

# Building Futures

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**Location:** Providence, Rhode Island

**Host Organization:** Building Futures

**Partner Organizations:** Youthbuild Providence, BuildRI, The Providence Plan, Associated General Contractors of America (RI Chapter), Rhode Island Building and Construction Trades Council

**Target Population:** Low-Income Adults in Rhode Island

## Program Innovations

- Advocacy and enforcement of apprenticeship utilization and first source hiring requirements in Rhode Island
- Two-tiered training program crafted to meet participants' varying needs with the second tier designed to provide additional training to participants who need more skills development before entering employment

## Program History

Building Futures began in the spring of 2007 with the mission to help the commercial construction industry meet its current and future needs for skilled labor, while also creating career opportunities in quality registered apprenticeship programs for low-income urban residents in Rhode Island. The organization, started through a collaboration among The Providence Plan, YouthBuild Providence, and BuildRI, and began with support and funding from the United Way's Skill-Up Initiative and the Governor's Workforce Board, Industry Partnership Program.

## Program Summary

Before enrolling in Building Futures' pre-apprenticeship program, participants must attend an orientation session. Applicants are subsequently screened for interest and motivation in entering an apprenticeship and must meet several requirements. Participants in Building Futures must be low-income residents in Rhode Island between the ages of 18 and 40, and must successfully complete a drug screening. Applicants take a math test prior to beginning their training to help guide their choice of a trade since different trades require different levels of math proficiency. Once enrolled, trainees attend workshops that provide an

overview of careers in the construction industry and cover topics such as wages, benefits, and working conditions.

The pre-apprenticeship training includes two distinct stages or tiers. During the first stage, trainees attend 32 hours of hands-on assessment over a period of four days. Candidates are evaluated on “soft”, or employability, skills such as responsibility, initiative, and working with others, as well as on factors that are important for construction, such as physical aptitude. After this 32-hour hands-on evaluation, Building Futures’ staff reviews each trainee’s performance and determines if the trainee passed or failed the class. Participants who pass continue to the next stage.

The second stage consists of a 200-hour hands-on basic skills training that simulates a construction work site where trainees work industry hours, engage in job specific tasks, and are expected to perform with the same work ethic and professionalism required on an actual job site. Through this comprehensive training, participants learn how to use and identify tools, read blueprints, exercise workplace safety, and develop a wide range of valuable skills and knowledge related to the construction industry. Embedded in the 200 hours are workshops on financial literacy, construction-relevant math, labor history and apprenticeship survival, as well as OSHA 10 certification.

Participants who successfully complete the 200 hours of basic construction training are counseled on potential construction trades that fit their interests and aptitudes and are placed on a waiting list for openings in their preferred trade apprenticeship program.

**“We’re not trying to do technical skills training....We really focus on employability and soft skills, but we do it in a hands-on manner.”**

*--Andrew Cortes,  
Director of Building Futures*

During training, participants receive **support services**, including case management, career counseling and job interview coaching. Many of the support services, such as legal assistance, health services, housing, child care, and English language instruction, are provided by partnering

community-based organizations. Building Futures has memoranda of agreement with them to provide these services. However, many services are kept in house with Building Futures. Trainees’ trade choice is guided through career counseling provided by Building Futures. Trainees also receive a small stipend while in the 200-hour program to help pay for transportation or other living expenses. Trainees without a high school diploma or GED earn a GED through

classes offered at Building Futures, which are contextualized around the construction industry, with a rolling admission every 10 weeks.

Building Futures has a direct entry agreement with 17 unions in the Rhode Island Building and Construction Trades Council. Though Building Futures' graduates must meet the entry level criteria for the trade they wish to enter, the direct entry arrangement means they do not have to wait until the union opens up the enrollment process. As part of Building Futures' mission, the focus of graduates' **job placement** is on quality apprenticeships. Quality apprenticeships meet the Class A definition of continuous operation and of producing graduates three of the last five years.

As part of its work to achieve its mission, Building Futures is heavily engaged in the **policy** arena. To increase the number of available apprenticeships in the community, Building Futures works with regular users of construction services, such as hospitals, government, and universities to adopt an Apprentice Utilization Program agreement, or AUP, in which a certain percentage of the total construction labor hours on any project come from apprentices. AUP agreements can be implemented through a variety of means, such as bidding specifications, project labor agreements or memoranda of understanding. At the same time, Building Futures works with local and state government, these same partners mentioned above and others to help increase entry-level apprenticeship opportunities. For example, with the City of Providence, Building Futures helps achieve local hiring through contracted services in relation to the First Source Hiring ordinance, which creates employment opportunities for local residents when public funding is involved. In addition, state legislation was supported and passed in 2008 that mandates contractor participation in registered apprenticeship programs when bidding on state projects over \$1 million dollars in value. Building Futures also engages in other policy areas, such as drivers' license remediation, to help their trainees overcome obstacles preventing their entry into an apprenticeship.

**“Given the economy and given the amount of projects that are in the ground, we really do focus on our programmatic services within the context of the broader initiative to catalyze apprenticeship.....The apprentice utilization program is the key protocol we promote in the industry.”**

*--Andrew Cortes, Director of Building Futures*

### **Program Funding**

Building Futures draws on a variety of sources to fund the pre-apprenticeship program and the organization's policy efforts. The United Way's Skill-Up Initiative and the Governor's Workforce Board, Industry Partnership Program helped start the organization and continue to support the program in 2010. The Governor's Workforce Board, Industry Partnership Program funding helps support Building Futures' efforts in building collaboration with the local construction sector. An Industry Skill Development Initiative of the state workforce development system supports the 200-hour basic construction skills training.

State and local government funding from Rhode Island and the City of Providence finance many aspects of the organization. For instance, the Rhode Island Department of Education funds the GED class and the City of Providence funds Building Futures' efforts to monitor first source hiring requirements.

Foundations also play a substantial role in various Building Futures' activities. The Rhode Island Foundation helps support Building Futures' work towards changing public policies affecting low-income communities' access to construction opportunities and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Nellie Mae Education Foundations, and United Way help support the pre-apprenticeship program and the organization's advocacy efforts.

### **Industry Engagement**

Building Futures engages the construction industry at multiple points throughout the pre-apprenticeship program and through the organization's policy work. As a result, Building Futures has close relationships with a range of industry partners including both contractors and unions. Specifically, Building Futures works closely with the Rhode Island Building and Construction Trades Council and their signatory contractor base, as well as with the Associated General Contractors of America. These partnerships help Building Futures' graduates gain access to quality apprenticeships through direct entry arrangements. Moreover, through collaboration such as this, Building Futures has built a strong coalition of nonprofit and industry partners to help support some of its policy initiatives.