Energy Innovation Cluster ICAP Cohort 3 Report

Inland Northwest Energy Innovation Cluster (Urbanova – Contract *25-78250-008)*

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Overview and Objectives

This report outlines the execution of Contract 25-78250-008, awarded under the Innovation Cluster Accelerator Program (ICAP 3) to Urbanova for the purpose of convening and managing an industry-led cluster focused on grid modernization. The key objectives were to enhance an innovation cluster focused on a resilient and equitable clean energy ecosystem through strategic governance, stakeholder engagement, and collaborative planning.

This ICAP 3 scope supported finalizing nonprofit cluster governance and leadership, hosting a statewide industry summit, deepening equity-focused strategic planning, expanding the cluster partner network with a focus on broad participation and expanding energy workforce alignment.

A final updated report will be submitted on July 10, 2025 to incorporate feedback and action plans developed during our two-day regional Energy Innovation Summit being held July 8-9, 2025.

Contents

Executive Summary and 2025-2026 Priorities

The Inland Northwest region, anchored by strong energy industry partners, research institutions, and community organizations, has an extraordinary opportunity to develop its emerging clean energy ecosystem in ways that deliver equitable benefits to underserved communities, ensure grid reliability, and stimulate long-term economic growth.

Over the last year, multiple workshops and stakeholder meetings have reinforced the region's alignment around five strategic focus areas listed below with the key gaps or needs (see Section 2).

1. **Governance, Policy & Strategy Development – key gaps/needs**
    - Coordination in regional energy leadership
    - Opportunity for neutral common energy strategy "Council"
    - Tribal, rural and underserved communities facing strain - stronger representation needed
2. **Market Making & Demonstration – key gaps/needs**
    - Clean energy and grid modernization transition requires more operational pilots and demonstrations
    - Increased certainty and consistency in energy market participation & benefit for all utilities
    - Distributed Energy Resources (DERs) require improved forecasting and economic models
3. **Community Energy Resilience – key gaps/needs**
    - Energy resilience and autonomy for underserved, Tribal and rural communities (e.g. microgrid deployment)
    - New funding pathways/incentives for energy innovation at resident, firm and community level
    - Operational "Resiliency Stations" can offer economic and local benefits
4. **Workforce & STEM Development – key gaps/needs**
    - Aging skilled trades and energy leadership
    - Under resourced STEM– shared learnings and prioritization for new energy career pathways
    - Uneven alignment between industry & training providers
5. **Investment, Innovation & Incubation (i3) – key gaps/needs**
    - Early-Stage funding shortage & expected turbulence next 1-3 years
    - Absence of a regional specialized energy incubator with laboratory, simulation, and utility partner demonstration capability
    - Siloed IP & Tech transfer, data integration and regulatory support for pilots

These focus areas and gaps/needs emerged through the three workshops, multiple proposal efforts, Accenture's "Competitive and Market Analysis" (2024), engagement with partners the past two years, and related meetings on strategy and future goals.

Workshops built on the outputs of each prior one, looking at SWOT analysis and industry data and experience, guiding principles and identification of key intervention areas, and building detail around the top intervention areas for the purpose of developing the National Science Foundation (NSF) Engines preliminary proposal. The Washington State Commerce ICAP Cohort 3 award allowed further refinement through a two-day energy innovation summit where the information in this report will be refined and focused on actionable outcomes for our partners for 2025 and 2026.

Below are immediate (12-month) priorities, **integrated** with short-term ICAP outcomes for partner expansion, with added numeric targets to assist in building a value proposition for cluster partners and members:

1. **Governance, Policy & Strategy Development (Governance and Partnerships)**
    - **Priority 1:** Convene with partners across the state to determine the benefit and participation in a "Regional Energy Innovation Strategy Council" to unify regional energy cluster strategy with cross-sector partners and communities that leverages the many energy-focused organizations that are part of the ecosystem.
    - **Priority 2:** Add 10 new partners and grow cluster membership to 25 in 2025.
    - **Priority 3:** Finalize and adopt an "Energy Roadmap & Scorecard" clarifying near-term legislative objectives, more resilient grid development, and Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) updates incorporating demonstration support.
    - **Priority 4:** Continue to elevate the emphasis on collaboration, "banding together on workforce, investment, and regulatory engagement" that can strengthen common strategies (rather than duplicating efforts across different organizations).
2. **Market Making & Demonstration (Industry and Research)**
    - **Priority 1:** Launch at least two demonstration-scale microgrids or energy pilots to validate DER technologies and advanced storage.
    - **Priority 2:** Form a "Market Innovation Working Group" to explore real-time market signals, aggregator models, and local renewables.
    - **Priority 3:** Host an "Investor, Supplier, and Producer Workshop" to expand synergy for early pilot success.
    - **Priority 4**: Facilitate 10 real-world demonstrations by 2030 to ensure research and technology transitions to practical pilots in the region.
3. **Community Energy Resilience (Industry and Research)**
    - **Priority 1:** Promote energy innovation pilots and projects with broad community benefits (e.g."resiliency stations" with on-site generation and storage).

- **Priority 2:** Map the region's top 3–5 at-risk communities based on social vulnerability and wildfire/climate data.
- **Priority 3:** Adopt industry "Common Challenges" to better identify common issues that need coordinated problem solving. Shared solutions to wildfire extremes and infrastructure vulnerabilities can be integrated here by aligning multiple utility infrastructure efforts in resilience planning.

4. **Workforce & STEM Development (Workforce and STEM)**
   - **Priority 1:** Host an "Industry and Educator Conference Track" to finalize short-term workforce gap and opportunity analysis.
   - **Priority 2:** Coordinate a "Clean Energy Career Pathways" effort with K–12, community colleges, and workforce councils.
   - **Priority 3:** Launch an "Energy Apprenticeship Accelerator" bridging skilled-worker gaps.
   - **Priority 4:** Adopt a "Workforce Target": Adopt the numeric goal of increasing the locally trained energy workforce by 25% by 2035, ensuring continuity of advanced skill development for the entire region and mitigating the aging skilled workforce.
5. **Investment, Innovation & Incubation "i3" (Economic Development)**
   - **Priority 1:** Establish or partner with a "Regional Energy Incubator" with next-generation career opportunities that support cleantech, grid modernization, and electrification ventures with dedicated partner support to provide the laboratory, simulation, and demonstration capabilities needed for energy innovation.
   - **Priority 2:** Formalize an "Energy Innovation Funders Circle" with local and national angels, philanthropic entities, and corporate partners to fill early and mid-stage funding gaps.
   - **Priority 3:** Aim to double private investment in Inland NW energy businesses by 2030, complementing the near-term $50 million with a broader, long-term objective for scaling the entire region's innovation pipeline.

Recent federal priority changes continue to show tightening for energy/climate grant programs, further underscoring the need to diversify capital and leverage mature technologies that have can show better ROI timeframes. Projects like microgrids or advanced DERs especially with renewable or intermittent capabilities may require philanthropic or corporate support if federal funding lines shrink.

The July 8–9, 2025 Energy Innovation Summit was a critical ICAP3 milestone that advanced the transition from an emerging to a growth-stage energy innovation cluster. The two-day convening engaged over 50 contributors—including utilities, research institutions, investors, and equity leaders—to co-develop strategic pathways for regional clean energy innovation, workforce expansion, and investment alignment. Three targeted tracks (Industry & Research, Workforce &

STEM, and Innovation/Investment) generated actionable roadmaps to meet the Pacific Northwest's rising energy demand with sustainable, equitable, and economically viable solutions. The Summit served both as a proving ground for INTENT's evolving governance and membership model and as a collaborative platform for aligning long-term sustainability priorities.

Top summit highlights:

- **53 confirmed speakers, panelists, and facilitators** contributed across 4 panels and 20 discrete presentations.
- **Three focused tracks** produced prioritized next steps for innovation, workforce development, and investment ecosystem building.
- **Over 100 registered attendees** from across the greater Inland Northwest and spanning numerous sectors focused on the clean energy transition
- **Momentum-building milestone** that engaged over 40 partner organizations in live collaboration around INTENT's ICAP3 goals.

Conclusion

The Inland Northwest's transition from an emerging to a growth-stage energy innovation cluster is underway—grounded in collaborative vision, inclusive governance, and industry-aligned action. With strong momentum generated by the ICAP Cohort 3-supported Energy Innovation Summit and alignment with state and federal clean energy goals, the region is poised to become a national model for equitable decarbonization, workforce development, and innovation deployment. Yet continued progress requires sustained commitment.

Washington State must continue its strategic investment in this cluster to unlock the full value of its clean energy ecosystem. By supporting the expansion of smart grid demonstrations, funding community-based energy resilience projects, and advancing innovation in long-duration storage and demand flexibility, the state ensures not only regional economic growth but also national leadership in decarbonization solutions. Further investment in this new cluster and its partners will accelerate the deployment of scalable technologies, increase energy equity for rural and Tribal communities, and train the next generation of clean energy professionals. This is not just an energy imperative—it is an economic and social one. Washington's continued leadership will catalyze long-term impact across the Pacific Northwest and beyond.

Let us act now—together—to ensure that Washington remains at the forefront of a resilient, inclusive, and carbon-free energy future.

Objectives Met and Activities Completed

1. Governance Creation and Cluster Buildout

These are the updates from the June 15 report as we continue to evolve organizational governance and energy cluster branding.

- Established interim board (through September 2025) consolidating Urbanova and INTENT governance strategies to pave the way for sustainable cluster formation.
- Began coordination with Washington State innovation cluster partners (Clean Tech Alliance Washington, VERTical Innovation Cluster).
- Planned for post-summit board meeting review to strategize ongoing recruitment, staffing and communication needs.
- Distributed Request for Information (RFI) and received responses (June 30) for rebranding strategy support (logo, name, and value proposition messaging).

2. Energy Industry Gap/Needs Analysis

This incorporates all workgroup and workshop outputs, prior observations and recommendations, market and data analysis, current focus areas and goals in recent grant applications, and potential federal funding constraints in the near term. The first workshop in May 2024 was primarily a series of SWOT exercises for each workgroup area (Industry, Research, Workforce, and Investment) and the outcomes of those exercises were used for the following workshops to refine the goals and focus areas for the NSF preliminary proposal.

i. <u>Governance, Policy & Strategy Development</u>

Key Gaps/Needs

1. **Coordination in Regional Leadership.** Different regulatory environments within Washington and Idaho, together with over 30 utilities and at least two different market levels result in inconsistent policies, making it harder to coordinate energy projects and launch pilots.
2. **Opportunity for Common Energy Strategy Council.** No unified, neutral body exists to bring together the interests of industry, rural co-ops, tribal and local governments, municipal utilities, and investor-owned utilities which creates policy and investment misalignment.
3. **Underrepresented Tribal and Rural Voices Related to Grid Modernization.** Tribal entities cite minimal inclusion in broader state-level energy planning, which slows adoption of equitable strategies. Rural communities often don't have a direct voice or advocacy outside the County Commissioner level.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- **Existing WA & ID State Policies**. Washington's Clean Energy Transformation Act and Idaho's evolving decarbonization policies can serve as a foundation for accelerating regional clean energy.

- **NSF Engines, DOE FOAs.** Federal initiatives and funding channels incentivize multi-organization collaboration, strengthening governance frameworks.
- **Public-Private Collaboration Track Record.** Past successes (e.g., Avista–PNNL–university projects) prove the region's ability to jointly address policy and R&D objectives.

Weaknesses

- **Divergent Regulatory Environments**. Idaho's historical focus on cost-based rates can conflict with Washington's stronger carbon mandates, limiting uniform progress.
- **No Single "Regional Energy Strategy Council"**. Multiple boards and organizations exist doing great work, but none comprehensively unify PUDs, municipal utilities, investor-owned utilities, or tribal reps into one coordinated strategy body. This was one of the primary value statements showcased for INTENT.

Opportunities

- **Policy Alignment** . A dedicated "Regional Energy Strategy Council" can reduce duplicative compliance steps and streamline binational or multi-county projects to get more energy projects invested in and done.
- **Joint Legislative Platform**. A shared agenda for wildfire prevention, advanced grids, and consistent funding can boost legislative traction in both capitals.
- **Equitable Representation in Governance.** Formal tribal seats and community working groups ensure historically marginalized voices have direct input, enhancing overall policy legitimacy.

Threats

- **Political Volatility**. Changing administrations or legislative priorities risk stalling or reversing policy commitments.
- **Funding Shortfalls & Potential Federal Budget Cuts**. Recent congressional deliberations on climate/energy appropriations could strip resources from state-based or cross-border programs.
- **Jurisdictional Tensions.** Lack of established legal frameworks for cross-state energy programs can lead to confusion or conflict among local, tribal, and state entities.

ii. <u>Market Making & Demonstration</u>

Key Gaps/Needs

1. **Insufficient Operational Pilots**. While a few small-scale microgrids exist (e.g., Catalyst Building, MLK Jr. Community Center), insufficient data outcomes and ability to economically scale hamper widespread replication.
2. **Limited Real-Time Market Signals.** The Western EIM addresses transmission-level balancing but lacks distribution-level market mechanisms for behind-the-meter DER synergy.
3. **Uncertain ROI for DERs**. Many pilot projects fail to incorporate resilience or social benefits (e.g. energy autonomy) into standard cost-benefit analysis.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- **Existing Projects in Spokane Eco District, others**. Demonstrations reduce perceived risk around advanced grid technologies and provide valuable baseline data.
- **Collaborative Partners: Avista, Itron, OES**. Having utility, metering, and software expertise in close proximity drives integrated solutions quickly.
- **National Investment Momentum**. Federal climate-tech funding and private VC interest bolster local demonstration budgets.

Weaknesses

- **Regulatory Uncertainty for Aggregator or Transactive Models**. Utilities are uncertain how to recover costs or share revenue for behind-the-meter generation or aggregator-led solutions.
- **Siloed Pilots.** Many demonstration efforts do not systematically share data or best practices, slowing broader adoption and scaling.
- **Uneven landscape for balancing authorities, system operators, and utilities.** This leads to different strategies and implementations, often in a one-off manner or suited to the involved parties and regulatory environment they are in. New or unique DERs become one-off grid and utility partner projects rather than a repeatable framework that can speed regional or national scalability.

Opportunities

- **DER Market Aggregation**. Aggregating flexible loads can yield new revenue streams and stabilize the grid, benefiting customers, utilities and communities.
- **Regional Knowledge-Sharing Network**. A formal "Market Innovation Working Group" can scale up learning from each pilot so new projects avoid reinvention.
- **Additional "10 real-world demos by 2030"**. As a "Research" target, bridging lab discoveries to practical pilot usage fosters robust, replicable demonstration models.
- **Federal Funding Alignment**. DOE's Connected Communities and other new FOAs can underwrite advanced microgrids or aggregator testing, though funding is at risk.

Threats

- **Uncertain Utility Business Models.** Utilities fear potential revenue erosion if behind-the-meter expansions proceed without stable regulatory frameworks.
- **Technological Complexity**. Achieving interoperability among multiple vendors, plus ensuring cybersecurity, can slow or derail advanced projects.
- **Potential Federal Grant Tightening**. Federal budget and grant cuts will limit the scale or frequency of new awards and investment in either sustainable or intermittent energy innovation and demonstration efforts.

iii. Community Energy Resilience

Key Gaps/Needs

1. **Rural & Tribal Vulnerability**. Wildfires, storms, and extended outages hit remote or tribal regions harder due to less robust infrastructure and fewer response resources.
2. **Few Operational 'Resiliency Stations'**. Though widely discussed, real microgrid or storage-backed community shelters remain rare regionally.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- **Strong Community & Tribal Commitment**. Local leadership frequently voice the need for solutions that ensure long-term energy security and cultural sustainability, even in remote locations.
- **Active Wildfire Mitigation Efforts**. Both WA and ID invest in forest health and grid hardening, supporting resilience for frontline communities.

Weaknesses

- **Financing Gaps**. PUDs or small towns often lack the budget to adopt microgrids without state or philanthropic bridging.
- **Disparate Planning Efforts**. Some utilities plan individually, missing collaborative synergy across county or tribal boundaries.

Opportunities

- **Community-Led Microgrids**. Engaging local end-users fosters buy-in and ensures microgrid configurations reflect local priorities.
- **IIJA Funding**. If not reduced, these grants can offset large capital costs for resilience projects. The future for this is very uncertain.
- **Integration with Equity & Justice**. Prioritizing the most at-risk communities supports a just energy transition, bridging socio-economic disparities.

Threats

- **Climate Amplification.** Extreme weather events and demand peaks strain existing infrastructure beyond normal design limits.
- **Siting & Permitting Delays**. Environmental and cultural resource reviews can be lengthy, slowing microgrid deployment.
- **Shifting Federal Budget Climate**. If resilience grants shrink, communities lacking local capital may be stranded.

iv. Workforce & STEM Development

Key Gaps/Needs

1. **Aging Skilled Trades**. Many line workers and power engineers approach retirement, creating an urgent need for new entrants. Several in our core group have likewise retired that also can reduce influence and engagement at the partner level.
2. **Under resourced STEM**. Shortage of modern energy lab facilities, forcing talented students to relocate for advanced programs.
3. **Disconnect Between Industry & Providers**. Industry sees emerging roles (e.g., microgrid operator) that training institutions haven't yet integrated.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- **Spokane Workforce Council and GSI**. These agencies drives strong job-training programs and fosters linkages among employers, educators, and job seekers.
- **University Partnerships**. Collaborations across WSU, EWU, UI, and CCs generate specialized STEM tracks, bridging research to application.
- **National Hiring Trends**. Demand for advanced energy roles is climbing, creating favorable conditions for local talent retention.

Weaknesses

- **Low Retention of STEM Graduates**. Many newly trained individuals move to larger cities offering higher wages or bigger technology hubs. Higher education ata shows we are producing what is needed at the degree level, but they do not stay in the region.
- **Minimal K–12 Integration**. Younger students seldom get repeated exposure to energy careers, diminishing local awareness. Multiple workshops, partners, and government officials have stressed the importance of engagement at the middle school level is key.
- **No Formal CIP Codes for New Roles**. Without classification or recognized credentials, new job titles remain invisible in official workforce planning.

Opportunities

- **High Demand for Clean Energy Jobs**. This creates new career pathways if local institutions can respond quickly to training needs.
- **Investment in STEM & Apprenticeships**. Federal or state programs can inject funds into short-course or apprenticeship expansions. Local industry has programs internally that could be leveraged.
- **"Industry and Educator Conference"** . This event fosters immediate synergy among employers, colleges, and K–12 to align skill pipeline demands.
- **"25% workforce increase by 2035".** This longer term goal and target underscores a multi-year commitment to cultivate local professionals for advanced energy systems.

Threats

- **Coastal Competition for Top Talent**. Tech hubs like Seattle or San Francisco often lure engineers with higher wages and brand recognition.

- **Rapidly Evolving Tech vs. Slow Curriculum Updates**. Emerging roles (e.g., aggregator specialist) require new training modules not yet developed.
- **Potential Federal Grant Reductions**. Some workforce grants may be cut, forcing local agencies to find alternative funding.

v. <u>Innovation, Incubation & Investment (i3)</u>

Key Gaps/Needs

1. **Early-Stage Funding Shortage**. Risk-tolerant capital is sparse; local angel/VC networks are smaller than major metropolitan areas.
2. **Absence of Specialized Cleantech Incubator**. Generic co-working spaces lack advanced lab or hardware prototyping capabilities essential for energy R&D.
3. **Siloed IP & Tech Transfer**. Universities and labs have valuable patents, but no streamlined path for bridging them to local energy startups.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- **Global Energy Players (Avista, SEL, Power Engineers, Kore Power)**. Large anchor companies can serve as pilot customers or co-investors, providing startups an immediate market.
- **Robust Research Assets (PNNL, INL, WSU, UI, EWU, Avista)**. Abundant IP resources and lab expertise exist; the challenge is coordination and moving early stage efforts into commercial readiness.
- **Existing Incubators & Near-Term Membership Expansion**. Programs like LaunchPad NW, plus the cluster's drive to add new partners, can expedite innovation synergy.

Weaknesses

- **Inadequate Specialized Lab Space**. Early-stage hardware ventures can't easily test, refine and scale prototypes locally without major capital and access to utility assets in some cases.
- **Limited Venture Capital**. Investors often center in Seattle or out-of-state, overlooking rural or smaller NW communities.

Opportunities

- **Collaborative Incubator Model**. By co-locating demonstration labs near utility or campus facilities, entrepreneurs can quickly test solutions in real or simulated grid conditions.
- **De-Risking Mechanisms**. Grants, philanthropic funds, or corporate sponsorship can mitigate high costs of early hardware or software R&D.
- **Scaling Through Federal Partnerships**. NSF Engines, EDA Tech Hubs, or DOE ARPA-E can amplify local success if budget lines remain intact.
- **"Double Private Investment by 2030"**. Doubling private capital in NW energy businesses complements near-term $50M i3 goals, ensuring the region's long-term scale and viability.

Threats

- **Utility Procurement Complexities**. Multi-year processes to adopt new technology slow the route to commercial validation.
- **IP Ownership Hurdles**. Negotiations among labs, universities, and private founders can stall commercialization.
- **Federal Budget Volatility.** Proposed cuts to "green innovation" lines hamper seed-funding opportunities (*Politico*, 2023).

3. Strategic Planning: 12-24 month Strategic Action Plan for 2025-26

The below action plan information is focused on many shorter term goals to both narrow focus for organizational sustainability, build the value statement based on that focus for our partners and members, and show actionable results to help build momentum. Funding for energy innovation and projects with emerging technologies is seen to be a nationwide challenge for the next few years, and our plan is to help our partners develop projects that have a more realistic ROI without large scale government investments. This has been a core principle for us over the past three years. To do that, our value proposition must help our partners do more with less and leverage the extensive partner network to help achieve tangible results. This collaboration can help partners specialize and minimize new expertise or resources. In order to demonstrate this value, there is a critical 12-24 month period of intense partner and community development work that needs to be accomplished to help develop that common voice and ensure the most important energy interventions rise to the top for investment.

The benefits are a more connected and vibrant energy ecosystem, integrating several energy clusters, utilities and supporting industry organizations, policy and economic development organizations. Most importantly, this helps the communities we all serve by increasing energy capacity and resilience, flattening energy costs, benefiting the environment, and developing new skilled and living wage workforce opportunities.

Through December 2025 (Next 6 Months – includes alignment for ICAP3 Award)

1. **Governance, Policy & Strategy Development**
    - Finalize the INTENT/Urbanova merged 501.c.3 membership model and cluster partners as the starting point for the above discussed "Energy Strategy Council" with Tribal, community, and policy maker seats.
    - Complete and publish an updated strategic plan leveraging the NSF Engines Development and ICAP 3 award efforts.
    - Recruit 10 new partners toward a goal of 25 total members.
2. **Market Making & Demonstration**
    - Conduct an "Investor, Supplier, and Producer Workshop".
    - Define the roadmap needed to complete "10 real-world demonstrations by 2030" from prior analysis and start market development sessions regionally to align evolving technologies with grid and system operators.

- Receive and start effort on the DOE STRIVES project if awarded.

3. **Community Energy Resilience**
    - Select 2–3 high-risk communities for innovation pilot projects, focusing on energy resiliency and equity. Where possible, tie that to related rebuilding or investment efforts related to past wildfire or other natural disasters to rebuild back more resiliently.
    - Perform rural or at-risk community engagement to develop better understanding of common and unique energy resilience needs in order to promote awareness and look at common solutions available.
4. **Workforce & STEM Development**
    - Leverage the Cluster workforce workgroup to evolve to a "Clean Energy Career Pathway Coalition" representing key industries, academic and training partners.
    - Coordinate an "Industry and Educator Conference" for immediate workforce gap solutions.
    - Incorporate the "25% workforce growth by 2035" target to shape program and training goals for the next ten years.
5. **Innovation, Incubation & Investment (i3)**
    - Host an "Energy Funders Circle" expanded to producers and suppliers in co-operation with E8 Angels, Fuse Fund, Avista Development, Montauk Climate and other partners that includes cyclical programming and opportunities for pitches and reverse pitches.
    - Initiate a $50M capital campaign and adopt the objective to "double private investment by 2030."

Through December 2026 (Months 7–18)

1. **Governance, Policy & Strategy Development**
    - Draft aggregator legislation in WA/ID.
    - Plan and host a multi-stakeholder legislative workshop on decarbonization leveraging partnership with E8 Angels and their Decarbonate annual conference.
2. **Market Making & Demonstration**
    - Identify aggregator/market requirements for near-term demonstration.
    - Publish region-specific reliability data on cost savings and stability.
    - Publish a "Market Pathway Toolkit" to replicate pilot successes.
3. **Community Energy Resilience**
    - Secure MOUs for near-term microgrids or resiliency stations.
    - Develop a "Rural Resilience Finance Guide."

4. **Workforce & STEM Development**
    - Launch "STEM Energy Innovation Educators Initiative" for 10 school districts in Eastern Washington.
    - Implement a "Clean Energy Apprenticeship Accelerator" to 3–5 colleges with industry informed programming and internship opportunities.
    - Host annual "Energy Futures Summit," bridging K–12, higher ed, industry.
5. **Investment, Innovation & Incubation (i3)**
    - Leverage LaunchPad and university efforts and resources to continue a "Cleantech Incubation Hub" with utility, academic, and laboratory partners.
    - Partner with E8 and other investment partners to launch the "Inland NW Energy Seed Fund" offering 5–7 seed grants.

From 2027 on (Months 19+)

1. **Governance, Policy & Strategy Development**
    - Institutionalize "Inland NW Energy Strategy Council" under 501(c)(3) or an NSF/EDA engine.
    - Seek interstate DER compacts.
2. **Market Making & Demonstration**
    - Make progress toward "10 real-world demos by 2028" from the PUD engagement.
    - Fund/design two new microgrid pilots partly via philanthropic or corporate means.
    - Operationalize demonstration-based local energy market.
    - Scale aggregator-based transactive markets to 20,000+ DER participants.
3. **Community Energy Resilience**
    - Complete 2–3 "Resiliency Stations" with solar, battery, black-start.
    - Standardize microgrid design to enable more scalable and equitable deployments.
    - Achieve "Resilience Ready" for the State-assessment most high-risk areas.
4. **Workforce & STEM Development**
    - Graduate 1,000 new professionals in advanced energy systems.
    - Adopt integrated K–12 "Energy & Environment" curricula in 50% of rural districts.
5. **Investment, Innovation & Incubation (i3)**
    - Operationalize the "Cleantech Incubation Hub" for new ventures.
    - Attract $50M in private capital.

4. Partner Engagement & Membership Development

We challenged ourselves to identify ten (10) new partners within the six weeks of the ICAP3 scope. We also challenged ourselves to broaden the circle and connect with other clusters and energy-related organizations to more fully develop the Venn diagram of energy expertise and capabilities in the region.

a. Energy Industry Outreach and Partner Development

Over the past six weeks of the ICAP3 scope, we have conducted outreach to over 30 utility organizations, three tribes, and over one dozen energy related organizations and energy investment and development organizations to broaden both our perspectives and connective tissue in the new energy economy. This has spanned national geography with climate and investment organizations from New York, energy development organizations in Texas and Oregon, and many of the energy cluster organizations already active and doing great work in the Pacific Northwest.

We are proud to demonstrate we exceeded that goal with discussions with 15 new partners with at least 12 new MOU's in progress. The new connected partners include:

- City of Spokane
- Community Colleges of Spokane
- Greater Spokane Incorporated (GSI)
- Avista Corporation
- Eastern Washington University
- Washington State University
- University of Idaho
- Inland Power
- Edo Energy
- McKinstry
- Itron
- Open Energy Solutions
- Carbon Quest
- Clean Technology Alliance
- Washington Green Bank
- E8 Angels
- VERTical
- Fuse SPC
- Montauk Climate
- Clean Energy Supplier Alliance
- Zero Emissions Northwest
- Apricus Energy Partners
- Emerald Renewable Energy Developers

Expanding a sustainable energy cluster's connections to peer organizations, investors, and developers yields major benefits for the Pacific Northwest and the State of Washington as they navigate competing energy challenges, including rising load growth, resource retirements, transmission constraints, more frequent extreme weather events, and ambitious policy targets.

Diverse actors such as the City of Spokane, Eastern Washington University, Washington State University, Avista, Carbon Quest, Zero Emissions Northwest, and Montauk Climate bring diverse technical expertise, regulatory insights, and commercialization pathways into a shared effort. Collaboration with financial engines like Washington Green Bank, E8 Angels, and Apricus Energy Partners unlocks critical capital for piloting advanced grid solutions, clean firm energy technologies, and DER platforms across rural and urban communities alike. Connecting to

energy innovation hubs outside the region, such as Emerald Renewable Energy Developers in Texas, ensures scalable solutions and reciprocal market access that accelerate the transition to resilient, low-carbon energy systems statewide.

These relationships also enrich the strategic perspective and operational capacity of clusters like INTENT and Urbanova, transforming them into more robust conveners and enablers of equitable energy innovation. Institutions like the Community Colleges of Spokane, Washington State University and Eastern Washington University supply vital workforce pipelines, while entrepreneurial catalysts like Fuse SPC and VERTical support commercialization and supply chain innovation. By aligning these regional assets with national and global innovators, the cluster amplifies its influence in shaping investment priorities, policy incentives, and technology deployment frameworks. The result is a smarter, more connected energy transition—anchored in the Pacific Northwest but attuned to national trends—capable of meeting growing demand with a sustainable return on public and private capital over the next 5–10 years.

b. Industry-Led Cluster Summit (2 Days – July 8-9)

A key deliverable of the ICAP3 scope was leveraging this partner outreach with the core partners and other energy clusters to host a two day Energy Innovation Conference in eastern Washington. This follows three other conferences in 2024 and one strategy session in March 2025 as part of the overall cluster and NSF Engines development effort the past two years.

The July 2025 Energy Innovation Summit serves as a pivotal milestone in the Inland Northwest Energy Innovation Cluster's evolution under ICAP Cohort 3. Designed to advance the strategic goals of Washington State's Innovation Cluster Accelerator Program (ICAP), this two-day convening directly aligns with INTENT and Urbanova's objectives to build a self-sustaining, industry-led energy cluster grounded in equity, innovation, and economic development. The Summit brings together regional and national leaders in utilities, research, investment, workforce development, and public policy to co-develop actionable strategies for meeting the Pacific Northwest's rising energy needs through sustainable and inclusive means.

Structured around the ICAP3 goals of deepening partnerships, fostering innovation pipelines, and expanding the clean energy workforce, the Summit supports INTENT's transition from an emerging to a growth-stage cluster. The event is purpose-built to accelerate partner engagement, align roadmaps, and validate challenge/opportunity areas identified in prior ICAP3 planning. This is essential to the new cluster's sustainability planning, especially as it finalizes its strategic roadmap, launches a 501(c)(3) governance model, and cultivates a value-based membership model and investment ecosystem.

Benefits and Purpose Alignment:

- **Cluster Engagement:** Over 50 contributors and 100 attendees representing utilities, universities, national labs, equity advocates, capital networks, and startups deepen the shared ownership and visibility of the cluster's mission.
- **Roadmap Development:** Each of the three tracks is focused on validating and prioritizing key issues and building actionable strategies to support the ICAP goals of sector transformation, inclusive workforce pipelines, and resilient infrastructure.
- **Sustainability:** The Summit explicitly advances the sustainability plan by testing membership value, identifying programmatic priorities, and strengthening industry-to-academic-to-government alignment—critical to attracting investment and sustaining operations beyond state support.

Feature Summary:

- **Number of Partner Presentations (non-panel, confirmed individual speakers):** 20
- **Number of Panels:** 4 (2 main session panels and 2 in track breakouts)
- **Total Number of Speakers, Panelists, and Contributors:** 53 discrete individuals adding content and contributing their experiences for the benefit of all participants.
- **Tracks (Three Parallel Workstreams):**
    - **Track 1: Industry and Research** – Focuses on using design thinking to co-create a prioritized roadmap of technical challenges and solutions related to clean energy deployment, grid modernization, and resilience.
    - **Track 2: Energy Workforce and STEM Development** – Engages workforce leaders and educational institutions in defining programmatic strategies to grow inclusive energy career pathways and fill critical talent gaps.
    - **Track 3: Innovation, Incubation, and Investment (I3)** – Explores a regional innovation continuum from ideation to commercialization, identifying needs for early-stage capital, incubation support, and market access for investment in clean tech ventures.

Held at WSU's Spokane Academic Center and Catalyst Building, the Summit blends technical rigor with community relevance. With over a dozen partners presenting on regional case studies—from Carbon Quest's carbon capture innovations to Avista's equity-led planning—the sessions exemplify the ICAP cluster model of applied innovation rooted in place.

The event concludes with track report-outs and next steps, which will directly inform INTENT's updated strategy and future cluster programming.

This analysis will be updated in the final report after completion of the two-day summit.

Appendix: Supporting Documents

The following attachments are provided in accordance with the requirements of Contract 25-78250-008 under the deliverable "Energy Innovation Cluster ICAP Cohort 3 Report" for the ICAP3 Innovation Cluster Accelerator Program award to Urbanova.

1. Request for Information: Development of Name, Logo, and Visual Identity for Non-Profit Energy Organization

With support from Avista Corporation, Urbanova/INTENT issued an RFI statewide to communications firms to assist in name and logo development along with supporting visual identity for the new combined entity. Three responses were received and are currently being evaluated by staff and the board of directors.

2. Regional Energy Innovation Flyer

To support partner outreach and communication, we have developed a 'one-pager' outlining the shared goals and core initiatives of the cluster, with an invitation to 'join the movement'.

3. New Partner MOU Statements (Draft Attached)

New connected partners with MOU's in progress include the list below and will be updated following the July 8-9 event.

- City of Spokane
- Community Colleges of Spokane
- Greater Spokane Incorporated (GSI)
- Avista Corporation
- Eastern Washington University
- Washington State University
- University of Idaho
- Inland Power
- Edo Energy
- McKinstry
- Itron
- Open Energy Solutions
- Carbon Quest
- Clean Technology Alliance
- Washington Green Bank
- E8 Angels
- VERTical
- Fuse SPC
- Montauk Climate
- Clean Energy Supplier Alliance
- Zero Emissions Northwest
- Apricus Energy Partners
- Emerald Renewable Energy Developers

4. July 8-9 Energy Innovation Summit Event Invitation and Agenda

Attached is the PDF of the July 8-9 event invitation and final summit agenda.

5. Journal of Business - *Urbanova, Intent merge to form INW energy cluster (June 19, 2025)*

Request for Information: Development of Name, Logo, and Visual Identity for Non-Profit Energy Organization

Background:

Urbanova (Spokane, WA) is a public-private-academic partnership organization focused on civic innovation initiatives. Founded as a smart city collaboration, Urbanova is in the process of transitioning to focus exclusively on energy innovation in the region. INTENT (Spokane, WA) is a collaborative initiative focused on developing an energy ecosystem in the Inland Northwest region. The organization aims to leverage partnerships with various stakeholders to promote sustainable energy solutions and innovation. Recently, Urbanova and INTENT merged and are in the process of updating the new organization's mission and purpose. The interim board of directors is seeking an agency partner to assist with name and logo development along with supporting visual identity for the new combined entity.

Scope of Work:

We are seeking a creative and experienced agency or individual to assist us in the following areas:

1. Name Development: Crafting a name that encapsulates our mission and resonates with our target audience.
2. Logo Design: Creating a visually appealing and memorable logo that represents our organization.
3. Visual Identity: Developing a comprehensive visual identity, including color palettes, typography, and design guidelines, to ensure consistency across all our communications and materials.

Deliverables:

- A selection of name options with rationale for each.
- Multiple logo concepts with revisions based on feedback.
- A visual identity guide outlining logo usage, color schemes, typography, and other design elements.

Proposal Requirements:

Please include the following in your proposal:

- A brief overview of your experience and qualifications.
- Examples of previous work, particularly in the non-profit and energy sectors.
- A detailed timeline and cost estimate for the project.
- Any additional information or suggestions you believe would be beneficial to our organization.

Submission Deadline:

We kindly request that all proposals be submitted by end of day June 30. Please send your proposals to dana.anderson@avistacorp.com

We look forward to collaborating with you to create a visual identity that will help us effectively communicate our mission and engage our community.

POWERING THE FUTURE

LEADING THE ENERGY TRANSITION AND GROWING THE MODERN ENERGY ECONOMY

Leveraging the region's hydroelectric legacy, engineering expertise, reputation for innovation and collaborative spirit, INW Energy Innovation Cluster is charting a path toward global energy leadership.

SHARED DIRECTIVES

At the heart of INW Energy Innovation Cluster's mission is a commitment to shared prosperity through a resilient, renewable-rich electric grid. By aligning powerhouse stakeholders—utilities, industry, entrepreneurs, academics and community —the next-gen energy hub delivers high-impact value across ***six key dimensions:***

1. ***NEUTRAL CONVENOR & ENERGY THOUGHT LEADER*** – Creating competitive advantage through partner-enabled solutions.
2. ***WORKFORCE GROWTH & RETENTION*** – Cultivating local talent pipelines to ensure emerging energy careers stay rooted in the INW.
3. ***ACCELERATED INNOVATION*** – Streamlining development, validation, and market entry for new technologies.
4. ***ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT*** – Attracting investment and amplifying regional competitive advantage through innovation and modern grid solutions.
5. ***RESILIENT GRID INFRASTRUCTURE*** – Supporting distributed, digital and microgrid energy solutions that build efficiency and resilience.
6. ***ENERGY TRANSITION EQUITY***– Centering underserved communities in every initiative to ensure inclusive benefit.

STRATEGIC GOALS BY 2035

- *GROW REGIONAL ENERGY GDP BY 10%*
- *DOUBLE RETAINED ENERGY WORKFORCE AND GRADUATES*
- *ACHIEVE TOP 7 GLOBAL INNOVATION HUB RECOGNITION*
- *DEMONSTRATE EQUITABLE CLEAN ENERGY SOLUTIONS IN 5 COMMUNITIES*

CORE INITIATIVES

Focused initiatives are driving measurable impact:

Talent: +25% increase in skilled energy workers

Capital: Doubling private energy investment by 2030

Demonstration: 5 community-based clean energy pilots launched

Connection: Stronger industry collaboration and innovation scaling

JOIN INW ENERGY INNOVATION CLUSTER AND BE PART OF THE SOLUTION.

- Access cross-sector networks and innovation hubs
- Leverage support for funding and visibility
- Contribute to inclusive, resilient energy systems

Regional Energy Alliance for a Resilient Energy Future

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Between

Urbanova dba Inland Northwest Energy Innovation Cluster

and

_____

Vision & Shared Purpose

The Inland Northwest Energy Innovation Cluster (hereafter "the Cluster"), facilitated by Urbanova, brings together diverse partners from across the public, private, academic, utility, and community sectors to transform the region into a global model for equitable and sustainable energy innovation. Recognizing the Inland Northwest's unique combination of power engineering legacy, utility innovation, Tribal leadership, and R&D capacity, this Cluster seeks to address urgent energy challenges—including surging demand, digital transformation, and the need for resilient infrastructure—while ensuring that clean, reliable, and affordable energy benefits all communities.

This MOU outlines a shared, voluntary framework for collaboration among participants to scale the clean energy transition and grow an inclusive regional energy economy. The Cluster exists to fill systemic gaps in testing, data integration, commercialization, and community benefit sharing by coordinating pilot projects, thought leadership, and scalable investment strategies.

Strategic Objectives

- Accelerate Innovation through pilot projects, testbeds, and scalable technology demonstrations (e.g., DERs, storage, microgrids).
- Foster Cross-Sector Collaboration across utilities, startups, national labs, Tribal organizations, and academic institutions.
- Expand Community Access to renewable energy, clean energy jobs, and technology benefits across urban, rural, and Tribal communities.
- Strengthen Workforce Pipelines with new training, certification, and internship pathways for the clean energy and digital grid economy.
- Attract Capital and Investment by positioning the Inland Northwest as a turnkey "living laboratory" for clean energy innovation.
- Demonstrate Regional Leadership through convenings, publications, and global partnerships that amplify impact and influence.

Areas of Cooperation

- Hosting investment and technology showcases and energy demonstration tours;
- Promoting data-sharing and open standards for grid resilience and interoperability;
- Convening expert industry working groups on DER interconnection, digital and grid optimization, energy resilience, energy incubation and investment opportunities;

- Supporting inclusive workforce development strategies in collaboration with higher education, Tribal colleges, workforce training and development organizations, and industry;
- Exploring blended finance models (grants, loans, impact capital) to fund commercial and public-sector energy solutions.

Coordination & Activities

- Participants will jointly support the development of any annual strategic action plans from either organization;
- A designated liaison from each organization will assist in coordination and communications;
- Key events and collaborative convenings (e.g., any cyclical summits, workshops, or conferences) will be developed and shared to engage stakeholders and showcase impact;
- Participants will contribute to working groups, thought leadership, and shared communications where appropriate.

Voluntary Participation & Non-Binding Nature

This MOU represents a non-binding, good-faith commitment. It does not impose legal or financial obligations and may be modified or exited at any time by individual participants. Activities described are subject to the availability of each organization's personnel and resources.

Duration and Amendments

The MOU is effective for a period of five (5) years from the date of signing and may be renewed, modified, or withdrawn by the participants at any time.

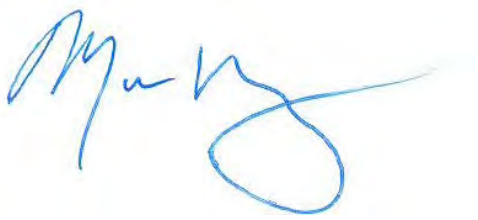
Signatures

Mason Burley

CEO, Urbanova
dba Inland Northwest Energy Innovation Cluster

Date: July 8, 2025

Date:



Sales end soon

Tuesday, July 8

Regional Energy Innovation Summit hosted by INTENT, Urbanova, and WSU

advancing sustainable energy development, grid modernization, workforce development, energy investment pathways

By **Urbanova and INTENT, LLC**

Follow

Follow

Date and time

July 8 · 8am - July 9 · 12pm PDT. Doors at 7:30am

Location

WSU Spokane SAC Bldg

600 N Riverpoint Blvd Spokane, WA 99202

Get directions

Speakers

Andy Johnston

Dale Silha

Select tickets

Mike Diedesch

Robert Waldher

View all

Agenda

Day 1 Agenda (Jul 8) | Day 2 Agenda (Jul 9)

7:45 AM - 8:15 AM
Check- in and morning networking

8:15 AM - 8:35 AM
Welcome – Why we are here?

8:35 AM - 9:35 AM
Setting the Stage – Drivers in the Emerging Energy Economy

9:35 AM - 9:45 AM
Break

9:45 AM - 11:15 AM
Industry and Energy Development Opportunities

11:15 AM - 12:00 PM
Panel: What is the future of Energy Innovation?

View full agenda

About this event

Event lasts 1 day 4 hours

Free venue parking

Please join us July 8th - 8:00 am to 4:00 pm and 9th - 8:00 am to 12:00 pm for a Regional Energy Innovation Summit hosted by INTENT, Urbanova, and WSU.

We will also hold a networking mixer after the first day (July 8) from 4:30 pm to 7:00pm.

This summit will start with the review of several years of industry needs analysis and engagement, the evolution of our regional energy cluster, and then focus on discussion and prioritization of ACTIONS we want to regionally promote for sustainable energy innovation, workforce development, energy investment pathways, and the related economic development needs.

We have also evolved the partnership between Urbanova and INTENT to focus on energy, initially using the title "Inland Northwest Energy Innovation Cluster" and will cover this integration and alignment of purpose and how we see it benefitting our energy industry partners.

This conference is a key opportunity for all of us to engage and prioritize this important cluster effort, supporting by Washington State Department of Commerce Innovation Cluster Accelerator Program (ICAP).

This agenda will include:

- An overview of the goals and what we have learned on energy needs and gaps over the past two years.
- Expert panels on energy topics

WSU Downtown Spokane – Spokane Academic Center (SAC)

Problem statement: Meeting the regional energy need: how do we help the energy market in the PNW continue to deliver sustainable, low-cost power to promote community resilience and sponsor economic development including large power consumers?

July 8 – Day 1	
Time	**Description**
7:45 – 8:15 AM SAC Basement Lobby	Check- in and morning networking continental breakfast & beverage service
8:15 - 8:35 AM SAC 20	**Welcome – Why we are here?** **Land acknowledgement:** HollyAnna DeCoteau Littlebull Senior Transportation Planner and Tribal Liaison Yakama/Nez Perce/Umatilla/Turtle Mt Chippewa/Cree **WSU Welcome Speaker** Mani Venkatasubramanian - WSU ESIC **Introduction of key partners** Eric Finch - Urbanova/INTENT
8:35 – 9:35 AM SAC 20	**Setting the Stage – Drivers for the Emerging Energy Economy (Needs and Opportunities)** John Gibson - Urbanova/INTENT (30 min) **Financial Opportunity for Energy Investing/The Electron Economy** Kirk Hourdajian - Montauk Climate (30 min)
9:35 - 9:45 AM	**Break**
9:45 - 11:15 AM SAC 20	**Industry and Energy Development Opportunities (issue/need)** This session will delve into the future of energy in the Pacific Northwest, examining its potential trajectory with solution providers. From the construction of buildings to the implementation of carbon capture technologies and the development of innovative utility solutions, various aspects of the energy landscape will be explored. Six esteemed expert speakers will share their perspectives on the evolving energy landscape and outline the strategies employed by their respective organizations to align their solutions with the envisioned future energy state. **Confirmed Speakers:** **Dave Curry - CarbonQuest** *(Industry)* **Mike Diedesch - Avista** *(Industy-Innovation)* **Dale Silha - McKinstry** *(Built Environment)* **Andy Johnston-Johnston Engineering - Clean Tech Supplier Alliance** *(Supply Chain – DoE presentation in energy storage available)* **Jillian Cadwell - VERTical/WSU (v)** *(Small Nuclear Energy)* **Rachelle Ames - Clean Tech Alliance** *(Cluster)*
	Facilitator: Curt Kirkeby, OES

11:15 - 12:00 PM **SAC 20**	**Panel: What is the future of Energy Innovation?** This panel will discuss anticipated challenges as we progress towards the new energy future. The panel will commence with the question: "What is the most significant challenge or set of challenges the region will face in the future, and how imminent is that future?" Each panelist is a member of world-renowned organizations that provide solutions, economic development, or research that is crucial for community prosperity. From this opening question, the panel will explore the interconnected nature of their individual responses to gain a comprehensive understanding of our regional opportunities. **Confirmed Speakers:** **Robert Waldher - Umatilla County, Oregon** *(Econ. Development, Data Center infrastructure and growth planning)* **Doug Forkner -Avista** *(Utility)* **Brian Johnson, John J. Kumm - U of I** *(Research)* **Mani Venkatasubramanian - WSU** *(Research)* **Bob Strasser - Itron** *(Innovation Lab)* **Crystal Ball** – **PNUCC** (v) *(Industry)*
	Moderator: John Gibson - Urbanova/INTENT
12:00 - 12:45 PM **TBD**	**Lunch and Networking** **Equity Lunch Roundtable Option** Bring your lunch to hear and contribute to the discussion on energy equity and how to better connect and represent the underserved areas. Discuss how to better integrate equity into all aspects of the cluster work. **Speaker**: Amber Lenhardt - Avista Equity Advisory Group
	Facilitators: Mason Burley - Urbanova/INTENT, Mani Venkatasubramanian - WSU
12:45 – 1:45 PM **SAC 20**	**Partner Showcase Part I** This region boasts a remarkable concentration of energy ecosystem talent. Numerous involved partners have recently demonstrated exceptional experiences, unique projects, and innovative solutions that we believe will be of great interest to you. These are your neighbors and friends who make a positive impact on the region. **Confirmed Speakers:** **Kim Gentle - Inland Power** *(Utility)* **Chad Kruger - VERTical/WSU** *(Food/Ag Energy)* **Brian Henning - Gonzaga** *(Gonzaga Climate Institute)* **Kathleen Hebert - E8** *(Investment)* **Monish Mukherjee - PNNL** *(National Laboratories)* **Rick Schumaker - U of I "I-Crews"** *(Research)*
	Facilitator: Will Rambo - Urbanova/INTENT

1:45 – 1:55 PM **SAC 20**	**Overview of and goals for track sessions:** 1- Goals for the Cluster (5 min) a. Grow the community and active members/partners b. Increase/incite participation to achieve the roadmap 2- Goals for the summit tracks (5 min) a. Affirm and refine the opportunities/challenges b. Prioritize opportunities/challenges c. Create actionable roadmap that positively influences our communities for each of the tracks: Industry & Research, Investment, and Workforce & STEM
	Facilitator: Eric Finch - Urbanova/INTENT
Breakout Sessions **2:00 – 4:15 PM** **(Room locations to be posted onsite)** **Break on your own**	**<u>Track 1: Industry and research</u>** This track aims to employ design thinking methodologies to identify and prioritize future challenges and opportunities. Subsequently, we will develop a roadmap of activities that can proactively influence the regional energy future, leading to a cleaner, more economic, and highly resilient state. Encourage creativity and collaborate with small teams to foster the generation of innovative solutions. 2:00-2:15 Welcome & Opening Remarks 2:15-2:30 Recap: INW Energy Landscape 2:30-2:50 Validate / Refine Past Findings 2:50-3:20 Group Discussion: Key Energy Challenges & Opportunities 3:20-3:30 Break 2:50-3:20 Prioritize Challenges & Opportunities 3:30-4:15 Intro to Design Thinking Process & Breakout Setup
	Facilitators: Curt Kirkeby - OES, Daniel Conte De Leon – U of I, Rabindra Nanda – WSU, Jonathan Male - WSU
	<u>Track 2: Energy Workforce and STEM Development</u> As the clean energy sector rapidly evolves, building a diverse, skilled workforce is critical to sustaining innovation and meeting climate goals. This session will explore how workforce development and STEM education intersect to create pathways into clean energy careers, with a focus on equity, access, and future-ready skills. Leaders from industry, education, and government will discuss successful models for workforce training, the importance of early STEM engagement, and strategies to ensure underrepresented communities are not left behind in the energy transition. Attendees will gain insights into actionable partnerships and programs that are preparing the next generation of clean energy professionals and identifying and prioritizing new programs and expanding existing programs based on regional needs. 2:00-2:40 Setting the stage – Workforce – Mike McBride 2:40-3:20 Industry Workforce Needs Panel – Spokane Workforce Council 3:20-4:00 Workforce programs and capabilities – State Commerce, GSI 4:00-4:15 Review Workforce track efforts and next steps
	Facilitators: Stacia Rasmussen – GSI, Kevin Williams – Spokane Workforce Council Stephanie Scott – WA State Commerce (v), Matt Bisgyer - Montauk Climate

Breakout Sessions **2:00 – 4:15 PM** **(Room locations to be posted onsite)** **Break on your own**	**<u>Track 3: Innovation, Incubation and Investment (I^3)</u>** This track dives deeper into energy ecosystem development looking at all three areas on how to better influence innovation, new energy start-ups and evolving those already started, and how to better diversify and connect investment to energy projects and new technologies. Putting together a more comprehensive life cycle approach to help cultivate new and investable energy innovation to provide more options and sustainable funding is a goal of this track. 2:00-2:10 PM Session orientation (LaunchPad) 2:10-2:40 PM Fostering Innovation: Ecosystem Development & the Commercialization Continuum w/resource mapping activity (LaunchPad) 2:40-3:20 PM Incubation case studies and panel (LaunchPad) 3:20-4:00 PM Energy Investment panel (E8, Montauk Climate) 4:00-4:15 PM Session recap & Set stage for Day #2 (LaunchPad)
	Facilitators: April Needham – Bloom Collective, Bill Kalivas – LaunchPad; Kathleen Hebert – E8, Mark Gustafson – Avista, Kirk Hourdajian - Montauk Climate
4:20 – 4:30 PM **SAC 20**	**End of Day 1 Thank You – Walking Tour Transition to Partner Showcase & Mixer** **Facilitator**: Mason Burley, Eric Finch
4:30 – 7:00 PM **Catalyst Building Main Lobby**	**Partner Showcase – Part II / Mixer and Networking** Continue the journey with more talented partners discussing their recent experiences, unique projects, and innovative solutions. Don't miss out, the solution you are looking for might be revealed!! There will also be some acknowledgements for key participants as we all enjoy light refreshment and (adult) beverages to continue the conversations! **<u>Confirmed Speakers:</u>** **Latisha Hill – Avista and Urbanova Board Member** *("Thank you and the importance of this work for our communities and partners")* **Melissa Graham, Jen Waldo – EWU** *(Research)* **Jennifer Farmer, Edo Energy** *(Industry)* **Aaron Feaver - ICAP CHARGe – JCDream** *(Cluster)* **Opt: Bill Kalivas – LaunchPad - Co-host** *(Incubation and Ecosystem Development)* **Opt: Curt Kirkeby, Wade Malcolm – Open Energy Solutions** *(Industry)*
	Facilitator: LaunchPad and EWU Co-Hosts

July 9 – Day 2	
Time	**Description**
7:45 – 8:15 AM SAC Basement Lobby	Check- in and morning networking continental breakfast & beverage service Any changes to the day will be given during this time
Breakout Sessions **8:15 – 10:15AM** **(Room locations to be posted onsite)**	**Track 1: Industry and research** 8:15 – 8:20 AM - Day 2 Kickoff 8:20 – 9:15 AM - Design Thinking Breakouts 9:15 – 10:00 AM - Scope & Plan: Initial Feasibility Framing 10:00 – 10:15 AM - Prepare Group Share-Out & Wrap-up
	Facilitators: Curt Kirkeby - OES, Daniel Conte De Leon – U of I, Rabindra Nanda – WSU, Jonathan Male - WSU
	Track 2: Energy Workforce and STEM Development 8:15 – 8:30 AM - Review Day One and Goals for Day Two 8:30 – 9:30 AM - Exercise: Putting it all together 9:30 – 10:15 AM - Developing the report out
	Facilitators: Stacia Rasmussen – GSI, Kevin Williams – Spokane Workforce Council Stephanie Scott – WA State Commerce (v), Matt Bisgyer - Montauk Climate
	Track 3: Innovation, Incubation and Investment (I^3) 8:15 – 8:20 AM - Session Orientation 8:20 – 9:05 AM - Facilitated Discussion 9:05 – 9:45 AM - Small Group Exercise 9:45 – 10:15 AM - Prepare report-out for Summit
	Facilitators: April Needham – Bloom Collective, Bill Kalivas – LaunchPad; Kathleen Hebert – E8, Mark Gustafson – Avista, Kirk Hourdajian - Montauk Climate
10:15 – 10:30 AM	**Break** – transition to main room for Track Report out
10:30 – 11:30 AM SAC 20	**Report out from each Breakout Session** – 15 minutes per Track Lead; major outcomes and next steps recommended Moderator: Eric Finch - Urbanova/INTENT with Track Leads presenting
11:30 – 12:00 AM SAC 20	**Recruitment and Ongoing Partnership Commitment – Thank You** Urbanova/INTENT Board Members, Mason Burley - Urbanova/INTENT

This is the FINAL – if we get a late addition or change we will have updated agendas available on Tuesday morning as people check in.

JOURNAL OF BUSINESS
Serving Spokane & Kootenai Counties

Urbanova, Intent merge to form INW energy cluster

New entity hopes to establish Eastern Washington as a hub for innovation

Mason Burley, Urbanova CEO says the merger with Intent LLC is a strategic move to form a stronger team to tackle energy projects in the Inland Northwest.

| Karina Elias

June 19, 2025

Karina Elias

Two Spokane-based energy innovation groups have merged to launch a new energy innovation cluster backed by state funding.

Board members of Inland Northwest Center for Energy and Decarbonization LLC, known as Intent, and the nonprofit organization Urbanova signed a memorandum of understanding earlier this month to form the new organization, tentatively named Inland Northwest Energy Innovation Cluster. The new nonprofit organization is now operating under a transitional board. Leaders say they plan to unveil a new company name, strategic initiatives, and organizational structure in the fall.

Mason Burley, CEO of Urbanova, says the impetus for the merger is to position Spokane and the surrounding region as a testbed for cutting-edge energy solutions, ranging from grid modernization to distributed energy systems. The region already is home to several companies working in this space, he says, including companies like Itron, Inc., which developed a smart metering technology, and McKinstry Co., which is spearheading geothermal projects in the area, among many others.

“The vision is to support and accelerate the great work that’s already happening here,” Burley says. "Those innovations are going to result in more efficiency … that can really help establish the energy future and the energy economy."

The push for energy innovation comes as utilities and communities brace for growing demand, try to address aging infrastructure, and deal with the impacts of climate change, Burley adds. Factors like rapid load growth from data centers, increasing strain on transmission systems, and the need for more resilient renewable-rich grids are driving urgency in the sector, he says.

Regional collaboration will be essential to navigate these challenges, Burley says.

To help shape the long-term vision, the organization is hosting an Energy Innovation Summit on July 8 and 9 at Washington State University’s Spokane campus. The event will bring together stakeholders from industry, academia, and the public sector to identify regional energy challenges and opportunities, Burley says. Insights from the summit will inform a strategic planning process led by the organization’s interim board, which is expected to finalize its direction and board expansion plans by September.

Urbanova was established in 2017 as a smart city collaboration between the city of Spokane, Washington state University, Avista Corp., McKinstry, and Itron. Initially focused on deploying and studying emerging technologies—such as smart streetlights and air-quality monitors—in Spokane’s University District, the organization later expanded into community-centered research on how technology affects residents, particularly in terms of energy use, housing insecurity, and public health. Urbanova is based at the WSU Center for Innovation, at 120 N. Pine in the University District, and has two employees and several contractors, says Burley, who assumed his role in 2022.

In 2023, Urbanova was awarded a $1 million development grant from the National Science Foundation as part of its Regional Innovation Engines program, says Burley. The grant supported early efforts to establish Eastern Washington as a hub for energy innovation, particularly in grid modernization and clean technology.

“The idea was that the emerging energy innovation is going to be reliant on grid modernization and infrastructure,” Burley says. “And if we can find a way to accelerate innovation around grid architecture and modernization, there are a lot of benefits, both for the community and for the regional economy.”

To meet the National Science Foundation’s requirement for strong industry involvement, a separate entity—Intent, the Inland Northwest Center for Energy and Decarbonization—was created. The spinoff group acted as a liaison between academic institutions and private industry, bringing together partners from Washington State University, the University of Idaho, the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, and others, Burley says.

"What Intent brought to the effort was the industry expertise that NSF was interested in," Burley says.

Burley says that following the conclusion of the NSF award in April, leadership from Urbanova and Intent began discussions about how to sustain the momentum of their joint work over the past two years. With overlapping missions and a shared network of partners, the two groups saw merging as a strategic move to streamline operations, strengthen funding opportunities, and clarify their regional role in energy innovation.

The merger is also a practical step. Both organizations operate with lean staffing, typically one to three core team members supported by contractors, partner organizations, and board members, which include Jason Verduzco, of Verizon Communications Inc.; Latisha Hill, of Avista Corp.; retired Itron Inc. executive Rich Christensen; retired Avista executive John Gibson; and Dan Wadkins, of Foster Garvey PC law firm. By unifying under a single structure and board, the merged entity hopes to improve efficiency, scale projects more effectively, and better position itself for future grants and state-level support, Burley says.

As reported by the Journal, the newly formed entity has already been recognized by the Washington state Department of Commerce as part of its Innovation Cluster Accelerator Program and awarded a $140,000 grant to support planning and development efforts.