Building Pathways to Infrastructure Jobs

Quarterly Peer Learning Call

May 19, 2026 | 2:00-3:00pm ET

Overview

This Building Pathways to Infrastructure Jobs peer learning session explored strategies for engaging labor unions, industry associations, and employer partners to strengthen sector strategies and improve workforce outcomes. The goals of the session were to:

1. Explore effective approaches to engaging labor unions and elevating worker voice in workforce initiatives.
2. Share examples of successful partnerships that improve training quality and career pathways.
3. Facilitate peer exchange on addressing real-world challenges and building sustainable partnerships with labor and industry stakeholders.

The session featured a subject matter expert presentation featuring two guest speakers, an open discussion where grantees raised questions and challenges, and a peer exchange focused on lessons learned and strategies for strengthening partnerships. The call concluded with key takeaways and actionable next steps.

Guest Speaker Highlights

Guest speakers shared perspectives on engaging labor unions and industry partners to strengthen workforce programs.

- **Labor Partnerships:** Stu Bass (AFL-CIO) highlighted examples from the Working for America Institute and North America's Building Trades Unions (NABTU), emphasizing the importance of labor partners' involvement in program design, training, apprenticeships, and career advancement.
- **Industry-Aligned Training:** Leslee Haisma (Urban Institute) shared an example of collaboration with the Communications Workers of America (CWA) to train IT workers for the renewable energy sector, demonstrating how labor partnerships can connect training to quality jobs.

Themes

Nonprofits & Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)

The discussion focused on strengthening union relationships, improving employer engagement, and creating pathways into apprenticeships.

- **Union Engagement:** Grantees discussed challenges gaining union access and buy-in, highlighting the value of trusted referrals, identifying union champions, and involving labor partners early in program design.
- **Pre-Apprenticeship Pathways:** A grantee shared an example of a successful partnership with IBEW, demonstrating how union-supported preparation programs can help participants more easily transition into registered apprenticeships.
- **Scaling Successful Partnerships:** A grantee shared its plans to expand its Clean Tech training to 15 sites, highlighting opportunities to replicate existing union engagement approaches to new regions.

Colleges/Universities

- **Employer Engagement:** Grantees emphasized starting conversations with employers by understanding their workforce needs and hiring challenges, rather than simply promoting existing training programs.
- **Industry Alignment:** One grantee shared challenges with student placement amid limited hiring in the renewable energy sector. Participants discussed exploring related industries, including manufacturing and maintenance, to expand employment opportunities and help graduates apply their skills across sectors.
- **Employer-Connected Training:** A grantee highlighted a partnership with an automotive manufacturer that combines classroom instruction with on-the-job training. The discussion underscored the value of hands-on learning and direct employer engagement, while also noting challenges related to securing funding and tracking student outcomes after program completion.
- **Student Supports and Connections:** Grantees discussed how transportation and housing challenges can affect students' ability to complete training and secure employment, and how essential wrap around supports are to student success.

Workforce Development Boards & Government Agencies

The discussion focused on building regional partnerships, understanding employer needs, and strengthening pathways to career advancement.

- **Union Partnerships:** Participants discussed navigating union structures and identifying the appropriate labor partners, including asking employers which unions hold relevant collective bargaining agreements.
- **Regional Collaboration:** Multi-employer partnerships can help organizations address shared workforce needs by establishing common goals, clear roles, and shared ownership.

- **Employer Needs:** Participants highlighted the value of regional needs assessments and skills-gap analyses to guide training strategies and address employer workforce challenges.
- **Career Pathways and Retention:** Grantees discussed employer concerns about training workers who may leave, emphasizing that clear career pathways can also help improve employee retention.