

Newark/Essex Construction Careers Consortium Pre-Apprenticeship Training Program

Location: Newark, New Jersey

Host Organization: New Jersey Institute for Social Justice

Partner Organizations: New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Newark One Stop/WIB, Essex County Building Trades Council, Newark Public School System, La Casa de Pedro, Essex County Vocational Technical School

Target Population: Low-income Minorities and Women in Newark, N.J.

Program Innovations

- Curriculum heavily focused on academic skills related to math, reading, and critical thinking
- The State of New Jersey's role in structuring funding for pre-apprenticeship programs to require organized labor as a partner

Program History

In 2000, the New Jersey Supreme Court mandated that the State of New Jersey fully fund the reconstruction of the State's poorest school districts, the Abbott Districts. The New Jersey Legislature passed a law fully funding the project with \$8.6 billion that included an additional mandate to set aside one-half of one percent of the reconstruction funding to be used for training of women and minorities for careers in construction. The New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development oversees the development, funding and implementation of pre-apprenticeship programs started to meet this goal. In 2001, the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice (NJISJ) helped form a consortium to create the Newark/Essex Construction Careers Consortium Pre-Apprenticeship Training program (N/ECCC).

NJISJ, whose mission includes increasing economic opportunities for minority and low-income residents of Newark, oversees and manages the operations of the program. Though the N/ECCC program initially focused on recruiting and screening youth as potential apprenticeship candidates, the program now aims to

improve job opportunities and wages for minorities, women, and low income adults of Newark by training them for a career in construction. The Consortium includes 27 organizations, which include unions, contractors, state and local government agencies, community-based organizations, and local schools.

Program Summary

Participants are recruited through coordinated outreach with NJISJ and its partnering community-based organizations, One Stop Center, and local schools. Participants must apply to the program and must be 18 years old, have a GED or high school diploma, have a driver's license, and must be a resident of Newark or Essex County. Before training begins, students take the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), are interviewed by NJISJ and partnering organizations to determine their motivation and interest in joining an apprenticeship program, and take a drug screen, all of which is purposively designed.

“We have structured our program to emulate that of the Building Trades. In order for them to get into our program they have to pass a test, go through a panel interview, and have to have a drug screen. By going through that process, when they then engage the Trades’ process, they’re already familiar with it.”

-- Al Williams, Director of Workforce Development and Training at NJISJ

The training program is offered three times a year and enrolls on average 90 to 120 students annually. The majority of trainees are African-American males, though significant numbers of females and Latinos also participate in the training.

The N/ECCC program consists of 10 weeks of training for a total of 144 hours, though the summer session is accelerated and lasts only six weeks. Classes run in the evening or on weekends so trainees can work outside of the training. The **curriculum** focuses on building skills in math, reading, and critical thinking within a class contextualized around the construction industry. A central goal of the class is preparing trainees to pass the tests required for entering one of the union apprenticeship programs.

“We are the only game in town that is heavily focused on academic components. That’s the strongest part of our program.”

-- Al Williams, Director of Workforce Development and Training at NJISJ

The Essex County Vocational School System provides training space and state-certified instructors to the program. Two math teachers, a reading specialist, a logic and critical thinking instructor, and two shop teachers provide the instruction. The shop teachers include a current carpenter and a plumber. Hands-on training includes participating in framing, welding, and soldering, but is minimal due to the emphasis on academic skills. For all the classes, a partnering community-based organization provides the life skills training and job readiness training components. Topics such as financial literacy and interview skills are covered in these components.

To help students choose a trade to pursue, apprenticeship directors and coordinators visit the classrooms and present about their respective trades, and students also make field trips to apprenticeship sites to tour the facilities and receive additional presentations. Most trainees identify a trade to pursue before graduation and apply to that trade union's apprenticeship program during training.

“We try to give the trainees as much information and exposure as possible to as many of the trades as possible during the training.”

-- Al Williams, Director of Workforce Development and Training at NJISJ

Trainees may access some **support services** through local community based organizations or through NJISJ. Each trainee is provided \$50 - \$100 per week to help cover the costs of transportation and other related expenses.

After graduation, graduates continue or begin the process of being **placed in a union apprenticeship program**. Graduates may receive additional tutoring or counseling during this time to prepare them for a test or interview. As a signatory partner on the N/ECCC project, the Building and Construction Trades Council actively assists graduates with entry into one of the 17 union apprenticeships, and are even incentivized to do so, as the State provides a union that accepts a graduate with \$5,000 over the first two years of the apprentice's training. NJISJ staff, who have good relationships with the union contractors, also advocate strongly on behalf of the graduates to enter an apprenticeship. With the recession, few apprenticeship opportunities exist as many union members may themselves not be working. Some graduates support themselves while they wait by working temporarily for a non-union contractor, which also provides the graduate with some real-world experience. Even after trainees complete the N/ECCC program and begin work, NJISJ staff and partnering organizations continue to support them and help them succeed in their new careers.

Program Funding

The N/ECCC program is funded through the Abbott grants provided by the New Jersey State Department of Labor as detailed above under “Program History.” The annual budget is between \$500,000 and \$600,000. Some additional funding comes from the Port Authority of New York/New Jersey and the Prudential Foundation. Also, the program recently received an U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Brownfields Remediation grant, which will provide program participants’ with training and certification in asbestos abatement and lead removal.

Industry Engagement

NJISJ’s involvement and relationship with the Essex Building and Construction Trades Council began in 2002 and continues to grow. One grant that funds the N/ECCC program, provided by the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, requires each grantee to partner with a local organization representing organized labor, and its representative’s signature is also required on the grant application.

The partnership between NJISJ and the Essex Building and Construction Trades Council began when NJISJ approached the Council to be a partner on the N/ECCC program. Throughout the years, a lot of negotiation and conversation helped solidify the partnership. The open lines of communication allowed the program to target its curriculum to what the Essex Council wanted, which was apprenticeship candidates with strong math skills. In addition, NJISJ learned and continues to gain knowledge about the apprenticeship application and training process and hiring cycles, and receives feedback on the graduates that are placed into union apprenticeships.

“Our relationship with the unions is much stronger now than it was in the beginning because over time we’ve learned what works, what doesn’t work, and what they’re looking for....It’s a win-win situation for everyone. Our people get placed in apprenticeships and they receive qualified and screened candidates.”

-- Al Williams, Director of Workforce Development and Training at NJISJ