

STUDY: Union Contractors Deliver Projects Faster and Control Costs Better than Non-Union Contractors

SACRAMENTO, CA, UNITED STATES, July 13, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A new study analyzing Sacramento County public works projects completed between 2018 and 2022 has found that those led by union-signatory prime contractors were completed as much as 22 days faster and were more than ten times better at controlling costs than those led by non-union contractors. The report was authored by Dr. Larissa Petrucci at NorCal Construction Industry Compliance (NCIC) and Alma College Assistant Economics Professor, Dr. Matthew Hinkel.

[Read the Report](#), "Union Contractors and Project Management Outcomes: Cost and Timeliness on Sacramento County Public Works Projects"

Drawing from publicly available data on public works projects, researchers analyzed a total of 128 projects, including infrastructure, public buildings, and schools. Each project was covered by the state's prevailing wage law. On 75 (or 59%) of projects, the prime contractor on the project was signatory to a collective bargaining agreement (union). The remaining projects were led by non-union prime contractors. Across all projects, the average starting cost was around \$6.5 million. The average final cost stood at \$6.75 million, and the average time to completion stood at 274 days.

Data revealed that projects led by non-union firms experienced average project cost increases of



Summary Table: Cost and Timeliness on Sacramento County Public Works Projects, 2018-2022				
Average Project Starting Cost of \$6,511,139; Average Final Cost of \$6,747,005				
Key Project Metrics	All Projects	Union-Led	Non-Union-Led	Union Difference
Number of Projects	128	75	53	-
Average Cost Increase \$	\$235,866	\$41,351	\$511,123	-81%
Average Cost Increase %	2.96%	1.85%	4.53%	-41%
Average Time to Completion	274 Days	268 Days	283 Days	-5.3%

over \$500,000. This was more than ten times greater than the average increases reported on projects led by union signatory contractors, even though union-led projects tended to be larger and more complex. Union-led projects were also completed more than two weeks faster, on average.

After researchers ran industry standard regression analyses to control for variables such as project size, location and the type of construction work, they concluded that the leadership of union signatory prime contractors reduced project cost increases by 4.9-6.4%, and sped up completion times by 14-22% (38 to 60 days).

"The data shows that projects led by union signatory contractors came in substantially cheaper and were completed much faster than those led by non-union firms," said Dr. Petrucci. "These results suggest that labor standards and project performance are complementary rather than competing goals."

Researchers noted that labor only represents about 23% of total costs on public works construction, and construction [unionization has been linked](#) with superior workforce supply, safety and productivity outcomes on projects.

For example, [one recent report showed](#) that joint programs operated by signatory employers and California's construction trade unions administer 92% of the registered apprenticeship programs that train the Golden State's skilled construction labor force and attach them to in-demand careers. Other studies have found that these investments make union firms significantly less likely to suffer from costly labor shortages(<https://www.businessinsider.com/how-to-get-construction-project-done-on-time-unions-report-02022-5>), much less likely to experience safety problems(<https://theconstructionbroadsheet.com/report-union-construction-jobsites-significantly-safer-than-nonunion-site-p547-175.htm>) that result in lost work time or added workers' compensation costs, while yielding workforce productivity gains(<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/001979398603900202>) of twenty to thirty percent.

"When it comes to construction, what ultimately matters most to the end-user is whether the project is done right and delivered on time and on budget," added study co-author and Alma College Assistant Economics Professor, Dr. Matthew Hinkel. "The data shows that union signatory firms are delivering far more effectively and reliably than the non-union alternative on these core metrics. And these superior outcomes are evidence that the long-term investments union signatory employers make in training, safety and job quality are paying near-term dividends on the jobsite."

About the Authors

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About NCIC

NorCal Construction Industry Compliance (NCIC) is a joint labor-management organization committed to creating a level playing field for contractors and workers by promoting equitable contracting and enforcing state and federal labor laws across California's construction industry. Learn more at <https://norcalic.org/>

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