

Unions on the Cutting Edge: A Workforce Trained for the 21st Century



Unions have a long history of leadership on designing and promoting innovative and effective job training and apprenticeship programs that benefit workers, businesses, and local communities. Now more than ever this country needs workers to have a voice at the table to ensure that the challenges of a new economy are met with fair and effective policies.

Examples of this innovation can be seen across the nation:

Training and Cultivating Healthcare Professionals in Philadelphia

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) District 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund has been operating for 35 years in Philadelphia to help workers advance and grow in their jobs. Negotiated between the local union and hospitals, nursing homes, and other health care facilities, the fund is a trust to which employers contribute 1.5 percent of gross payroll. **The fund serves over 10,000 workers annually through training programs, counseling, placement, certification testing, and workshops for union members as well as local community residents.** As local hospitals have cut their programs due to high costs, the 1199C program is now the only Licensed Practical Nurse program in the Philadelphia area. Workers have a strong voice in the program, and their input has been key to the successful design that includes remedial work, tuition support, using instructors who themselves advanced from entry level positions, and creating a sense of community and support. ¹

New York City Construction Apprenticeship Program Creates Opportunities

Construction Skills 2000: The Edward J. Malloy Initiative for Construction Skills places New York City high school graduates, veterans, women, and economically disadvantaged workers into apprenticeship programs of unions affiliated with the Building and Construction Trades Council. The program is jointly-sponsored by the Building and Construction Trades Council of Greater New York and the Building Trades Employers Association. **As of 2007, it has placed over 700 adults into apprenticeship programs.** Of these placements, 87 percent went to individuals from the African-American, Hispanic, and Asian communities, and a five-year follow-up survey showed that 81 percent remain actively employed in the industry. ²

Developing Childcare Careers in Pennsylvania

Brightside Academy is one of the largest providers of early childcare education services for low-income families in Pennsylvania. **During the first year of reaching a union contract with its employees that provided significant pay raises and provisions for worker training, turnover at Brightside decreased 20 percent.** Brightside then partnered with the union to establish a program for its employees to earn Child Development Association credentials to further their careers in the childcare industry. ³

Creating Las Vegas Hospitality Careers through Free Skills Training

In collaboration with 24 Las Vegas hotels, the Culinary Workers and Bartenders Union operates the Culinary Union Training Center (CUTC) to provide free training for union members and those seeking work in the hotels. The CUTC trains students for 12 different job classifications. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the program “provides these potential workers with the quality training they need to improve their skills as well as the tools to become successful and climb the career ladder... [and] **offers hotels and restaurants a large, readily available, and qualified pool of potential workers that is easily accessible.**” ⁴

The Green Jobs Revolution

Unions, with longstanding training programs in place, are poised to play a central role in readying the U.S. workforce for jobs supporting a green economy, such as manufacturing wind turbines, installing solar panels, and processing biofuels,

When the Ella Baker Center of Oakland, CA, sought to train disadvantaged youth to install solar panels and weatherize buildings, it partnered with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and together they secured city funding for a training program involving local unions, community groups and employers.⁵

"[Union members] are better trained, they know what they're doing when they get out there. We don't mind paying the extra benefit packages at all because of the quality of labor you get, the quality of people you get."

Dean Floyd

Owner of Concord Electric Co., in Arkansas⁷

Gamesa USA, a leader in wind energy production, decided to build its plants in specific areas of Pennsylvania to benefit from an available pool of skilled union steelworkers.

The company has invested \$175 million in the state and now employs roughly 1,200 workers. Its two Pennsylvania facilities produce enough wind turbines to power up to 270,000 households across the United States each year.⁶

¹ Testimony of Dr. Joan Fitzgerald, Ph.D., Director, Law, Policy and Society Program, Northeastern University to the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies, March 25, 2009. Available at http://appropriations.house.gov/Witness_testimony/LHHS/Joan_Fitzgerald_03_25_09.pdf.

² Kotler, F. B. (2009). *Project labor agreements in New York State: In the public interest* [Electronic version]. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, School of Industrial and Labor Relations Extension Division, Construction Industry Program. Pg. 28-29. Available at <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/reports/22/>.

³ American Rights at Work Education Fund. "The 2005 Labor Day List: Partnerships That Work," August 2005.

⁴ U.S. Department of Labor. "National Skills Summit, Innovative Initiatives: Retail," April 11, 2000. Available at http://www.dol.gov/_sec/skills_summit/p2s6a.htm.

⁵ Ella Baker Center. "Oakland Green Jobs Corp," June 2008. Available at www.ellabakercenter.org/downloads/rtf/oakland_green_jobs_corps_summary.pdf.

⁶ American Rights at Work Education Fund. "The 2008 Labor Day List: Partnerships That Work," August 2008.

⁷ Quoted in Steve Painter, "In state, 3 talk up union bill," *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, April 4, 2009. Available at <http://www.nwanews.com/adg/Business/256519/>.