

New York City District Council of Carpenters: Building Works

Location: New York, New York

Host Organization: New York City District Council of Carpenters

Partner Organizations: Brooklyn Workforce Innovations and other multiservice agencies, New York City Building and Construction Trades Council, United Way, Habitat for Humanity, New Jersey School of Public Health at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, Helicon

Target Population: Low-Income Adults and Minorities in New York City

Program Innovations

- Trainees participate in service learning projects in the community to help redevelop low-income housing
- Program's direct entry arrangement with signatory unions of the New York City Building and Construction Trades Council

Program History

The New York City District Council of Carpenters and Joiners of America represents 25,000 union members across the City who are dedicated carpenters, millwrights, dock builders, timbermen, cabinetmakers, floor coverers and industrial workers. The Council works to promote fair wages, worker rights, and a safe workplace. The Council began the Building Works pre-apprenticeship training program in 1995.

Program Summary

Participants in the Building Works program are first recruited by partnering community based organizations (CBOs) in New York, such as Brooklyn Workforce Innovations. Participants must come from a low-income area in New York City, and must be unemployed or chronically unemployed. Following this initial recruitment, the CBOs provide an orientation to the program and administer the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE). To be eligible to participate in the program, applicants must demonstrate an 8th-grade proficiency in reading and math on the TABE. Applicants who meet this requirement then compete for entry into the program through two days of tryouts. During the tryouts, applicants engage in classroom exercises and other activities where staff and instructors

observe and evaluate their performance. In general, any applicant who demonstrates a good attitude, strong work ethic, and some general ability to handle the subsequent training is enrolled into the program.

The pre-apprenticeship training is held once or twice a year and enrolls 30 students per cycle. The program runs for 17 weeks and is full-time, from 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. The **curriculum** covers life skills, as well as construction specific skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the industry. The life skills component of the training helps participants choose a trade through career guidance and assists them in other areas such as conflict resolution and financial literacy. A heavy focus is placed on academic skills during the first month of training, with special focus given to building trainees' math skills with math training provided by Helicon. Computer literacy classes are also taught.

After the first month, the class turns its attention more heavily toward the construction workplace. Trainees earn an OSHA 10 certification, complete 40 hours of hazardous waste training, and learn about asbestos and lead abatement and environmental remediation. Retired journey people or current union contractors teach the trainees construction skills, including blueprint reading, introduction to electricity, welding, shop instruction and woodworking. An introduction to weatherization was recently added to the curriculum and the program is exploring other **green components** to add to the training. To complete the Building Works program, trainees participate in a two to four week service learning project, where they work with nonprofit agencies to help renovate and repair low-income housing, community and youth centers, and housing for the disabled. Partner agencies include Habitat for Humanity, United Way and other community-based organizations in New York City.

Students may access **support services** during the training. Each trainee is provided with a metro card to pay for transportation expenses, lunch each day, and a \$100 clothing voucher to purchase clothes appropriate for the industry.

“My wall is filled with photos all of our students so I can always remember who they are, who’s working, and who’s looking for something.”

--Donald Killinger, Director of Building Works

Building Works' staff works on the trainee's **job placement** throughout the training cycle. Most of the program's graduates enter an apprenticeship with the Carpenters' Union in New York since the program is housed within that institution. However, some graduates do go on to placements with other unions.

The Building Works program has a direct entry arrangement with all of the signatory unions of the New York Building and Construction Trades Council, which allows Building Works graduates to bypass the normal process for entering an apprenticeship program.

The economic recession in New York led to many unions closing any entry into their apprenticeship programs. In some cases, Building Works' graduates are being placed in positions with non-union contractors in order to support themselves until the economy recovers and apprenticeship openings occur. During this time, Building Works maintains contact with the graduates to keep them engaged and ready to enter a union apprenticeship once the opportunity arises.

Program Funding

Building Works' principle funder for the last 15 years has been the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS). The NIEHS grant that supports Building Works is first awarded to the grant's lead applicant, The University of Medicine and Dentistry of the New Jersey School of Public Health, which oversees the New York and New Jersey Hazardous Training Materials Cooperative, of which Building Works is also a member. The University subsequently distributes the money to the Building Works program. NIEHS funds pre-apprenticeship grantees across the country and is designed as an environmental remediation program.

Other Building Works' local government funders include the Newark Mayor's Office and the New York City Department of Environmental Protection. Foundations, including the Prudential Foundation and the Robinhood Foundation, help fund additional components of the program, such as a youth initiative designed to recruit high school students into the trades.

Industry Engagement

Building Works ties to the local construction industry are strong as the home organization is the New York City Council of Carpenters, which represents over 25,000 union members in the City. The program's relationship and direct entry arrangement with signatory unions of the Building and Construction Trades Council also offer the program additional means to connect their graduates to quality apprenticeship opportunities. To further expand the program and the opportunities available to program graduates, staff from Building Works keep abreast of which unions are

“You have got to keep your ear to the ground... You have to figure out who is having trouble recruiting qualified minority candidates.”

--Donald Killinger, Director of Building Works

actively seeking to build diversity into their memberships, and pay attention to who wins the bids on government-funded projects in which diversity and local hire ordinances are likely to be required.