

SUSTAINABILITY CAMPUS AND CAREER PROGRAMS WIN BEST PRACTICE AWARDS



From left, Alison Erlenbach, David Phillips, Aaron Klemm, Joe Fullerton, Isaac Knipfing, Madeline Willet, and Alyssa Hagerbrant accepting the Climate Corps Facilities Best Practice Award

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Energize Colleges and Climate Corps Facilities, both programs of northern California nonprofit [Strategic Energy Innovations](#) (SEI), received Best Practice Awards at the annual [California Higher Education Sustainability Conference](#) (CHESC) this month. The conference highlights research, curriculum development, operational programs, and community partnerships in sustainability among higher education institutions statewide.

CHESC Best Practice Awards acknowledge the achievements that California campuses have made through innovative and effective energy efficiency projects and sustainable operations. The CHESC committee bestows the award to programs that demonstrate quantifiable and tangible outcomes, strong partnerships, and longevity.

[Energize Colleges](#) received CHESC's "Partnerships, Communications, and Planning" Best Practice Award. The Energize Colleges' "Campus as a Living Lab" model was recognized for its commitment to prepare the next generation of sustainability professionals via applied learning and partnerships. Facilitated at each campus by a dedicated Campus as a Living Lab coordinator, the model comprises formal, paid internships and faculty partnerships. Energize College interns advance campus clean energy and sustainability, integrate cutting-edge content and hands-on projects into curricula offerings, establish industry and community connections, develop paid student work-experiences, and transform their campus energy operations. Since 2016, Energize Colleges has created over 300 student internships, 15

post-baccalaureate fellowships, 36 engagements with faculty on new courses, certificates and degree programs, and meaningful career connections with 12,000 high school students.

The [Climate Corps](#) Facilities program received CHESC's "California Community College Innovations" Best Practice Award. Through SEI's Climate Corps Facilities fellowship program, emerging sustainability professionals are placed at a higher education site. The program provides capacity building as well as workforce development, and addresses the gap in qualified energy and sustainability managers. Currently, 14 Fellows are placed at campuses statewide to address energy savings, sustainability program design and implementation, green purchasing and procurement, zero waste and other recycling-related projects, water savings goals, built environment (LEED, etc.) standards, greenhouse gas emissions quantification, climate action planning, and other facilities-focused projects. On average, Fellows save 140,000 kWh and 2.1 million gallons of water per year. The resulting fiscal savings, \$42,000 per year on average, often exceed the cost of the fellowship. Fellows also serve as a bridge to connect campus facilities departments to student interns, curriculum, community, and industry.

Skyline College, Energize Colleges campus partner, was represented at CHESC. According to Ray Hernandez, Dean of Skyline College's Science, Math and Technology Division, the school's partnership with SEI on Energize Colleges "has catalyzed our campus to connect classroom theory with real-world issues and projects, both on our campus and in our surrounding communities." Alison Erlenbach, a Pacific Gas & Electric public sector program manager, actively champions the Climate Corps Facilities program in Northern California. Erlenbach, a graduate of the third cycle of Climate Corps in 2013, reflects on her Climate Corps fellowship "as a seminal experience in my professional career, which opened the door to opportunities and connections that I never would have otherwise had. Our recent Climate Corps Facilities program graduates are positioned for highly successful careers in the fast-growing facilities and energy management field, and I'm excited to see what they accomplish."

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