

Study Shows Pre-Apprenticeships are Transforming Illinois Construction Workforce

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Investments in pre-apprenticeship programs have helped women and people of color become the two fastest growing demographic segments within Illinois' construction workforce, according to new research by the nonpartisan Illinois Economic Policy Institute (ILEPI) and the Project for Middle Class Renewal (PMCR) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Read the Report, [The Impact of Pre-Apprenticeship Programs in Illinois](#):

Evidence from the Highway Construction Careers Training Program and the Illinois Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program Since 2017.

As 8-to-14-week programs, pre-apprenticeships (or apprenticeship readiness programs) offer individuals the chance to learn foundational construction skills needed to earn placement into longer term construction apprenticeship programs. These tuition-free programs—often funded via government grants to community colleges or non-profit organizations—offer industry-focused training, hands-on learning, and classroom instruction that introduces participants to career opportunities in the skilled trades. Programs also often provide access to wraparound services to address barriers to entering the construction workforce, such as childcare, transportation, and stipends. For this analysis, ILEPI and PMCR researchers examined publicly available data on investments and program outcomes in the two largest programs in Illinois—the Highway Construction Careers Training Program (HCCTP) and the Illinois Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program (IL Works).

Construction Apprentice Enrollment by Demographics and Year, 2017–2024

Newly Enrolled Construction Apprentices	2017	2022	2024	Change: 2017 to 2024	Change: 2022 to 2024
New Apprentices Enrolled	4,080	5,496	6,202	+52.0%	+12.8%
White	2,469	3,283	3,340	+35.3%	+1.7%
Black	272	405	531	+95.2%	+31.1%
Hispanic	712	1,279	1,492	+109.6%	+16.7%
Men	3,953	5,135	5,716	+44.6%	+11.3%
Women	126	293	381	+202.4%	+30.0%
Share of New Apprentices	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	±0.0%	±0.0%
White	60.5%	59.7%	53.9%	-6.7%	-5.8%
Black	6.7%	7.4%	8.6%	+1.9%	+1.2%
Hispanic	17.5%	23.3%	24.1%	+6.6%	+0.8%
Men	96.9%	93.4%	92.2%	-4.7%	-1.2%
Women	3.1%	5.3%	6.1%	+3.1%	+0.8%

HCCTP and IL Works Enrollment, Completions, and Placements by Demographics, 2017–2024

Metrics from 2017 to 2024	Total	White	Black	Hispanic	Male	Female
Participants	5,858	1,274	3,484	889	4,464	1,306
Completers	3,466	856	1,957	536	2,624	799
Placements	2,134	572	1,215	284	1,645	482
Completion Rate	59.2%	67.2%	56.2%	60.3%	58.8%	61.2%
Placement Rate*	61.6%	66.8%	62.1%	53.0%	62.7%	60.3%
Placement-to-Participation Ratio	36.4%	44.9%	34.9%	31.9%	36.9%	36.9%
Share of Participants	100.0%	21.7%	59.5%	15.2%	76.2%	22.3%
Share of Completers	100.0%	24.7%	56.5%	15.5%	75.7%	23.1%
Share of Placements	100.0%	26.8%	56.9%	13.3%	77.1%	22.6%

*Placement rate is only calculated among completers.

Enrollment and Employment Shares in Illinois by Demographics, Selected Years						
Enrollment Shares (Years)	All	White	Black	Hispanic	Male	Female
Community Colleges (2024)	100.0%	45.4%	12.5%	30.2%	42.9%	57.1%
Public Universities (2024)	100.0%	49.3%	12.8%	18.6%	46.7%	53.2%
Construction Apprenticeship Programs (2017–2024)	100.0%	61.6%	7.2%	20.1%	94.9%	4.6%
HCCTP Pre-Apprenticeship Program (2017–2023)	100.0%	30.1%	56.2%	11.1%	76.3%	21.1%
Illinois Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program (2022–2024)	100.0%	15.3%	62.0%	18.3%	76.1%	23.2%
Comparison: Illinois Workers Age 18–64 (2017–2023)	100.0%	62.4%	12.0%	12.0%	52.5%	47.5%
Comparison: Illinois Population Age 18–64 (2017–2023)	100.0%	60.3%	13.9%	18.2%	49.5%	50.5%

“The construction industry has struggled to attract sufficient numbers of new workers, leading many industry leaders to explore new partnerships and new ways to expand potential labor supply pools into historically underrepresented groups,” said ILEPI Economist and report coauthor Frank Manzo IV. “The surge in women and people of color entering the industry through these initiatives, graduating, and moving on to becoming apprentices makes it clear that these intentional public investments have been a win-win-win for workers, for in-demand industries, and for communities.”

Collectively, HCCTP and IL Works enrolled more than 5,800 pre-apprentice participants from 2017 through 2024, with black and female enrollees disproportionately exceeding their share of construction apprentices statewide. Buoyed by this enrollment, the number of black apprentices has surged by 95%, and the number of female apprentices have surged by 202% since 2017--making both groups the fastest growing share of the state’s recent construction apprentices.

“As America invests in new infrastructure, energy systems, and advanced manufacturing, the ability to more readily access new pockets of workforce candidates has never been more critical,” said University of Illinois Professor, PMCR Director, and report coauthor Dr. Robert Bruno. “It is equally important for policymakers to understand how program investments are delivering returns both for workers and for critical industries as a whole.”

ILEPI and PMCR researchers were able to quantify that the \$66 million invested in HCCTP and IL Works pre-apprenticeships dating back to 2017 ultimately translated into an investment of just over \$12,000 per program participant, \$18,000 per program graduate, and \$35,000 per placed apprentice. In terms of earnings paid to pre-apprentices who go on to careers in the skilled trades, pre-apprenticeship programs deliver a cumulative 900% return on grant investment over ten years.

“The substantial return on investment we saw in the data was also supported by testimonials from participants who succeeded in completing their programs and becoming registered apprentices,” Bruno added. “These first-hand accounts revealed that pre-apprenticeship programs led to upward economic mobility, often from low-paying jobs, and that the wraparound services performed by pre-apprentice provider organizations can be determinative in getting these participants through their programs and connected to family-sustaining careers.”

ILEPI and PMCR researchers note that additional pre-apprenticeship program hubs have been created as part of Illinois’ Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA), which received nearly \$40 million in grant funding to support the creation of regional pre-apprenticeships and workforce hubs in the clean energy sector in 2024 alone. Based on the success of the HCCTP and IL Works programs, they forecast that clean energy programs could create as many as 3,200 pre-apprenticeships and another 1,200 apprentice placements each year once fully operational.

"It is clear that pre-apprenticeships are transforming lives and creating a more stable skilled labor pipeline for the construction industry," Manzo concluded. "This first-of-its-kind study shows that these programs are working as intended, but it is also true that more can and should be done to expand their utilization and impact."

To that end, report authors offered a range of policy options. These include using multi-year state grants to increase program funding, boosting incentives for employers to hire graduates, creating more tools to help providers connect graduates with contractors, raising stipends above the state's minimum wage rate, and delivering more wraparound services like mentoring initiatives and childcare services to help expand program reach into underserved communities and attach more workers to in-demand careers.

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[The Illinois Economic Policy Institute \(ILEPI\)](#) is a nonpartisan nonprofit research organization which uses advanced statistics and the latest forecasting models to promote economic growth for businesses and working families in Illinois and across the nation.

[The Project for Middle Class Renewal \(PMCR\)](#) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign investigates the working conditions of workers in today's economy to elevate public discourse aimed at reducing poverty, create more stable forms of employment, and promote middle-class jobs.

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