

Gov. Pritzker Launches Illinois Works Training Program, With \$10 Million To Expand Pre-Apprenticeships Statewide

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SPRINGFIELD – Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) today announced the launch of the new Illinois Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program, leveraging a \$10 million commitment from the State to provide additional training programs that will expand the talent pipeline while boosting diversity within the construction industry and building trades.

A Notice of Funding Opportunity ([NOFO](#)) released by the DCEO Illinois Works Office aims to expand access to training programs that will prepare residents for well-paying jobs in the trades – with plans to focus on reducing barriers to entry and increasing representation of women and people of color in these fields.

The Illinois Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program is a key component of the Illinois Works Jobs Program Act – a result of landmark legislation put forward by Governor Pritzker to prepare residents for jobs created by the historic \$45 billion capital expansion plan. DCEO is now accepting applications for grant proposals– to view the NOFO, please visit [DCEO's website](#).

“The Illinois Works program is designed to turn the tide on representation in Illinois’ construction trades, which for too long left women and people of color out of key jobs in the industry,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “It’s a down payment on our future and will help increase opportunities for thousands more residents – regardless of where they live – to join us as we revitalize our infrastructure and Rebuild a new Illinois.”

Through the Pre-Apprenticeship Program, DCEO and the Office of Illinois Works aim to create a network of providers across the state to recruit, prescreen, and provide pre-apprenticeship skills training. More importantly, providers will structure pathways and manage the program graduates’ transition from the pre-apprenticeship program to a full apprenticeship program in construction and building trades. DCEO estimates that pre-apprenticeship training programs supported by these grant funds will serve as many as 1,000 participants during the first program year.

“Our new pre-apprenticeship training program is designed to help more Illinois residents, especially those from underrepresented populations, benefit from jobs created by our historic Rebuild Illinois capital plan – building a strong talent pipeline and career paths for those who need them most,” said Sylvia Garcia, Acting Director of DCEO. “Working alongside training organizations, our partners in labor and members of the legislature – the new Office of Illinois Works is aiming to not only boost capacity, but diversify the construction and building trades here in Illinois. We encourage qualified partners to apply for the NOFO as we seek to expand career training in high demand trades jobs in Illinois.”

“For job seekers, pre-apprenticeship programs can provide an on-ramp to receive training in high-growth sectors, leading to higher wages and increased benefits for them and their families,” said Angela Morrison, Policy Engagement Manager at the Chicago Jobs Council. “We applaud the State’s investment into pre-apprenticeship training, and leveraging community-based organizations and training providers will ensure that

workers from historically underserved communities that have been underrepresented in the construction and building trades – including BIPOC and women – have increased access to good jobs that provide family-sustaining wages.”

Participants of the program will attend tuition-free and receive a stipend and other supportive services to help overcome systemic barriers to entering the construction industry. Upon completion of the program, pre-apprentices will receive industry aligned certifications which will prepare and qualify them to continue to a full-time apprenticeship program in one of the trades.

Eligible applicants include non-profit, community-based organizations, such as colleges, industry associations, chambers of commerce, local workforce areas, community colleges, technical schools, and school districts. Grants awards will range from \$200,000-\$550,000 for a one-year agreement.

“We know that when Illinoisans of all backgrounds see what a career in the construction and building trades can mean for a better way of life for themselves and their families, they are ready to go to work but sometimes just need a little help getting into the pipeline,” said Tim Drea, Illinois AFL-CIO President and CEO. “We are proud to work with Gov. Pritzker’s Administration on this new training program that will help women and minorities find well-paying, fulfilling careers in the trades, and we will continue to work to rebuild and strengthen the great state of Illinois together.”

Signed into law in 2019, the Illinois Works Jobs Program Act is designed to promote diversity, inclusion and use of apprentices in state-funded capital projects. The Act created three major programs: the Illinois Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program; the Illinois Works Apprenticeship Initiative, and the Illinois Works Bid Credit Program. Together these three programs aim to create a talent pipeline of skilled and diverse candidates to fill new job opportunities created by the Act.

The Office of Illinois Works operates in collaboration with workforce partners, the building trades and construction industry, as well as the Illinois Works Review Panel, which contributed to the development of this NOFO.

“The Illinois Works Pre-Apprenticeship program has been desperately needed in the State of Illinois for decades,” said Rep. Will Davis. “For too long, Black men and women have faced incredible barriers to accessing the high-wage, middle class careers available in the building trades. In creating Illinois Works, it was and it is my hope that increased opportunities for training, along with established goals for apprenticeships on our capital projects, will turn around this historic inequity.”

The launch of Illinois Works Pre-apprenticeship Program dollars today builds on several steps taken by the Pritzker administration to increase access to apprenticeship opportunities throughout Illinois – a priority outlined in the state’s 5-year economic plan. Key investments so far include the passage of bipartisan legislation to create the Illinois apprenticeship tax credit, funding additional workforce training partners and sites statewide, and creation of a new apprenticeship navigators model focused on increasing equity in apprenticeship positions funded in Illinois across all industries.

With pre-apprenticeship training programs lasting three to four months on average, the State of Illinois aims to award funds and launch training programs that will put more residents on the job site in time for the spring 2022 construction season. The deadline for the Illinois Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program is October 4, 2021. Informational webinars will be held on August 12, August 19, August 26 and September 9 to help prepare organizations applying for training dollars. For more information on the Illinois Works program, please visit <https://www.illinoisworknet.com/ilworkspreapprenticeshipnofo2021>.