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SDSU-IV receives $1.67 million grant for Brawley renewable energy center

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A new renewable energy center may be on the horizon for San Diego State University-Imperial Valley campus.

The campus with Calexico and Brawley extensions has been awarded a $1.67 million job creation grant to establish the Renewable Energy Generation Training and Demonstration Center at its Brawley location. The federal funds are set to help the green energy technology industry in the Imperial Valley region by installing a generalized power plant simulator and bringing in private companies to partner with the university for training.

“It is critically important that SDSU play a lead role in the development of renewable energy for the region,” said David Pearson, dean of the Imperial Valley campus. “This grant is a valuable building block that will support the long-term development of a green technology industry and have a positive impact on the entire Imperial Valley region.”

The money will be used to create renewable energy demonstration sites for companies to test their renewable energy projects and innovations at, as well as to install a generalized power plant simulator to provide technical skills training for power plant managers in geothermal, solar and traditional power plant installations.

The grant is going to help build on prior successes, such as the partnership with Combined Power Cooperative to test whether its hyperlight solar technology could be utilized for utility-scale projects, said Glen Allegranza, Brawley campus coordinator and lecturer. That partnership was what helped the university get the grant.
Allegranza’s particular portion of the grant application was the power plant simulators project, which will allow people to experience what it’s like to run a power plant and how to fix problems that may come up, he said. An active power plant is not the place industry officials would want people to learn and make mistakes.

The site would not only help those studying to join the workforce, he said.

“The students that would go through it would be both those wanting to be better-trained to get a job in the renewable energy industry and those already in the renewable energy industry,” Allegranza said, adding that it would help those in the industry better develop their skills.

The power plant will only be about a third of the money, with the rest going to attract more companies to pursue research at the Brawley site, he said.

The federal funds are going toward the development of the renewable energy center. The goal of the center would be to create field stations for San Diego State University researchers, an exposition center to allow people to see various forms of renewable energy and a conference and training center both for academic and industry audiences, Pearson said. It will also allow for training and research for students at both San Diego State University-Imperial Valley campus and Imperial Valley College, possibly culminating in new educational programs and degrees.

“Universities are in the education business, and renewable energy can be part of this,” he said.

The university was one of 20 winners announced Thursday of the Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge that shared a combined $37 million. The challenge, a multi-agency competition launched in May, was funded by the Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration, the Department of Commerce’s Economic Development Administration and the Small Business Administration.

“The Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge brings the public and private sectors together to build on America’s regional strengths and create local jobs in key industries of the future,” said acting Commerce Secretary Rebecca Blank in a press release. “This initiative is a shining example of how the federal government is working collaboratively and leveraging existing resources to enhance local efforts to build public-private partnerships that support economic growth and job creation.”

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