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JUST A START LAUNCHES SOLAR START LAB, A SOLAR PANEL INSTALLATION PROGRAM FOR OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

Over \$1 Million in Public and Private Funding Fuels Expansion of Youth Clean Energy Career Training

Cambridge, MA — September 8, 2025 — Just A Start is proud to announce the launch of the Solar Start Lab, a hands-on clean energy workforce training program tailored for YouthBuild alumni in Massachusetts. Building on a successful 2024 pilot, the expanded program will train 20 students over two cohorts, equipping them with the skills and experience needed for in-demand careers in solar panel installation and maintenance.

The Fall 2024 pilot, supported by [YouthBuild Global](#) in partnership with [Unirac](#), [Solar Landscape](#), and the [Solar Energy Industries Association](#) (SEIA), successfully trained and certified nine YouthBuild alumni from Cambridge, Quincy, and Brockton. All participants received two nationally recognized certifications — the Unirac Master Installer Program (MIP) and Solar Landscape’s STEP-UP certification. Graduates also connected with our employer partners, [Freedom Forever](#) and [Sunrun](#), through career panels with industry leaders. One graduate has already been hired full-time as a photovoltaic installer.

“From the beginning, we saw this pilot as a way to build employment pathways for our construction graduates into a growing segment of the clean energy sector. We’re ecstatic for the chance to expand our program with the support of our partners and recent investments in our program,” said **Nate Bae Kupel, Managing Director of Youth Programs at Just A Start**. “It’s such a win for our students and a win for Massachusetts’ clean energy future.”

Thanks to [\\$850,000 in funding](#) from the **Massachusetts Clean Energy Center's (MassCEC) Equity Workforce Fund**, Just A Start will expand the curriculum developed during the pilot to include solar labor as well as a broader range of clean energy occupations. Training will take place in the newly outfitted Just A Start Solar Laboratory near Alewife, complete with a mock roof and full solar panel array. Students will participate in a three-month training that includes in-person and online instruction, hands-on practice, safety certifications, supportive services, and job placement support.

Additional support includes a **\$150,000 planning grant over two years from the Clipper Ship Foundation** Charitable Giving Account at Vanguard Charitable, which will help fund instructional staff, case managers, tools, and classroom materials. **YouthBuild Global recently awarded the program a \$15,000 continuity grant** investing in the program through its [Solar Jobs Pathway Initiative](#), offering job placement resources, industry convenings, and ongoing technical assistance as part of a national network of solar training programs.

Employer partner **Freedom Forever** shares, “Partnering with YouthBuild has been nothing short of inspiring. At Freedom Forever, we’re proud to stand alongside an organization that’s transforming lives and opening doors for the next generation of clean energy leaders. This program is more than training

— it’s a launchpad for meaningful careers in solar, and we’re honored to be part of that journey. We believe in these students, we see their potential, and we’re committed to hiring as many as possible to help build a brighter, more sustainable future together.”

Industry Leader **Sunrun** adds, "The YouthBuild students we’ve met are truly impressive, motivated, and ready to make an impact. At Sunrun, we value partnerships that invest in people, and this program is doing just that. The hands-on experience they’re gaining is setting them up for success in a rapidly growing industry. We’ve had the opportunity to speak with graduates at career panels and graduations, and it’s clear they’re entering the workforce with confidence and purpose. We’re excited to see how these future clean energy professionals grow and help shape the industry in the years to come."

The Solar Start Lab will launch its first full cohort at the start of 2026, followed by a second cohort in spring 2026.

With clean energy jobs growing at more than twice the rate of other U.S. employment sectors, and 88% of Massachusetts solar employers reporting difficulty finding qualified workers, SPIP is not only preparing young people for meaningful careers but also addressing a critical need in the state’s evolving energy landscape.

To learn more about the Solar Start Lab, please contact Nate Bae Kupel, Just A Start Managing Director of Youth Programs at NateBaeKupel@justastart.org.



Graduates of the pilot program in Solar Laboratory at Just A Start’s headquarters, joined by local program staff, regional team members, and YouthBuild Global President and CEO John Valverde.

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About Just A Start:

Just A Start believes that access to stable housing and sustainable careers are the essential building blocks of equitable communities. For more than 50 years, we have focused on meeting the fundamental needs of individuals and families who have been systematically denied opportunities to realize their full potential. Our programs include affordable housing, education and job training, and comprehensive support services, spanning Cambridge and beyond. We have developed and currently maintain 600 affordable apartments. To keep community members housed, we also offer financial and technical assistance to prevent evictions, and support low- and moderate-income homeowners. Finally, we prepare individuals of all ages and circumstances with the skills and knowledge they need to secure fulfilling careers, leveraging their talents to achieve economic mobility and strengthen the region's workforce.