

# St. Paul Building Trades Council

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**Location:** St. Paul, Minnesota

**Host Organization:** St. Paul Building Trades Council

**Partner Organizations:** Construction Careers Coalition, Women Venture, Minnesota Building and Construction Trades Council and Signatory Unions, Merrick Community Center

**Target Population:** Low-income, Minority, and Females in the St. Paul area

## Program Innovations

- Minnesota Build, a pre-apprenticeship program that places trainees as licensed multi-craft apprentices with union contractors as part of their training

## Program History

The St. Paul Building Trades Council is chartered by the Building & Construction Trades Department of the national AFL-CIO, and is an affiliate of the Minnesota Building & Construction Trades Council, which represents over 50,000 unionized construction workers across the state. The St. Paul Building Trades Council created a pre-apprenticeship training program in 1998 to help the construction industry diversify and better represent the community it serves. Since then, the Council has built partnerships with local community-based organizations, such as Merrick Community Services, Women Venture, and training providers including the Construction Careers Coalition, to improve and expand the pre-apprenticeship programs it offers to the community.

**“It wasn’t about needing people in the industry...it was really about trying to have our industry look like the community we live in.”**

*--Harry Melander, Executive Secretary of the St. Paul Building Trades Council*

### Program Summary

The original St. Paul Building Trades Council pre-apprenticeship program, now known as the Environmental and Construction Workers Training Program, is offered every winter to prepare the pre-apprentices for placement in the spring when many construction projects are beginning and the demand for new apprentices is high. Interested applicants must first attend an informational session to learn about the construction industry including the working conditions and workplace culture.

After the informational session, participants still interested are given a math test. Applicants who pass the test must then be interviewed by a panel of industry experts, which often includes contractors, apprenticeship coordinators, and other industry representatives. During the interview, applicants are screened on their motivation and interest in pursuing a long-term career in construction. Through this process an average of 25 - 35 applicants are selected each year to participate in pre-apprenticeship training.

The training includes eight weeks of hands-on training and classroom instruction. The training **curriculum** provides students with an introduction to the construction industry and builds relevant skills and knowledge in areas such as blueprint reading, tool identification and use, construction materials and safety. The 40 hour per week training simulates the construction work environment in a lab

### Minnesota Build

The Construction Careers Coalition, a training group and partner of the St. Paul Building Trades Council, organizes and leads Minnesota Build, another pre-apprenticeship program. Participants in Minnesota Build first go through three weeks of training and cover topics related to soft skills, the history and culture of unions, financial literacy, and math remediation. During these first three weeks, participants also engage in some hands-on learning through rotations with participating unions.

After the first three weeks, participants are placed with union contractors as Minnesota Build Apprentices, which are multi-craft apprenticeships licensed by Minnesota's Department of Labor. Apprentices earn an hourly wage, but receive no benefits and commonly work on large publicly-funded projects such as the Minnesota Twins' Stadium.

Through this process, the apprentice and contractor evaluate one another, and if both are satisfied, the contractor is asked to sponsor the trainee's apprenticeship training. Apprentices may rotate to different contractors until they find the trade and contractor best matched to their interests and skills, and may also be placed as a helper if they wish to pursue a licensed trade.

The last Minnesota Build class was in 2008, and the program has been suspended until the construction industry recovers from the recession.

setting. During training, students receive **support services** including case management, assistance with obtaining a driver's license, and drug testing. The St. Paul Council works with a network of community-based organizations to provide these services and also works with local partners to help participants who need a car access rehabilitated vehicles and low interest loans. Trainees also receive work boots and some basic tools.

At the conclusion of the training, graduates are eligible for **job placement** services. Graduates are placed in a union apprenticeship. To minimize the time graduates wait for an apprenticeship slot, the St. Paul Building Trades Council, through conversations with affiliated unions, aims to only enroll the number of pre-apprentices the program feels confident it can place after graduation. After placement, the new hire is assigned to a mentor who can help them navigate the first year of their new occupation.

**“We don't like to train people unless we have placements for them..... If there's too big of a span between program completion and placement, you will lose the participants.”**

*--Harry Melander, Executive Secretary of the  
St. Paul Building Trades Council*

The St. Paul Building Trades Council also supports and works with a program targeted at youth. Under Construction, a program of the Construction Careers Coalition, employs youth for eight weeks during the summer. The youth are paid \$8.00 an hour and work on various projects, including some operated by the local park system, and others that help rehabilitate old homes in the community. During the eight weeks, the youth participants gain hands-on skills, receive OSHA training and tour apprenticeship training facilities.

### Program Funding

The St. Paul Building Trades Council Pre-Apprenticeship Program is funded primarily through a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Brownfields Grant. The Brownfields Grant has helped sustain the program since its inception. Additional financial support comes from the Anderson Foundation and the United Way.

### Industry Engagement

The St. Paul Building Trades Council works closely with partnering unions, labor groups, developers and contractors. These partnerships are instrumental in helping the program place graduates in apprenticeships and construction-related jobs after training, and in helping the Trades Council's contracting partners build

a qualified, highly-skilled, and diverse workforce. Program Coordinators from the pre-apprenticeship training programs connect with contractors at construction projects on the ground. Through these connections, coordinators are able to build bridges to the industry for their pre-apprenticeship graduates. The St. Paul Building Trades Council also works with the Minnesota Department of Transportation and the local Metropolitan Council to help ensure that diversity and local hiring goals are met on publicly-funded projects.