

B.C. Federation of Labour
Moving Forward: Apprenticeships in the New Economy
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Construction Apprenticeship Programs: Career Training for Economic Recovery

Presentation by
Corinne Wilson, Research and Policy Lead
Center on Policy Initiatives
San Diego, California

The current economic downturn has caused vast unemployment in California's construction industry. Also, the world is shifting to a green economy and changing the face of construction, and as the economy revives, we need to make sure that new construction jobs include middle-class career paths AND training in skills for now and the future.

The construction industry in California has two faces: a high-road industry with family-sustaining wages, benefits and stability, and the other a low-road industry with low pay, no benefits, dangerous conditions and frequent periods of unemployment.

The construction industry also has the highest concentration of contingent workers of any non-farm industry in California. Contingent workers are much less likely to have employment-based healthcare or pensions.

We need to put people back to work in middle-class careers in order to create long-term, stable economic growth. We literally cannot afford to create poverty jobs.

Apprenticeships in the construction trades provide the training that our recovery needs to make sure our money is invested wisely...by creating careers AND quality infrastructure projects.

Apprenticeship programs also strengthen communities by providing career paths and consistent health insurance for all and especially for people from disadvantaged backgrounds. They also benefit the building industry by reducing workplace injuries, reducing turnover and providing a motivated and well-trained workforce. They lead to careers with higher average wages, promote job stability through skill certification and portability and increase on-the-job safety.

Therefore, disadvantaged populations need to have equal access to entering and completing an apprenticeship program to create strong communities for

everyone, and move people off of using social programs and into careers where they pay into social programs.

Other policies help make this happen, such as local hire. Local hire policies provide local jobs and also create incentives for the creation of career ladders by requiring that a certain number of journeyworkers and apprentices are residents of the local area to be employed on development projects. Many local hire policies also require a set participation rate by “at-risk” residents or living in poverty. Local hire is a concrete mechanism to ensure that the investment of public funds into the community helps low-income residents.

Completion of apprenticeship programs creates household self-sufficiency rather than a reliance on taxpayer-supported services. Construction workers are also consumers and taxpayers, so their wages and benefits are reinvested in the community as bills and mortgages are paid, local shops are patronized and workers have the time and health to participate in church, schools and other civic associations. Creating more local jobs for apprentices is the key to a strong local community. Rebuilding the economy means creating and supporting high-road, good jobs through policies that train and reward workers for their productivity.

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