

A low-angle photograph of an offshore wind farm under construction. The image shows a complex network of yellow steel beams and white support structures against a clear blue sky. In the foreground, several large black cables with orange stripes are visible, some coiled and others running vertically. The perspective is looking up at the structure, emphasizing its scale.

CROSSWINDS

THE FUTURE OF WIND

EARLY UNION ENGAGEMENT KEY TO OFFSHORE WORKFORCE SUCCESS

JDR has been subcontracted to supply 130 miles of inter-array cables. (Courtesy: JDR)

As an emerging industry likely to endure for decades, the offshore wind workforce will require an experienced core of people to work up and down the eastern (and eventually western) seaboard.

By BRIAN DAVIS and ADAM BARNES

The Inflation Reduction Act, which was signed into law in August 2022, is set to create tens of thousands of new clean-energy jobs by 2030. Labor unions have been broadly supportive of the act, which is hoped to underpin “labor standards that will promote family-sustaining union jobs.” As one of the largest new industries to come along in decades, unions are understandably enthusiastic about the job opportunities presented by offshore wind. Equally committed to delivering high-quality workmanship supported by proactive training, the offshore wind industry can be confident in the provision of union members with the right foundational knowledge to execute on projects.

However, recent analysis from Reuters indicates that over three quarters of the clean-energy manufacturing facilities that have been announced since the signing of the act are in states with anti-union laws. While opting to locate facilities in an anti-union state might reduce the initial cost of hiring, companies run the risk of missing out on the most highly skilled (unionized) workforce for the job. Early and proactive union engagement will be vital for ensuring companies establishing operations in the U.S. unlock the opportunities presented by union partnerships.

SETTING A STRONG PRECEDENT FOR UNION LABOR

As the United States’ first commercial-scale offshore wind project, all eyes are on the delivery of Vineyard Wind, which has set a strong precedent for the use of union labor on future offshore wind projects in U.S. coastal waters. Through a project labor agreement, the site is expected to create a total of 500 union jobs during its construction. Key to the success in reaching the agreement has been the proactive approach taken by the project’s developer and service companies to align with local stakeholders and unions to establish strong, long-term relationships.

JDR, which has been subcontracted to supply 130 miles of inter-array cables, has been working closely with the Southeastern Massachusetts branch of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW Local 223) to identify opportunities for union members within the cable contract. While European technicians will set the industry in the right direction, the union partnership will ensure the necessary subsea and technical training is delivered to create a skilled local workforce for ongoing maintenance at Vineyard Wind and for future project construction.

LIFE OFFSHORE

One important element of this service company/union relationship has been early and open engagement to share information. While many union workers are technically capable of entering the offshore wind industry, for most, being off-

shore will be a completely new experience. From the need to remain calm in a survival situation to working 12-hour shifts and living in a confined space, a critical success factor will be attracting the right personality types to train for the roles becoming available. While having the right technical skills and certification is a requirement, people skills, teamwork, and professionalism is also vital. Unions, with their direct line to hundreds of thousands of qualified individuals, provide a fast-tracked route to meet candidates, disseminate educative materials, and host industry events.

Union partnerships are also well placed to support the involvement of underrepresented groups to ensure local plans are considered and create local labor opportunities for these groups. Roundtables are an excellent way to create engagement and address possible barriers for workers interested in joining the industry. Some insights from the JDR-IBEW Local 223 partnership include questions around the privacy and practicalities of using the restroom when on the offshore turbine worksite, whether there is designated female-only bunks onboard, and what processes are in place for raising and addressing HR concerns.

These conversations highlight the need for service companies to consider whether project execution can be adapted to make offshore wind a more attractive environment in which to work. Equally, a strong commitment exists within local stakeholders in Massachusetts and in the U.S. more broadly to ensure that offshore wind is a benefit to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). As such, service companies interested in growing their business in this emerging market will need to create opportunities to enhance DEI if they are to be successful in the long-term.

Having completed significant outreach within the local electrical community, IBEW Local 223 and JDR have now moved on to facilitating visits to the fabrication yard where Vineyard Wind’s cable transition pieces are being fabricated. As part of the mock-up trial, union members apply their previous knowledge and offshore wind-specific training to ensure the project will be executed successfully once offshore.

A FOCUS ON LONG-TERM OPPORTUNITIES

The final piece in ensuring successful union engagement is the need to balance short term and long-term goals. At present, while the U.S. has an exciting pipeline of projects, the first few projects are only just beginning to break ground. Understandably, there is an eagerness to create as many short-term jobs as possible to capitalize on these first few projects.

But as an emerging industry that is likely to endure for decades, in the long term it requires an experienced core of people to work up and down the eastern (and eventually western) seaboard. This requires a shift in focus from

As one of the largest new industries to come along in decades, unions are understandably enthusiastic about the job opportunities presented by offshore wind. (Courtesy: Shutterstock)

project-to-project work to a longer-term, industrywide vision, which brings together states, trades and companies around the same mission.

Through proactive union engagement, the offshore wind industry will create lifelong, family-sustaining jobs for tens of thousands of people, all while enhancing diversity, equity and inclusion and supporting the energy transition. ✍️

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Brian Davis is General Manager and Adam Barnes is Service Manager with JDR.



YOUR SOURCE FOR WIND ENERGY NEWS

For 10 years, Wind Systems magazine has been a leading authority on the wind-energy industry and its place in the world as a stable and sustainable source of renewable, clean energy.

Each issue, Wind Systems offers the wind industry workforce timely, valuable information from key segment players in order to increase its readers' knowledge of the wind industry's positive future.

On windsystemsmag.com, we have paired our vast archives with the latest web technologies to develop the most efficient, streamlined, user-friendly web experience in the wind-energy industry.

Best of all, it's free to you. All you need to do is subscribe.



SUBSCRIBE FOR FREE

www.windsystemsmag.com

Giving Wind Direction

**WIND
SYSTEMS**