



Green job apprenticeships help low-income workers

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By Helen Kaiao Chang

Green job training programs can help strengthen the construction industry, stabilize the economy and uplift low-income workers, according to a report released Wednesday.

The “Construction Apprenticeship Programs ” report by the Center on Policy Initiatives, a San Diego research institute for working class issues, calls for more training programs for green workers.

“Many studies show that there aren’t necessarily standards when you talk about the green economy because it is so new,” said Corinne Wilson, a research analyst at CPI who wrote the report. “We have an opportunity as we move into the green economy that these are good middle-class jobs.”

Key findings

Key findings of the study include:

- Construction work can pave a path from low-income to middle-class careers for workers.
- Apprenticeship programs benefit workers by providing work stability.
- Apprenticeship programs benefit the building industry by reducing turnover, increasing productivity and creating a well-trained workforce.
- Joint labor-management approaches work best for apprenticeship programs.
- Government policies and funding are needed to support such programs.
- Apprenticeship programs are the best way to train workers for green jobs.

It is projected that by 2030, green-related jobs will make up about 25 percent of all jobs, according to the American Solar Energy Society.

California’s construction industry has been hard hit by the recession, losing nearly 20 percent of its jobs in the last two years. The center wanted to find ways to address the shift.

“It’s about ‘What do we need to do to help the California economy recover, but also how do we make it recover in a long-term stable way?’” said Wilson.

San Diego apprenticeship programs

The report studied data from existing apprenticeship programs, which number about 200 in California. Wilson did not know exactly how many were in San Diego, but highlighted three programs run by local associations.

- One apprenticeship program run by the San Diego chapter of the International Brotherhood

for Electrical Workers teaches apprentices how to install solar panels.

- Another apprenticeship program by the local United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry trains members in areas such as solar hot water systems, wastewater treatment and water audits.
- Another program administered by the Metropolitan Area Advisory Committee, a social services provider, offers pre-apprentice training to weatherize low-income homes.

In addition, the San Diego Unified School District voted that many of the jobs generated by the Proposition S Fund will go to workers from local apprenticeship programs.

Training costs

Apprenticeship programs cost anywhere from \$40,000 to \$200,000 per worker over the course of two to five years. Companies and union dues contribute to a trust fund, which pays for their training and wages.

In San Diego, salaries for untrained workers starts at \$28,000 a year, but apprenticeship program graduates make closer to \$60,000, the study found.

“To invest in training may be an upfront cost, but it pays back several times over in the long run,” said Wilson.

“We’re creating middle-class careers,” she said. “When (workers) pay their bills and can afford to shop, the local economy is stronger. It’s not just about investing in our businesses, but in the economy and our recovery.”

The center will send the report to government officials, city council members, board of education directors and other public policy experts.