



# Tenino takes control of its energy future

## Community effort supports job training, school funding and the clean energy future

Government, education and business leaders gathered in Tenino, Washington, on January 17 to officially kick off and share information about a project poised to showcase how power grid modernization can create an educational testbed for new technologies, a training program for jobs of the future and a funding source for local schools.

The Tenino Innovation and Education Through Renewables (TIER) project has been in development for more than a year and has secured the initial funding to kick off its ambitious plan to transform Tenino School District into a training hub in the region for modern and flexible grids. As Tenino faces the impending closure of the Centralia coal plant in 2025, which will cause 200 local residents to lose their jobs, TIER has emerged as a way to develop a career pathway for former coal plant workers as well as a workforce pipeline that begins with young students.

The three-pronged TIER project creates a town-sized living laboratory that includes:

- A **grid modernization** project including smart grid infrastructure and technologies such as solar PV, batteries, a responsive grid with two-way communication and advanced distribution controls, software and strategies.
- An **education and training** program that will create a pathway for K-12 and Centralia College students to learn about new energy technologies while also providing training opportunities for workers transitioning to new careers from the Centralia coal plant.
- A **smart grid tool** for homes that will allow families to interact with the grid, empowering them to make better decisions about energy use and earn money that can be donated back to local schools.

“The TIER project is consistent with the City of Tenino's goals of providing positive educational opportunities for our youth, new economic development opportunities, reducing expenses and improving quality of life for our home and business owners,” said Wayne Fornier, City of Tenino Mayor. “And we’ll do all that while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions in our community.”

Through TIER, Tenino serves as a Living Lab demonstrating how a small town can promote a clean energy future by incubating and hosting clean energy infrastructure, technologies and workforce training.

The team behind the project includes Tenino School District, the City of Tenino, Centralia College, Bonneville Environmental Foundation, PECl, Washington State University, Puget

Sound Energy, and other leading community, power, technology, research and service sector collaborators.

TIER has received in-kind support and a \$60,000 grant from Bonneville Environmental Foundation and backing from local labor and trade associations (including the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the Thurston Lewis Mason Labor Council and the Solar Installers of Washington) as well as the Pacific Northwest Center of Excellence for Clean Energy at Centralia College. TIER is in the final round of applications to receive a total of over \$4 million in funding from TransAlta and the Washington Department of Commerce's Clean Energy Fund.

"TIER is an unprecedented research and training collaboration and there's no doubt that it has the potential to change the economic future of the South Puget Sound region," said Tanya Barham, PECl's Director of Operations and Product Development for PECl.

PECl and Tenino School District hosted the January 17 TIER event to share information about the living laboratory project and the economic opportunities that will emerge as the region transforms into a vocational training hub for next-generation energy technologies.

"Our community will benefit greatly from this program that offers opportunities for hands-on learning, creative problem solving and careers in a growing and dynamic field," said Joe Belmonte, Tenino School District Superintendent. "We are excited for the opportunity that TIER presents for our students and community here in Tenino and to sharing how insights can be leveraged to benefit Washingtonians."

The January 17 meeting invited procurement professionals, trainers, researchers, labor and trade partners, educators and lawmakers to engage with creative solutions for how to leverage TIER's smart energy projects to create economic and educational opportunity in the region. TIER partners will collaborate with the community to determine new avenues for hands-on training, apprenticeship opportunities, and staff development.

