

BUILDING THE FUTURE WORKFORCE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A State Playbook to Shape a New Age in Federal Infrastructure Investments

This executive summary presents a comprehensive set of strategies that empower state leaders to cultivate a strong, diverse, and multigenerational workforce capable of developing and maintaining our nation's infrastructure. With these recommendations, state policymakers can connect more working people to quality jobs, and create benefits for residents, businesses, and communities that rely on the implementation and maintenance of critical infrastructure.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE POLICYMAKERS:

- 1. Build a strong infrastructure workforce plan and conduct a comprehensive workforce assessment** in collaboration with local employers, unions, educational institutions, and community-based organizations. This helps bridge the gap between available jobs and qualified workers, thus creating more opportunities for people seeking quality jobs.
- 2. Foster industry partnerships that bring together businesses, unions, training providers, and community organizations to develop workforce strategies** that will help workers access quality careers. These partnerships promote equity and diversity, disrupt occupational segregation, and strategically utilize training funds to create a competitive and inclusive infrastructure workforce.
- 3. Expand access to skills training programs** that will enable people to train for sustainable career paths. By leveraging pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, and workforce programs at community and technical colleges, policymakers can enable broader participation in the labor market.
- 4. Incentivize and support training, hiring, and career advancement opportunities for local residents.** This will drive community development and enable equitable access to infrastructure jobs for people residing in areas reliant on infrastructure development.
- 5. Provide economic support and break down barriers by addressing financial obstacles** that hinder access to training and job opportunities. This will bolster workforce participation, particularly among underrepresented groups.
- 6. Collect data on job quality, employment, and training outcomes, focusing on race, gender, and geography.** This will facilitate evidence-based decision making and ensure that policies are tailored to the specific needs of diverse communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Build Stronger Workforce Plans

To effectively leverage funding provided by recent state and federal infrastructure investments, states should assess their current workforce capacity and identify skills mismatches and training and employment opportunities within the infrastructure and clean energy industries.

State transportation agencies should consult with stakeholders such as industry groups, education providers, labor organizations, and workforce boards to develop robust Transportation Human Capital State Plans, which can be bolstered by the integration of supportive services for workers.

Across infrastructure sub-sectors, local stakeholders should be included in the planning and implementation process. One way to accomplish this is through community workforce agreements between project owners and labor groups.¹ Having provided guidance on assessments in the planning phase, stakeholders can then facilitate coordination and understanding when funding becomes available.

States should set goals for investing in the infrastructure workforce in ways that create good jobs and build stronger and more sustainable economies. These should include specific goals for increasing employment in infrastructure sub-sectors, as well as equity-related goals that set standards for ensuring that people of color and women have meaningful pathways into good jobs within the sector.

2 Invest in Industry Partnerships

Industry partnerships are a proven model that bring together local businesses with education and workforce partners to develop localized, industry-specific talent strategies. Partnerships help workers enter and advance in industry and help local companies support an inclusive talent ecosystem. Because industry partnerships intentionally broker training, hiring, and advancement opportunities within a given sector, they can be used to disrupt occupational segregation if they are equity focused. States should invest in this model by developing a single program that incorporates all these components:

- 1. Dedicated Funding:** States should dedicate funding for partnerships in infrastructure and clean energy. Potential funding sources include IJJA or WIOA funds, state general funds, or discretionary grants. States should allocate a portion towards equity-advancing practices, such as enhancing equitable hiring practices.²
- 2. Equity and Inclusion:** States should provide funding incentives for partnerships that establish specific goals that expand access to training programs for women and people

of color, increase their representation in infrastructure industries, and improve their completion of training programs.³

3. Capacity Building, Technical Assistance, and

Assessment: States should provide capacity building and technical assistance to partnerships to enhance equity-advancing practices. States should invest in research to analyze the impact of partnerships, including their efficacy in closing racial and gender gaps. States should require partnerships to report on a standardized set of indicators that measure progress on employment and wage outcomes, career advancement, employer engagement, and job quality.

3 Expand Access to Skills Training

States can tackle the issue of underrepresentation of women and people of color in skilled trades by investing in apprenticeship programs and expanding financial aid. Both strategies ensure that people who cannot afford to participate in training opportunities are able to do so. There are two elements to this strategy:

- **States should expand pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs.** Apprenticeship programs allow people to earn while they learn. They're able to work and receive a wage as they progress through training milestones. Pre-apprenticeships provide on-ramps to apprenticeship programs for workers who might lack access or preparation. States should expand the pipeline of workers who can participate in apprenticeships by contracting with nonprofits and labor unions that have a record of success in serving women and people of color. These organizations can help recruit students for quality programs,⁴ and can provide support services to students, such as mentoring and job placement assistance. Policies to expand pre-apprenticeship programs can work in tandem with efforts to support local hires and economic supports like childcare and transportation.
- **States should expand financial aid.** Community and technical colleges are essential in developing the future infrastructure workforce due to their accessibility, workforce development programs, and partnerships. However, the short-term and noncredit training programs that can prepare students for good jobs are often ineligible for the federal Pell Grant. States can address this problem by expanding financial aid for infrastructure careers, especially for low-income students, students of color, and students from rural areas.⁵ States should ensure that aid is targeted at training programs that result in *quality* non-degree credentials.⁶

4 Incentivize and support training and hiring of local residents

Hiring locally for infrastructure projects fosters economic vitality. Local workers have a vested interest in the success of the project and bring local context to the job. Hiring locally helps to develop a skilled regional workforce and address un- and under-employment issues. It can also reduce costs of relocation and outsourcing and promote diversity and inclusion.⁷

The U.S. Department of Transportation has incorporated local hiring preferences as part of the selection or merit criteria for most discretionary grant programs under Federal Highway Administration projects funded by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). State agencies that receive these funds can take advantage of this opportunity by establishing local hire provisions as part of project implementation.⁸ States should align local hire initiatives with sector partnerships, and should consider how partnering with women-owned and/or minority-owned contracting firms can help achieve local training, hiring, and equity goals.

While the IIJA encourages local hire, it's not mandated. States that do enact local hire efforts should implement monitoring and reporting mechanisms to help track progress. This can include regular reporting on the number of local workers hired, the types of training programs implemented, and the outcomes of workforce development initiatives.

5 Provide economic support and break down barriers

Common barriers that prevent qualified workers from being able to complete training programs and begin work include lack of affordable, accessible childcare and transportation options. States that are serious about addressing workforce shortages and providing a robust pipeline of skilled workers should invest in these economic supports.

Because many working people – particularly women – have caregiving responsibilities, childcare is essential to ensuring that they can participate equitably in training programs. Policymakers should use all available resources to address this critical gap in workforce preparation.

In particular, states should:

- **Use federal funds to expand access to childcare:** States can spend down remaining American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to temporarily increase the number of subsidized slots to account for increased demand as infrastructure projects ramp up. States can also utilize the 504(e) provision of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act to be used for activities such as childcare.⁹ States can use Supplemental Nutrition Assistant Program Employment and

Training (SNAP E&T) funding to provide childcare assistance to eligible people participating in SNAP E&T programs. States can set aside Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds for childcare assistance or subgrant TANF funds directly to community-based organizations so that they can coordinate and pay childcare providers who serve parents in work-based learning programs.¹⁰

- **Make it easier for people to train for and retain good infrastructure jobs by addressing “benefits cliffs”:** Students who train for and secure good jobs can increase their incomes quickly, causing them to suddenly become ineligible for assistance. States can address this by raising initial income limits for programs or implementing transitional childcare using federal Childcare Development Fund or state funding.¹¹
- **Update state policies to broaden access to childcare for people receiving education and training:** States should update their policies to allow “education and training” to fulfill all activity requirements associated with childcare subsidy programs, instead of tacking on additional work or activity requirements.¹²
- **Use state and federal funds to incentivize childcare for nonstandard hours:** States can collaborate with private sector partners to develop childcare solutions for people working unconventional hours. This can involve subsidizing or incentivizing private childcare providers to offer services during non-traditional hours or partnering with employers to create or expand on-site childcare facilities.

Without consistent and readily available transportation, workers may face commuting challenges. Given that many infrastructure projects are expanding transportation access to remote and underserved parts of the country, state policymakers should ensure that workers on these projects have reliable transportation.

- **Fund sector partnerships** to join local and regional transportation agencies, employers, labor organizations, and other stakeholders to develop transportation programs tailored to the needs of the infrastructure workforce, and ensure sub-state geographic needs on projects are being met.
- **Integrate transportation planning into overall infrastructure project planning.** This can include considering transportation needs and costs for the project's workforce as part of project budgets and timelines and including transportation components in IIJA grant applications.
- **Develop robust funding streams** to cover costs such as bus passes, vehicle repairs, gas vouchers, and mileage vouchers. This can include dedicating new state funds, or setting aside a portion of federal ARPA, SNAP E&T, TANF, or workforce development funds to cover such costs.



6 Collect comprehensive data on job quality, employment, and training outcomes

To assess the success of infrastructure workforce goals, states need to collect and report on data for infrastructure-related training and education outcomes, hiring and advancement. This data should be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, English language proficiency, income, and geography. Tactics include:

- **Developing an infrastructure jobs and workforce equity index** that includes key indicators and metrics associated with a state's infrastructure jobs and workforce development goals.
- **Establishing a handful of common measures** perhaps based on the existing Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) common measures that every

entity that receives funding for infrastructure job creation and workforce development must report on.

- **Using federal infrastructure funding or allocating additional state funding for data infrastructure**, such as data management systems and data analytics tools to specifically report on infrastructure project funding.
- **Working with state labor market information offices**, as well as state labor and education agencies, to analyze available labor market information and program administrative data on the infrastructure workforce and related education and training programs.
- **Creating surveys, questionnaires, and other tools** that capture qualitative and quantitative data to determine how investments are impacting job quality and equity, employment and training outcomes, workforce advancement, and business competitiveness.

The full version of this playbook, along with other infrastructure resources and analysis, can be found under NSC's People Powered Infrastructure Campaign at nationalskillscoalition.org.

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