

# CONSTRUCTION COMMUNITY WORKFORCE PROGRAMS

*Recommendations from*

THREE TRANSIT-ORIENTED  
DEVELOPMENTS IN DENVER



**Mile High Connects**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Published in partnership with Mile High Connects with funding from JP Morgan Chase Foundation

Mile High Connects is a collaborative ensuring that our region's transit system helps people access opportunity by connecting to affordable housing, healthy environments, quality education and good-paying jobs.

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*Photo Credit:* **Colorado Construction Institute** and  
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Special thanks to the organizations that participated in this study for sharing their insights in developing and monitoring community workforce development programs –specifically the staff, employer partners and participants associated with Colorado Construction Institute, Denver Housing Authority, and Workforce Initiative Now.

Thanks to Jennifer Billig, Michael Smith, Tony Pickett, and Damon McIntyre for their editing and research support, and to Denver Office of Economic Development for assistance in obtaining labor market information.

# INTRODUCTION

The metro Denver area is experiencing strong growth across multiple industry sectors, including construction. The region continues to see above average population growth, leading to increased residential and multi-family construction coupled with large scale infrastructure investments. Realizing this growth potential, however, will require investing not only in places, but also people. As noted by the National Skills Coalition (NSC) in a 2012 report, infrastructure investments such as RTD's FasTracks expansion or CDOT's I-70 East Expansion, create critical opportunities not only to improve community resources, but also to create job opportunities for local residents [1]. The growth of residential construction across metro Denver provides further opportunity to link education and workforce development to economic development.

According to the Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation, the unemployment rate averaged about 4 percent in 2015, representing extremely tight labor market conditions. Strong industry demand coupled with a general workforce shortage presents a unique opportunity for construction industry education and training programs to increase alignment with local employers involved in economic development projects. This report details the learning experiences of three place-based projects that capitalized on infrastructure investments in order to generate employment and training opportunities for local residents and to expand the pipeline of qualified workers to meet industry workforce demands.

This resource guide is organized to present recommendations related to the planning and execution of community workforce development programs connected to targeted construction opportunities. The intended audience includes community-based or education and training organizations engaged in construction workforce preparation, employers or project owners interested in community workforce initiatives, and prospective private and public funders.

Place-based community workforce efforts can vary in size and scope. Tools may include contractual partnerships such as community benefits agreements, project labor agreements and contractor provisions, or mandated institutional structures such as executive orders, and municipal ordinances [2]. Regardless of the specific approach, the potential impact can be wide-spread—including the potential to recruit and train traditionally disadvantaged low-income workers.

Community workforce initiatives such as the work highlighted in this report support broad economic growth by creating employment and training opportunities for residents and efficiently serving the recruiting needs of local contractors constructing these infrastructure expansions. The three providers contributing to this report and their programs are described briefly below and more fully in subsequent sections.

- Colorado Construction Institute—CCI is a nonprofit training organization providing innovative pre-apprentice programs where people learn the soft and hard skills necessary to bridge the middle-skills gap. CCI offers a federally-funded YouthBuild program focused on serving high school dropouts, and industry-supported construction training classes for unemployed and underemployed adults leading to careers in construction. More information is available at [www.ccidenver.org](http://www.ccidenver.org)
- Denver Housing Authority—Denver Housing Authority is a quasi-municipal corporation with a portfolio of over 11,000 units and housing choice vouchers, providing affordable housing to more than 26,000 very low, low and middle income individuals representing over 10,000 families. DHA's employment and education services develops community members career skills and supports the creation of employment opportunities, including training and placement through federally mandated Section 3 business and hiring goals. More information is available at [www.denverhousing.org](http://www.denverhousing.org)
- Workforce Initiative Now—The regional Workforce Initiative Now (WIN) is a community workforce partnership managed by Regional Transportation District (RTD), Community College of Denver (CCD), Denver Transit Partners (DTP) and the Urban League of Metropolitan Denver. WIN expands opportunities for job seekers, employers, and local communities through demand-driven workforce services and the creation of career pathway opportunities in the transportation and construction industries. More information is available at [www.winforwork.org](http://www.winforwork.org)

This report is organized into six sections, including this Introduction. It begins with a foundational Statement of Need section outlining the labor market need for an expanded construction workforce and the strategic purpose for community workforce programs that connect to infrastructure development. The Program Detail section includes descriptions of the programs, including origins, core components, a definition of the target population and intended outcomes, and basic implementation requirements. The next section, Evaluation Methods and Program Data, provides a brief description of methodology and metrics and presentation of general program descriptions and participant demographic data. Outcomes and Findings presents outcome and impact findings for participants in the three identified projects. Finally, the Implications for Development and Funding section addresses both program oversight and development recommendations and considerations for funding of community workforce initiatives.

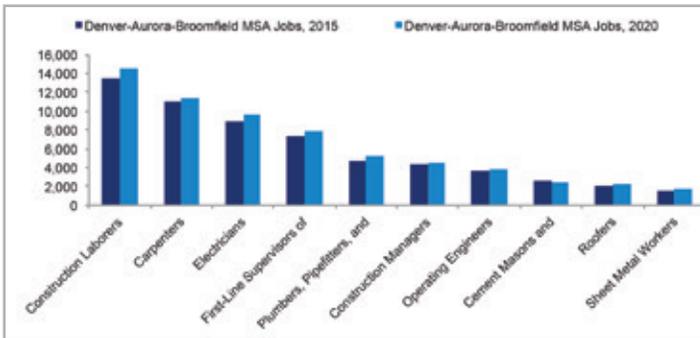


# STATEMENT OF NEED

Colorado's construction sector was one of the hardest hit industries during the Great Recession, however key economic indicators show improvement over the last year and anticipated continued growth. According to the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, the 2014-2024 long-term projected employment for Construction of Buildings in the Denver-Aurora-Broomfield MSA indicates an annual average percentage increase of 4.23% and a total employment change of 6,994 positions, representing an increase of 51.26% over the ten-year span. Heavy and Civil Engineering Construction will see a 3.44% annual increase and an overall increase of 40.27% or 4,429 positions in the same time period. [3]

Forecasts of employment trends for the Denver-Aurora-Broomfield MSA show growth through 2020 for the primary construction and heavy construction occupations. Table 1 displays the future employment projections for the top ten occupations employed in NAICS code 23 (Construction Sector). These employment trends are based on higher-than-average increases in residential construction due to limited housing supply, as well as regional infrastructure initiatives such as expansions at Denver International Airport, RTD's rail and bus commuting systems, and CDOT's planned I-70 East roadway expansion.

**Table 1. Employment Trends in the Construction Industry, through 2025.**

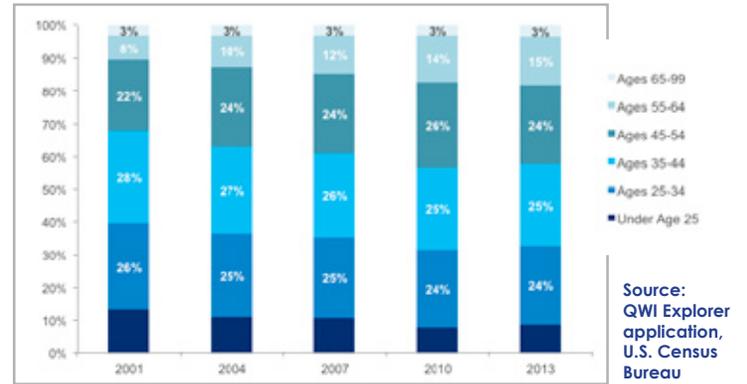


Source: EMSI 2015.1 Class of Worker (QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, Self-Employed)

In this time of growth, however, local employers are facing hiring shortages due to the increased residential and commercial construction activity and an aging workforce. A 2015 study commissioned by the Colorado Associated General Contractors revealed that the percentage of construction workers age 55 and older increased by 6% between 2004 and 2013, while the percentage of workers age 34 and younger decreased by 5% [4]

This statewide trend is evidenced locally as well. Between 2001 and 2013, the share of construction workers in the City and County of Denver between the ages of 55 to 64 nearly doubled, increasing from 8% to 15% (Exhibit 2). The share of workers between the ages of 25 and 34 fell from 28% in 2001, to 25% of total construction employment in 2013.

**Table 2. Distribution of City and County of Denver Construction Workforce by Age Group, 2001 - 2013**



While regional and national industry growth is favorable, construction company employers continue to report the lack of available skilled labor has restricted new activity. The Associated General Contractors of America's 2015 workforce survey indicated that 95% of member contractors reported trouble filling vacancies for hourly craft workers or salaried professionals [5]. Denver employers operating in construction and heavy construction industries face critical shortages due to limited available workforce, and these shortages may lead to project delays and cost overruns. It is imperative for the construction industry to attract, train and retain new groups of workers. AGC Colorado estimates currently that for every four workers leaving the trades, only one will enter the field to replace them. [4]

The construction industry plays a critical role in growing middle class opportunities. With entry-level laborer mean annual wages starting at \$32,170, health benefits, low education barriers to entry, and established career pathways to specialized trades, the construction industry provides a critical career pathway (Source: May 2014 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates; Denver-Aurora-Broomfield MSA). Yet a history of racial exclusion and a lack of information sharing on construction career opportunities has left many low-income communities and people of color with limited access to training opportunities that prepare applicants to be qualified job seekers and to connect with these high-quality middle-skill jobs in the construction and infrastructure industries.

The previously cited NSC report posits that federal investments that create jobs, such as infrastructure expansion, and investments that prepare people for jobs rarely align at the local, state or federal level [1]. Despite the shared priorities of community and workforce development practitioners and the industry workforce shortage, it is a complex effort to align the coordination necessary to improve the skills and employability of low-income individuals in association with a new building project. The three programs featured in this report all capitalized on economic development efforts—including transit oriented development and affordable housing initiatives—and attempted to connect these activities to education and workforce goals. Job growth alone cannot support our region's economic viability if local residents are not educated or trained for the jobs being created.

There is substantial research and documentation regarding large-scale opportunities with formal community benefits agreements or project labor agreements—this report is intended to provide guidance to program planners and potential funders of small-scale efforts seeking to leverage a local building project for enhanced community impact. Whether the investment project is private development, or publically financed, community workforce programs offer the potential to maximize economic development impact by also increasing education and employment outcomes for local residents.

# EVALUATION METHODS AND PROGRAM DATA

This evaluation assessed quantitative and qualitative program indicators in five categories—Recruitment and Outreach, Screening, Training and Skills Development, Placement and Retention. Evaluators analyzed outcomes data on over 450 trainees and interviewed 20 program participants. Evaluators also organized focus groups for program staff and partnering employers. This report presents outcomes and impacts from participants served from 2013 – 2015.

Given the small sample size and focus of the profiled activities, this report strives to present programming recommendations for community partners and potential funders. It is not intended to serve as a summative evaluation of the effectiveness of the community workforce development efforts coordinated through Colorado Construction Institute, Denver Housing Authority and the Workforce Initiative Now. The findings and implications detailed are intended to enhance the development and implementation of local place-based construction workforce development activities across metro Denver. The targeted industry workforce preparation programs featured in this report emphasize opportunities for women, people of color, and the economically disadvantaged to build careers in the construction industry. CCI, DHA and WIN all seek to enhance the employment prospects and earnings of metro Denver's low-income residents. A more detailed summary of the programs, scope, and demographics of all three organizations follows, in addition to details regarding the infrastructure or building project aligned to this review.

## COLORADO CONSTRUCTION INSTITUTE

Colorado Construction Institute (CCI) is a nonprofit training organization providing innovative 21st century pre-apprentice and apprentice programs where disadvantaged people learn the soft and hard skills necessary to bridge the middle-skills gap. CCI offers a federally-funded YouthBuild program focused on serving high school dropouts, and several industry-supported construction training "bootcamp" classes for unemployed and underemployed adults that lead to careers in construction.

CCI's training programs serve people who reside in under-resourced communities throughout the Denver Metro Area. These programs are demand-driven, meaning that CCI partners with local construction employers to identify specific workforce needs and places its graduates in high-demand construction positions. Nearly 100% of CCI trainees are low-income persons with barriers to full employment. 15% have been women; more than 75% of participants are people of color.

CCI's services can be split into two main categories: youth training programs, and adult training programs. For high school drop-outs and other out-of-school youth up to age 24 CCI offers Denver YouthBuild, a federally-funded program where trainees spend up to 12 months in pursuit of their diploma or GED and industry-recognized credentials. CCI also partners with local high schools to deliver Building Pathways programming to in-school youth, re-integrating vocational training into secondary education in the process. CCI's adult programming focuses on serving unemployed and underemployed persons, giving them the skills and experience necessary for career laddering and advancement into living-wage employment in the construction and infrastructure industries.

Since 2012, CCI has exceeded a completion rate of 80% across all programming, with 90% of all graduates securing employment or engaging in education or training within 3 months of program completion. From 2012 to 2014, CCI graduated a total of 76 individuals. Due to an increased demand for services, in 2015 alone, CCI is on-track to graduate 80 individuals; this represents approximately 50% growth. In the face of the current labor shortage, CCI's employer partners have pledged significant support to training programs.

One of the many local projects that CCI has supported is Park Hill Village West in the Northeast Park Hill neighborhood of Denver. When completed, the 9.4 acre site will feature 156 affordable housing units upon completion and Urban Land Conservancy (ULC) is working with the surrounding community to determine additional housing, retail and commercial spaces on the site. The property provides access to the 40th/Colorado station on the Regional Transportation District's (RTD) East Line commuter rail from Union Station to Denver International Airport.

For the activities profiled in this report, CCI partnered with ULC, real estate developer Delwest, and general contractor Drahot to integrate contractor input and student site visits into four-week boot-camp training segments. While the original intent of the partnership was to train participants specifically for hiring opportunities at PHVW, project schedules and actual hiring needs failed to align with the availability and skills of graduating cohorts and project. Program planners elected to then employ a more generalized year-long partnership in which the PHVW contracting team engaged with multiple boot camp cohorts. Over the course of one year, 81 individuals enrolled in training and 70 completed. Of those 70, 63 entered employment or advanced training and 44 entered construction-specific employment. Michael Smith, CCI founder and Executive Director cited that having industry at the table from the early stages was a significant factor in building demand-driven training and recruiting neighborhood participants. "Applicants see themselves as applying for concrete job opportunities, instead of applying to a traditional program," he reported. The most significant challenge CCI faced in this partnership was that communication and pre-project planning did not ensure perfect scheduling alignment. "Planners must stay flexible," he cautions. "When you are committed to meeting the needs of industry, you need to be prepared that needs may shift."

## DENVER HOUSING AUTHORITY

The Denver Housing Authority (DHA) provides affordable housing to more than 26,000 very low, low and middle income individuals representing over 10,000 families within the city and county of Denver. DHA's vision has been honed to reflect the goal that every individual or family shall have quality and affordable housing, in communities offering empowerment, economic opportunity, and a vibrant living environment. DHA owns and operates over 3,900 conventional public housing units that are subsidized by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, nearly 700 subsidized multi-family units, and about 200 other locally-funded housing units. DHA also administers the federal Housing Choice Voucher program, formerly known as "Section 8".

In recent years, DHA has engaged in multiple expansion and redevelopment efforts. All DHA contracts are required to comply with Section 3 Regulations. The purpose of Section 3 is to ensure that, to the greatest extent feasible, that employment, training and business opportunities created by HUD financial assistance be directed to low and very-low income persons. All DHA contracts over \$150,000 are required to comply with Section 3 regulations regarding hiring of targeted residents including low or very low income individuals who are either DHA resident, residents of other housing developments managed by DHA, participants in YouthBuild, or a resident of the city and county of Denver.

# EVALUATION METHODS AND PROGRAM DATA (Continued)

Contractors work with the DHA's Education & Employment Program to create new job opportunities in collaboration with vendors and subcontractors. They develop and submit a workforce plan that is a part of the bidding evaluative criteria; in addition successful outcomes may position a company to be more competitive in future DHA procurements. DHA's education and employment team provides the following supports:

- A staff person to assist in designing a successful program that effectively meets company short and long term staffing needs
- Assistance with job referrals and job placement support
- Preference when competing for DHA contracts

For the purposes of this report, DHA assessed workforce efforts related to the multi-phase Mariposa redevelopment in La Alma/Lincoln Park. The project, to be completed in 2016, includes 900 affordable, public housing and market rate units in addition to public open spaces. This project partnership was based in HUD's Resident and Employment Engagement programs designed to create sustainable economic opportunities for public housing residents in partnership with contractors performing services funded through HUD. Three general contractors performed the six phases of the project—Milender White Construction Company, Denuvee Construction and Shaw Construction. A total of twelve contractors and sub-contractors participated in hiring activities through DHA.

To date, 369 individuals have been hired through the six phases of the multi-year project, 217 of whom received direct training or services through DHA. Program coordinator Damon McIntyre cited the greatest benefit of the project as fostering direct resident stakeholder participation in education and employment opportunities made available to the immediate neighborhood (South Lincoln and Mariposa District). The broad eligibility guidelines expanded beyond the immediate neighborhood, however, to include low-income residents across the city of Denver. The greatest challenge DHA faced was keeping those placed on the Mariposa project employed directly with a contractor post completion of a specific work assignment. Additionally, since there were no requirements regarding hours completed or length of assignments, DHA saw large numbers of hired individuals return within a week of their hiring date. The program did not formerly track retention, a factor McIntyre will change on future projects. "Without strong programmatic support, targeted project hiring efforts can turn into temp assignments," McIntyre explained. "As trainers and resource providers we need to pay more attention to post-placement supports to help our participants build long-term careers."

## WORKFORCE INITIATIVE NOW

Together with a network of 53 aligned resource partners, WIN provides career exploration, training, placement, and advancement activities that grow opportunities for community residents. WIN offers a career pathways model of training and skills development that prepares workers to enter employment and advance along industry-specific pathways in construction and transportation, associated with RTD's FasTracks rail expansion. By connecting education and skills development programs with integrated support services and on-the-job coaching, WIN program activities bridge the gap between the initial skills of individuals and the skills they need to succeed in career-path employment.

Since its inception in the fall of 2011, WIN has served over 1100 unique individuals through general career outreach and planning activities. On average, WIN enrolls 90 to 120 individuals annually for intensive services—including training and placement. The program maintains a placement rate of at least 83% and an average starting wage of \$16.25 per hour or \$32,500 annually. 56% of WIN participants have completed post-employment training, which is one factor that supports the strong program retention rate. On average, 93% of WIN participants are employed 90 days later.

Current program demographics indicate that nearly 65% of WIN participants represent people of color. 31% are female and 68% are male. WIN has enrolled participants ages 18 to 69, with the largest percentage of applicants between the ages of 25 to 35 (30%), or 36 to 46 (22%). At time of application, 90% are unemployed or underemployed in a low-wage job and self-identify in intake interviews as needing to upgrade skills in order to qualify for better paying positions.

WIN currently operates on six FasTracks projects with a mandated hiring agreement. While it varies by project, contracting teams must comply with an 8 to 15 percent WIN participation goal under both craft and professional services scopes (up to 15% of the total work hours must be completed by WIN enrollees). From 2012 to October 2015, WIN placed over 300 local residents in positions on FasTracks expansion projects. An additional 156 incumbent workers in construction and transportation pursued advanced training.

In 2014, the program partnered with local developer D4 and general contractor PCL as they launched Denizen, a 275-unit apartment project adjacent to RTD's Alameda light rail station in central Denver. The partnership was designed to support an Enhanced Training Opportunities (ETO) effort in association with financing provided by the Denver Urban Renewal Authority (DURA) on a connected stormwater outfall improvement project. While there was not mandated hiring process linked to the project, funding supported pre-apprenticeship training at Emily Griffith Technical College and contractor training for advanced skills development. The activities assessed for this report reviewed the four-month pre-apprenticeship training cohorts. Funding supported two cohorts trained at Emily Griffith Technical College, with WIN providing career navigation and placement services. 17 participants started the four-month long training program and 15 completed. All 15 were employed or enrolled in further education and 13 were placed in construction industry positions. Both D4 and PCL supported the program through planning, curriculum development, site tours, and project funding—including program stipends and personnel protective equipment.

WIN representative Katrina Wert cited the on-site learning opportunities including shadowing experiences, as the strongest asset of the project, in terms of providing participants with realistic industry exposure. The greatest challenge was helping planners recognize that programming was still successful, even though no placements occurred on the project. "The learning they received through the project resulted in 87% industry placement," she said. "Participants were able to attain and retain careers in construction, just not on that project directly. The impact of project-based workforce programming can extend beyond the project itself."

# OUTCOMES AND FINDINGS

## OUTCOMES

This report is not intended to serve as an analysis of the effectiveness of the profiled programs. Rather, it highlights trends and practices across three similar place-based project efforts. The quantitative and qualitative outcomes detailed below are intended to emphasize implications for program development that connect workforce development to local infrastructure investments.

Table 3 provides a detailed summary of outcomes related to Outreach & Recruitment, Screening & Assessment, Training & Development, Job Placement and Post Placement Services for the targeted projects. Outcomes data reflects involvement in specified project activities only, and not program wide enrollment or achievement data. Project activities covered different time spans as identified in each program section

**Table 3—Outcomes Summary**

	CCI	DHA	WIN
<b>Outreach and Recruitment</b>			
Number of individuals served (general outreach)	324	389	45
Number of individuals applied	162	N/A	21
Number of individuals enrolled	81	N/A	17
<b>Screening &amp; Assessment</b>			
Number of participants that created a Career Plan	81	0	17
Number of individuals referred to developmental pathways	10	0	3
<b>Training &amp; Development</b>			
Number of individuals who entered training	81	389	17
Number of individuals completed training	70	217	15
<b>Job Placement</b>			
Mandated project hiring?	No	Yes	No
Number of participants placed on project	0	369	1
Number of participants placed or enrolled in education	63	369	15
Number of participants placed within target industry	44	369	13
Avg. starting wage data	\$12.75	\$9.28	\$15.25
<b>Post-Placement Services</b>			
Percentage of retained workers after 30 days	N/A	N/A	85%
Percentage of retained workers after 90 days	N/A	N/A	77%
Number of employed participants who receive a raise post placement (tracked up to six months)	N/A	N/A	4
Total number of employed participants receiving supportive services	N/A	N/A	9

Program staff or allied partners at all three highlighted agencies reported performing a variety of functions in support of construction skills programming, including:

- targeting development opportunities and partner employers
- building relationships with stakeholders
- coordinating or providing relevant instruction for participants
- assisting employers in developing learning opportunities;
- recruiting and screening program applicants
- providing case management support to address pre-employment barriers;
- coordinating labor market exchange services; and
- providing supportive services—such as personal protective equipment or bus passes—to participants on the job

Some services are provided through direct staff and others through contractual relationships. CCI for example, hires boots on the streets teams to support targeted neighborhood outreach. WIN forms contractual relationships with qualified local training providers in order to focus resources on career navigation and post-placement support.

All three programs featured strong industry engagement, as illustrated by Table 4, and indicated that employer involvement at all levels of planning and implementation is recommended for enhanced outcomes.

**Table 4—Employer Engagement Summary**

	CCI	DHA	WIN
<b>Number of participating project employers</b>	2	12	3
<b>Employer Engagement Activities Planning</b>			
Role in setting eligibility guidelines	✓	✓	✓
Support in curriculum and training goals development	✓	✓	✓
Employer generated funding	✓		✓
Employer assists outreach efforts		✓	✓
<b>Employer Engagement Activities Implementation</b>			
Prime contractor provides connection to subs		✓	✓
Referral and hiring system set for project	✓	✓	✓
Site tours and employer visits to classroom	✓	✓	✓
Hands-on structured field experience opportunities	✓		✓

Staff members at CCI, DHA, and WIN all indicated that the employer's active participation in community workforce efforts is critical to ensure participants develop realistic industry expectations in preparation for employment on that project or across the industry. Partnering employers cited that a support organization to develop targeted training and provide streamlined referrals was the primary benefit of these partnerships.

# OUTCOMES AND FINDINGS (Continued)

## FINDINGS

Key findings in each of the five program development categories—Outreach and Recruitment, Screening and Assessment, Training and Skills Development, Job Placement and Post-Placement Services are detailed below. Findings were identified from stakeholder interviews and partnering employer focus groups.

### OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT

**Conclusion 1:** Extensive outreach is required to ensure effective participation. All three partners reported the need to recruit at least twice the number of eventual participants in order to find sufficient applicants. Factors that influenced application and enrollment included limited industry interest, scope of outreach efforts, ability of program to demonstrate direct connections to employment and timing of training

*Recommendation: Programs must dedicate staff or secure resources to contract for temporary recruiting services in order to widely disseminate program opportunities*

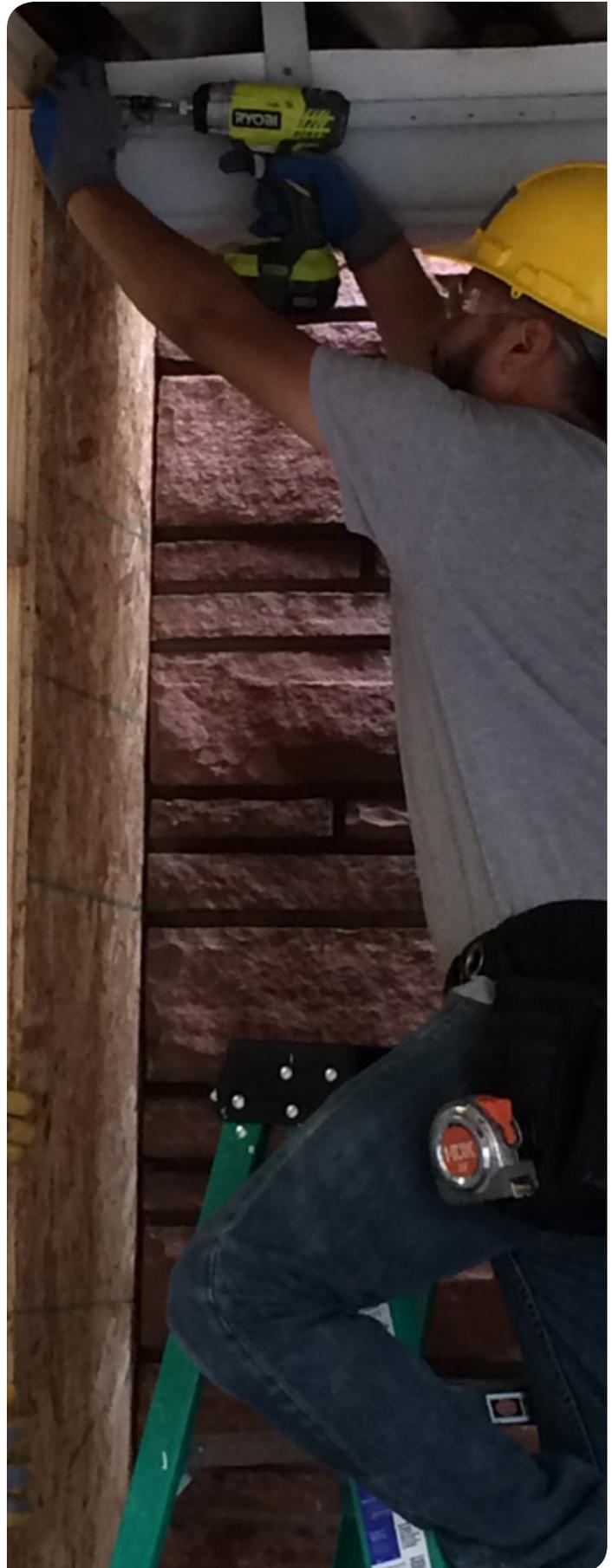
**Conclusion 2:** The active presence of the project owner/general contractor can support recruiting efforts through specific employment pathways. Both WIN and CCI found that when applicants perceived they were preparing for a specific job opportunity, as opposed to enrolling in a program, applications and program commitment increased significantly. DHA reported significantly higher applications when participants applied to services in relation to a posted job, as opposed to seeking out program resources independently.

*Recommendation: For community workforce development efforts, engage and involve contracting team early on to ensure sufficient recruitment and support general outreach. Methods include program publicity at site office, joint presence at bid meetings and neighborhood awareness presentations, and promotion of targeted positions available*

### SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT

**Conclusion 1:** Eligibility criteria did not impact application or participation levels, however, program developers in these three programs noticed an increase in commitment levels and post-placement retention when standards were set to employer/industry guidelines, compared to previous programming efforts with less rigid criteria. In focus groups, CCI, DHA and WIN representatives observed that clear expectations became a resource and not a barrier to participation. Graduates of all three organizations reported that when they knew they were building skills to exactly what employers needed, they were more motivated to persist and succeed.

*Recommendation: Set entrance criteria that aligns with local employer expectations. For example, WIN participants on this project needed to complete math assessments and earn a minimum qualifying score in order to enroll in the EGTC pre-apprenticeship training, which includes technical math coursework. This component prepared graduates for on-the-job math applications they were expected to perform. Ensure that there are community resources available to help participants meet the established criteria if there are gaps. In this instance, applicants who didn't meet the minimum score qualified for tutoring.*



# OUTCOMES AND FINDINGS (Continued)

## TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

**Conclusion 1:** Employer engagement holds the most value in the later stages of skills development programming. CCI, DHA, and WIN all cited this as the key factor to retention—interacting with employers in the classroom or on job sites made learning practical and connected to employment pathways.

*Recommendation: Take advantage of dedicated employer pool associated with project specific workforce development and the current need these construction employers have for an expanded pipeline of workers. A strong argument for partnership can be built on jointly preparing new groups of workers to fill vacancies in this high-wage high-growth industry, rather than asking employers to provide opportunities for lower-skilled low-income workers.*

**Conclusion 2:** In project-specific construction workforce development, the scheduling needs of the contractor may take precedent over skills development opportunities given the realities of time and cost constraints. Despite strong intentions, CCI's involvement in the Park Hill Village West project was limited due to schedule adjustments that resulted in a lack of alignment between positions available and the skills of graduates.

*Recommendation: Educate staff on industry realities facing contractors and be sensitive to scheduling and economic demands. Engage in joint planning early on in the project schedule and be clear and realistic on mutual expectations and the consequences of scheduling shifts.*

## JOB PLACEMENT

**Conclusion 1:** The current industry workforce shortage presents an unprecedented opportunity to partner with construction employers to provide jobs and skills development benefits on local economic development projects. All three programs saw utilization rates increase dramatically on project activities since the 4th Quarter of 2014.

*Recommendation: Market services to contractors as a hiring resource, not a social program. Partnership supports workforce needs of this project, as well as long-term industry needs.*

**Conclusion 2:** A target project alignment can benefit a program through general placement opportunities beyond the scope of the specific building or infrastructure program; placement success isn't necessarily associated with the targeted project. WIN for example, placed just one of the program graduates at the Denizen project. The skills the graduates developed as a result of project engagement, however, supported 13 of the 15 completers securing job placement. Moreover DHA reported that training graduates placed on Mariposa projects were more likely to experience short-term employment and less likely to be retained as the project ended. Employers in focus groups indicated they don't always view local targeted hire partnerships as a permanent hiring resource, therefore it may be unrealistic for planners to anticipate long-term employment for program graduates strictly connected to the place-based project.

*Recommendation: When developing workforce goals, refrain from defining placement success only in the context of project specific placement—securing career growth opportunities within the industry is the ultimate goal. Additionally, educate employer partners about the time and money cost savings embedded within the program's screening and training services.*



## POST-PLACEMENT SERVICES

**Conclusion 1:** Post-placement services support higher levels of long-term employment. Neither CCI nor DHA tracked retention at the time of the highlighted project partnerships and have since begun to track retention data. WIN provided services including on-going career coaching, access to training, informal industry networking, and personal supportive services such as transportation and personal protective equipment. In addition, placed participants accessed personal navigation services through WIN partner agency WorkLife Partnership. These combined resources support WIN's high-than average retention rates across all program participants. 85% of the project participants accessed some type of post-placement support.

"Knowing I could pick up the phone and call someone after a hard day made the difference for me," said one participant. "Working in construction is new and exciting but some days are tough. It really helps to hear that others have the same struggle and they aren't giving up either." Another graduate added, "Being able to keep coming back for training keeps me and my boss happy. I can show him I'm still building my skills." Post-placement supports are particularly critical for new workers in construction and were highly valued by employer partners.

*Recommendation: Build post-placement services into service delivery model, either through direct or aligned partner services. Use evaluation metrics that define success as not only getting a job, but also keeping it and building a career.*

# IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND FUNDING OF TARGETED HIRE PROJECTS



The focus groups and outcomes data research conducted for this report revealed multiple common practices that fostered success and sustainability. The first set of implications is designed to serve as general recommendations for program developers.

## **DO RESEARCH TO SELECT APPROPRIATE PROJECTS**

Likely targets include city-funded building or infrastructure repair projects, transit or infrastructure expansion efforts, or housing authority construction. Building or infrastructure efforts receiving local, state or federal funding are a natural alignment to also make a case for a public benefit in terms of jobs or training. Targeted hire initiatives should not be limited to public projects only, however; private projects can also provide alignment, particularly with companies committed to a corporate social mission.

## **ALIGN STAKEHOLDERS TO COMMUNICATE AND SET REALISTIC GOALS**

Strong leadership and support from multiple stakeholders is needed to support the implementation and adoption of targeted hire initiatives [3]. Potential partners include community organizations, training programs, project owners, contractors, and local government representatives. Convening stakeholders, while time consuming, builds trust and creates a forum to address potential concerns. The three partners profiled in this report allocated a minimum of five months in planning with stakeholders. Allow ample time to support the research of local workforce demographics and the setting of collaborative education and or employment goals in conjunction with project scheduling needs, wage structures, and workforce availability.

## **COOPERATE WITH PARTNERS TO EXTEND SERVICES**

Effective place-based community workforce programs require more than effective training solutions. They also require expertise in community outreach, employer engagement, labor market exchange, retention navigation, and program compliance. Most small-scale community organizations lack this broad skill set. Consider alignment with other organizations to provide a full scope of services from outreach, to skills development and employment, to post-placement. WIN, for example, does very little direct training and instead focuses its resources on maintaining efficient labor market exchange services, post-placement career coaching, and raising funds for training partner activities.

The next set of implications are designed to serve potential funders of community workforce construction career training efforts. Funding to support targeted hiring initiatives is a critical component of success. Community organizations and training providers need sufficient resources for outreach, wrap around supportive services, and personnel to oversee employer engagement and compliance. Leveraged funding resources can come through employer investments, aligned state or federal funding, but employer investments and community foundations play a more flexible role. All three of the partners featured in this report utilize varied funding streams, including foundation support, to ensure program sustainability and robust participant services. While many funders typically support direct training services, targeted resource development can make training programs more successful. Private donors and foundations can consider supporting targeted hire workforce development efforts in multiple ways

## **SUPPORT EXPANSIVE OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT EFFORTS**

Grassroots organizing and neighborhood-focused outreach is key to not only educating prospective applicants about training opportunities, but also empowering community members to make a case for more connected economic development and community workforce development partnerships. Targeted hire efforts struggle to find adequate participation without sufficient outreach. Multiple participants interviewed through this report mentioned the “knock on their door” or the “announcement at church” as the final motivational nudge to pursue this training opportunity.

## **CONSIDER FUNDING TO CHANGE PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF CONSTRUCTION CAREER OPPORTUNITIES**

Diminishing traditional vocational programs in local high-schools, limited outreach to women and people of color, and educational policy emphasizing college, has tainted the public perception of the trades. Public education campaigns are needed to highlight that construction opportunities provide solid wages and career growth for all. A sub-section of this effort should include the promotion of industry success stories, particularly from underrepresented populations. Certain aspects of the construction industry are still primarily white and male and it can be difficult for people of color or women, for example to find role models to draw them into the industry, or advance along established career pathways.

# IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND FUNDING OF TARGETED HIRE PROJECTS (continued)



## **STRUCTURE WORKFORCE-RELATED FUNDING ACROSS LONGER CYCLES TO SUPPORT LONG-TERM TRACKING AND RETENTION**

One year award cycles typically lead to designing outcomes related to expending funds (and therefore merely training), rather than success based on placement and retention over longer periods of time. Flexible pools of funding such as employer contributions allow WIN to support long-term advancement of participants, which leads to stronger program outcomes, and a broader pool of successful alumni to serve as mentors for newer participants. Both of these factors support long-term program sustainability.

## **FUND SUPPORTIVE SERVICES TO ADDRESS POTENTIAL EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS**

Supportive services to support participants in resolving any barriers to successful employment are just as critical as skills development resources. Flexible funding allows programs to offer services related to transportation, child care, financial literacy, expunging criminal records, or reinstating motor vehicle licenses. All three programs profiled indicated that supportive resources were critical to employment success and provided resources such as bus passes, child care vouchers, housing assistance referrals, and Personnel Protective Equipment (PPE). CCI provides graduates with a starter tool kit, a requirement of many local employers. High-priority needs they have not been able to address include funding to reinstate licenses by paying off fines or back-dated tickets, or initiation fees to registered apprenticeship programs.

## **PROVIDE INCENTIVES TO COMPLETE TRAINING ACTIVITIES**

For unemployed or underemployed individuals, it can be difficult to commit to extended training that supports skills development and the pursuit of higher-wage positions. Private funders can support stipends or training incentives that provide payment for participation in training. CCI offers graduates an incentive, tied to attendance and participation, of \$300 once the participant complete the month-long construction skills bootcamp. While modest, the reimbursement does provide some level of income to participants and enhances performance motivation.

Construction work will play a significant role in metro Denver's economy as the region continues to grow and expand. This demand, accompanied by a skilled worker shortage presents an opportunity for local service providers to align workforce training efforts to private and public projects for the benefit of both contractors and residents. The recommendations detailed in this report will benefit both program developers and prospective funders as they seek to leverage economic development opportunities to build construction career pathways for local residents.

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