporate partnerships help provide companies with guidance, strategy and boots-on-the-ground execution of net zero strategies. This is helpful given that, as a [survey](#) from the SME Climate Hub showed, most companies don't feel they have the resources to make the net zero transition on their own. This is also why Johnson Controls and Atos have teamed up to create a one-stop shop that offers companies expertise in all areas: global energy auditing for facilities, developing energy-lowering strategies and equipment selection, renewable energy choices, data analysis, strategy, digital platforms to manage buildings, and implementing needed solutions.

Collaboration can be found in unexpected alliances. [Greenpeace and McDonald's](#) teamed up to reduce deforestation in the Amazon. [WWF and Coca-Cola](#) secured freshwater resources and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Walmart is working with supply chain vendors on its [Project Gigaton](#).

Large private and public organizations have the economic strength to move mountains if they join forces. We saw this when governments and corporations came together to develop COVID-19 vaccines. And if climate change is the biggest threat to humankind, these global leaders can – and should – create and fund global academies to train sustainability workers who can effectively address the crisis. The first step is for organizations to be honest about what they have yet to learn themselves.

Three Main Takeaways:

1. Determine what climate skills you need for your net zero strategy by using measurement tools to identify the key areas of focus across your emissions, and engage with teams to understand the main gaps in knowledge and resources to tackle them.
2. Enlist external specialist climate skills to support with the complex challenges, but beyond this, put in place a procurement policy which favors vendors with strong ESG commitments.
3. Place sustainability at the heart of your partnership strategy and seek out opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing.

