

OPTIMISTIC OUTLOOK PODCAST | EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

“In 5: The Electrician Shortage—and a Coalition to Close the Gap”

Featuring:

David Etzwiler, CEO, Siemens Foundation

Lauren Espin, Siemens Corporate Communications

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Description: America is electrifying at a pace we’ve never seen before – driven by AI data centers, smart grids, and modern infrastructure. But all of it depends on one critical workforce: electricians.

The problem? The U.S. faces roughly 80,000 electrical job openings every year – and the gap is growing.

In this *Optimistic Outlook In Five*, Lauren Espin breaks down why the electrician shortage has become a national challenge, and how a new coalition of industry, education, government, and nonprofit partners is coming together through the Siemens Foundation’s Careers Electric initiative to help close the gap.

You’ll hear how this first-of-its-kind effort is creating clear, accessible pathways into high-paying electrical careers that don’t require a four-year degree—and why the model launching in North Carolina could become a blueprint for other states.

Conversation:

Lauren Espin

Hi, I’m Lauren Espin, and this is *An Optimistic Outlook in Five*, a quick brief on an important development that will change the future. America is electrifying at a pace we’ve never seen before. Electric vehicles, smart grids, data centers, modern infrastructure — all of it runs on electricity, and all of it needs skilled electricians to build, maintain, and scale. The problem: there aren’t nearly enough of them. The country currently faces approximately 80,000 electrical job openings every single year, and that number is growing. This isn’t just a skills gap — it’s a canyon. Which is where the Siemens Foundation’s launch of Careers Electric comes in.

Lauren Espin

Careers Electric is a national initiative designed to create a coalition of stakeholders focused on creating clear, accessible pathways into high-paying electrical careers — equipping students and workers with the technical, digital, and safety skills that today’s rapidly evolving energy and infrastructure sectors demand. It aims to train 25,000 people in the first 10 years. Careers Electric is designed to show us what we can achieve when, instead of addressing the worker shortage through many separate programs, we come together as a powerful ecosystem. The initiative is launching in North Carolina, backed by a \$9.25 million Siemens Foundation investment and built in partnership with the governor’s office, Wake Tech Community College, the North Carolina Community College System, the North Carolina Business Committee for Education, the EV Infrastructure Training Program, and the Families and Workers Fund, among others. Together, these partners are building multiple onramps into electrical careers — from high school training and youth apprenticeships to community college credentials and advanced certifications.

Lauren Espin

The goal is to position North Carolina as a model for other states. The ambition is bold: not only to train 25,000 people over the next decade, but to prove that this approach can scale nationwide. As Siemens Foundation CEO David Etwiler put it at the recent Careers Electric launch event with North Carolina Governor Josh Stein:

David Etwiler

“In the face of our need for more electrical workers in this country, we are not even treading water. The governor noted the number of electrical workers retiring from the field each year now exceeds the numbers entering it. In short, we are going backwards when we need to be accelerating forward at a rapid pace. At the same time, we know that 37% of adults in the U.S. report that they could not cover a \$400 unexpected expense from their savings or from their credit, and 70% say the American dream — that hard work pays off — is unattainable. This confluence of tremendous need and tremendous opportunity is at the heart of Careers Electric. It is rare that powerful market forces are so well aligned to the needs of so many individuals and families, but that is exactly the case that we have here.”

Lauren Espin

Purpose-driven work, financial security, a foothold in the middle class — this initiative is about delivering career paths that don’t require a four-year degree but still deliver a real shot at economic mobility. Critically, too, is the involvement of employers where these pathways could lead, including Siemens, which has more than 2,200 employees in North Carolina. Careers Electric isn’t about who leads — it’s about partnership and results. Reaching the scale and impact that this moment demands requires aligned partners willing to lead alongside one another.

David Etzwiler

“Perhaps most importantly, we’re here today to invite others — including employers, foundations, and trade associations — to join with us as equal partners in this work. Because like so many others, we know this work must be done in coalition at scale. The go it alone days of individual entities trying to do this are over. It’s not working. So our call to action today is for greater collaboration. Industry leaders, educators, policymakers — let’s unite to fill the gap together. And together, we can modernize how we prepare workers for tomorrow’s challenges.”

Lauren Espin

The Siemens Foundation invites partners to join Careers Electric by investing in the people and systems that are developing the next generation of electrical careers. This is how you close a workforce gap and move the needle — with investment, cooperation, infrastructure, and clear pathways to real careers. I’m Lauren Espin, and this is *The Optimistic Outlook*.