

KentuckianaWorks Construction/ Skilled Trades Pipeline Project

Location: Louisville, Kentucky

Host Organization: Louisville Urban League

Partner Organizations: Justice Resource Center, Kentuckiana Associated Building Contractors, Greater Louisville Building and Construction Trades Council, KentuckianaWorks (Greater Louisville's Workforce Investment Board), Kentuckiana Plan

Target Population: Adult Minorities and Women

Program Innovations

- Graduates interview with a joint panel of union and non-union job placement agents to maximize choice, opportunity, and employer-employee fit
- Union and non-union associations provide graduates with job placement services under a performance-based contract with the local workforce investment board

Program History

At the time the Construction Pipeline Project began in 2007, the Louisville area was undergoing some large-scale development. In downtown Louisville, a large sports arena was being constructed and projects related to the Museum Plaza, Iron Quarter, and River Park Place were also scheduled to begin.

The Justice Resource Center, an organization involved in civil rights, collaborated with the Louisville Urban League and the Greater Louisville Building and Construction Trades Council to lobby the Metro Louisville Council to adopt a local hiring ordinance to ensure the jobs resulting from these projects went to local residents. The Council approved an ordinance that mandated the arena project hire a workforce to be comprised of 60 percent Jefferson County residents and that 75 percent be from the local Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA), which includes parts of Southern Indiana. In addition, 15 percent of the employees on the initial arena project were to be minorities and five percent were to be females.

To help local contractors meet these obligations, the Arena Authority worked with the Governor of Kentucky, who provided some discretionary funding to launch the pre-apprenticeship program known as the KentuckianaWorks Construction/Skilled Trades Pipeline Project, or, simply, the Construction Pipeline Project. KentuckianaWorks, Greater Louisville's Workforce Investment Board, initially awarded the funding to the Louisville Urban League, the Kentuckiana Plan, which represented local construction unions, and the Justice Resource Center, to create and launch the training program. The Kentuckiana Associated Building Contractors (ABC) joined the program in 2009.

Program Summary

Prior to the pre-apprenticeship training, participants must move through three screening, or assessment phases. First, potential trainees are recruited through community outreach events conducted by the Louisville Urban League and the Justice Resource Center. These outreach events were created after informal surveys of program participants revealed that only five percent were aware of construction apprenticeship opportunities in the region. At these events, attendees learn about apprenticeship and construction opportunities present in the region and receive a brief overview of the industry. Those individuals still interested in the program after the outreach event are invited to attend an orientation session, which represents the second screening and assessment phase.

The Kentuckiana Plan, a local union collaborative, conducts the orientation in which interested candidates who completed a recruitment form receive a more detailed overview of the construction industry. Participants in the orientation learn about the Construction Pipeline Project training as well as what characteristics the construction industry needs in a worker and what working conditions are present in the industry. This orientation session helps screen out some individuals who may not have a strong interest in working in construction.

After the orientation, the remaining training candidates go through the third screening phase prior to training, which includes additional assessment and intake. A test is given and candidates must pass with a minimum 8th-grade proficiency in reading and math to enroll in the training. Candidates are then interviewed by the Apprenticeship Coordinators/Directors Association to further assess their interest and motivation in pursuing a career in construction. Finally, candidates must pass a drug screen before beginning training.

“In an apprenticeship program is where trainees get the training and experience they need to become a journeyman. The pre-apprenticeship process identifies, screens, selects, and prepares individuals who meet the minimum requirements to be ready to enter into an apprenticeship program; and, our program does that quite well.”

--Kevin Fields, Senior Vice President for Programs at the Louisville Urban League

Once candidates pass through these first three stages, participants move into the training portion of the program, which is provided by an instructor, who also serves as a career counselor and is hired by the Louisville Urban League. The **curriculum** of the pre-apprenticeship program focuses heavily on soft skills and apprenticeship test preparation, since the program is designed not to train participants in the trades, but is rather to screen potential employees for the industry.

During a two week period, or 46 hours, participants complete several training modules. Included in these modules are workshops devoted to interview skills, resume development, 14 hours of math remediation, and workplace safety. This last module allows participants to earn an OSHA 10 certification. During the training, union and non-union representatives visit the classroom and provide trainees an overview of the 15 apprenticeship trade opportunities available in the area. To follow up on these classroom sessions, trainees must visit at least three of the 15 trades’ offices, which provide them additional exposure to the trades in order to help them in their career choice.

Trainees spend additional time learning about the culture and history of the industry. Since training participants are typically minorities and females, preparing them for work in an industry, where minorities and females have not been traditionally represented, is seen as pivotal to their job retention.

“We try to prepare women and minorities for what to expect from a cultural perspective and how to deal with any insensitivities they may experience on the job site.”

--Kevin Fields, Senior Vice President for Programs at the Louisville Urban League

Throughout the two-week training students may access a variety of **support services** via the Pipeline Program. In addition to the career counseling trainees receive from their instructor, they receive case management and mentoring services to help them

complete their training and realize their career goals. Small stipends or training wages may also be provided to help sustain the trainees until they complete the program.

After the graduation ceremony, students are interviewed jointly by the Union **Job Placement** Agent from the Kentuckiana Plan and the Non-Union Job Placement Agent from ABC to develop a job placement strategy. Both the Kentuckiana Plan and the ABC operate under a performance-based contract with KentuckianaWorks to place students in employment. By interviewing for union and non-union positions, it is hoped that the students are placed in a position that successfully matches their interests and skills with the employer's needs. The Urban League also hosts career fairs and career expos to help graduates find employment, and is part of the One Stop system, which also provides resources to program trainees and graduates. Once the new apprentices are placed, the Urban League continues to support them as they navigate their entry into the construction industry.

Program Funding

The Construction Pipeline Program is funded primarily through the Governor of Kentucky's Discretionary Fund and through Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funding. In the program's first year, \$730,000 of the Governor's Discretionary Funding created and launched the program. The program, in its third year in 2009 and operating with \$500,000 of funding, is still financed in part through the Governor's Office, though at a reduced amount of \$230,000. The remaining \$270,000 in funding comes from KentuckianaWorks through WIA.

Industry Engagement

Both the union and non-union sides of the industry are involved in the Pipeline project. While Kentuckiana Plan's was involved from the beginning of the program in 2007, ABC joined in 2009. As mentioned earlier, each organization is contracted by the Urban League to provide job placement services, which they coordinate with one another through the joint interview process that graduates complete. The Kentuckiana Plan is also contracted to provide the orientation and some of the assessment, while representatives of both organizations visit the classroom to inform students about the industry and job opportunities. The Urban League holds regular meetings with ABC and the Kentuckiana Plan.

The recession led to the postponement of many of the major construction projects slated to begin in the downtown area. Thus, job opportunities for program graduates were cut as many union members' jobs were eliminated and non-union job demand dropped-off. However, the Urban League continues to maintain high visibility within the industry and actively maintains its connections with its industry partners. The program sends out mailings to local construction contractors to let them know program graduates are available for work, and the Urban League invites contractors to the career expos and job fairs hosted by the Urban League to market the program and the graduates.

According to Kevin Fields, Senior Vice President of Programs at the Urban League, flexibility is key to operating a pre-apprenticeship program.

“Part of the nature of construction is that it is time sensitive. Once the demand for a worker is identified you have to turn around quickly to fill that need and you don’t get a lot of lead time. So you have to be flexible.”

--Kevin Fields, Senior Vice President for Programs at the Louisville Urban League