



NAACP Alachua County Branch Environment and Climate Justice Committee (ECJC)

EMPOWER PROJECT BACKGROUND

In 2021, the NAACP Alachua County Branch Environment and Climate Justice Committee (ECJC) organized a countywide forum focused on the transition to clean energy and ensuring low-income, energy-burdened neighbors would be included in the process and share in the benefits. Inspired by the conversations held at that event, an informal local group was formed to put words into action.



Led by ECJC Chair, NKwanda Jah, representatives from the neighborhoods of Springhill, Duval, and SWAG, the Community Weatherization Coalition, Alachua County, the City of Gainesville, and GRU collaborated on a grant application submitted to the Department of Energy Local Energy Action Program (LEAP) in 2022. This grant was for 18 months of technical assistance to help us explore how our community could provide greater energy and economic resiliency to low-income neighborhoods through improved energy efficiency of homes and the use of solar energy on rooftops, while also promoting greater access to quality green jobs. We were one of 24 groups in the country to receive this grant and the only group in Florida. We named it the EMPOWER Project.

The grant did not come with any funding, but we were assigned a team of experts from the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL). This team has been meeting with the EMPOWER Project team regularly for the past 15 months, exploring the potential to reduce energy bills for low-income residents through expanded energy efficiency, weatherization, and solar energy and the development of a green jobs pipeline accessible to underserved communities in Alachua County.

EMPOWER PROJECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Through this shared vision, combined efforts, and pure hard work, the EMPOWER Project team has produced many accomplishments in the last 15 months, including:

- Sustained community outreach efforts starting with a kickoff meeting in early 2023 followed by on-going engagement with representatives of our partner neighborhoods of Springhill/Sugarhill, Duval, and SWAG.
- Expanded team partners to include CareerSource NCF, Santa Fe College, Alachua County School Board, Rebuilding Together North Central Florida, and Solar Impact, Inc.
- Organized a Green Jobs Pipeline Roundtable Discussion focused on expanding existing programs in public schools' curriculum, vocational training programs, internships, business and entrepreneurship opportunities, and sustainability policy related to green jobs. At this event a Green Jobs Advisory Council was formed and has been meeting monthly since December 2022.
- Organized monthly Weatherization Coordination meetings that bring together local service providers, resulting in the: creation of a guide to help residents seeking weatherization services; identification of bottlenecks in the provision of services provision; creation of Weatherization Technician Certification modules at Santa Fe College.
- Obtained a \$10,000 grant for green jobs development from Jobs for the Future (JFF), making the team eligible for future rounds of more funding. The EMPOWER Team is now working with leaders of the three focus communities to plan community events funded by the JFF grant to highlight green jobs opportunities and other

aspects of the EMPOWER Project. We also are eligible to compete for the next round of \$75,000 JFF Planning Grants.







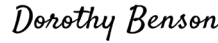

- Designed an innovative solar lease model that fits within the restrictive regulations of the state but also, if funded, will provide significant and long-lasting benefits to our current partner communities and other communities as we seek to expand our outreach.
- Submitted three additional applications for grants with funding ranging from \$50,000 to \$35.7 million. Other grant proposals are also in preparation.

SUPPORTERS OF THE EMPOWER COALITION

For the past 15 months, a diverse group of organizations, led by the NAACP ECJC, has come together with a common purpose, accomplishing some impressive goals in the process. Our collaborative efforts have not only brought about tangible results but have also strengthened our sense of unity and shared mission.

Our time with the NREL technical assistance team is coming to an end in a few months but we want to continue working as the EMPOWER Coalition. The NAACP ECJC believes that, with your support, we can strengthen and expand our partnerships, allowing us to build on our successes, reach more neighborhoods, and achieve even greater things.

The undersigned organizations that support the work of the EMPOWER Coalition are listed below.

Organization	Signature	Date
NKwanda Jah, Chairperson Environmental & Climate Justice Committee Alachua County NAACP		11/20/2023
RD Bonnaghan, Executive Director Rebuilding Together NCF		11/20/2023
Alane Humrich, Program Director Community Weatherization Coalition		11/29/2023
NKwanda Jah, Executive Director Cultural Arts Coalition		11/20/2023
Monica Frazier, President Springhill Neighborhood Assn		11/28/2023
Andrew Miles, Ex. Dir. Greater Duval Neighborhood Assn		12/07/2023
Dorothy Benson, Chair Southwest Advocacy Group		12/06/2023
Barry Jacobson, Board Chair Solar Impact, Inc.		11/17/2023

SUPPORTERS OF THE EMPOWER COALITION (continued)

Organization	Signature	Date
Tom Mason, Advisor Construction & Technical Programs Santa Fe College	<u>Tom Mason</u>	<u>12/08/2023</u>
Phyllis Marty, CEO CareerSource N Central FL	<u>Phyllis Marty</u>	<u></u>

