

Illinois Uses Pre-Apprenticeship Program to Increase Diversity in Construction Trades

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The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Development (DCED) awarded more than \$18 million in grant funding to 36 recipients through the [Illinois Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program](#). Recipients include contractor groups such as the Associated Builders and Contractors, colleges and universities, and non-profits dedicated to providing skills-building training that prepares individuals to enter full apprenticeship programs then enter the building and construction trades. The Illinois Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program was created by the Illinois Works Jobs Program Act, enacted in 2019, and launched in 2021.

[Eligibility for pre-apprenticeship programs](#) offered by grant recipients is open to all Illinois residents over the age of 18 who have earned a high school diploma or equivalent. Illinois DCED expects the program to help address the underrepresentation of women, people of color (POC), and veterans in apprenticeship programs, and, ultimately, in the construction trades. Pre-apprenticeships help increase diversity in full apprenticeship programs not by lowering standards but by enabling a greater number of diverse Illinois residents to meet apprenticeship entry standards.

According to the press release announcing the grants, 2023 participants in the Pre-Apprenticeship Program were 84 percent POC and 25 percent female, compared to only 31 percent POC and five percent women in Illinois registered apprenticeship programs in 2022.

Program providers offer structured pathways and support for participants' transition to full apprenticeship programs in the construction and building trades. Programs are free to participants and include a stipend. Participant support services include childcare, transportation assistance, housing assistance, math and reading tutoring, and mental health counseling. The programs offer more than 150 hours of instruction over at least six weeks. Job readiness and other assistance includes resume writing advice, mock interviews, assistance in applying for full apprenticeships, and apprenticeship program tours.

Other states, including Maryland, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina, have similar programs and have reported increased diversity in apprenticeships through pre-apprenticeship programs.

Please contact a Jackson Lewis attorney with any questions.

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