

Community Workforce Agreements

Building a Better Construction Industry for Communities, Workers, and the Public Interest

For over a decade, community-labor partnerships have been forming in urban areas with the joint goals of reframing the industries that have tended to provide low-quality jobs for urban residents and building greater equity in urban economies by helping low-income residents get better jobs. In recent years, these partnerships have developed a fruitful set of collaborations around the construction industry, using public policy to strengthen industry job quality standards while targeting employment and training opportunities to low-income workers.

After years of often-contentious experience, a consensus is emerging that the strongest approach to achieving quality jobs and new opportunities is a **community workforce agreement**, which consists of a signed project labor agreement that combines job quality standards with targeted hiring requirements. Working together, community-labor partnerships have engaged elected officials, community residents, and even contractors in this method of building a high-road construction industry that can deliver for everyone.

Background on PLAs and Targeted Hiring

Project labor agreements (PLAs) (sometimes called project stabilization agreements, or PSAs) provide a uniquely effective mechanism for creating a bridge to construction careers for low-income urban residents. PLAs have historically functioned to establish the parameters of working conditions and labor relations between the general contractor, the developer and building trades unions on major construction projects. These agreements set out the terms under which building trades unions agree not to go on strike or picket the job. Typically public entities have seen project labor agreements as a value-added for projects where the public investment must be safeguarded. Project labor agreements help prevent delays, maintain workplace safety, and ensure high-quality construction products, all of which help protect taxpayers' investments when public money funds some or all of the project.

In recent years, community-labor partnerships have begun to work to incorporate targeted hiring programs into project labor agreements. PLAs provide a useful vehicle for targeted hiring programs, for several reasons:

- **Project labor agreements typically pertain to big construction projects or groups of construction projects**, providing new workers with access to aggregated work that enables them to get sufficient work hours to sustain themselves as apprentices and work toward journey-level status. Targeted hiring programs that pertain to smaller projects may provide some workers with some opportunity to get a job, but in order to move through apprenticeship and attain journey-level status, workers need ongoing work. Project labor agreements aggregate the work and make it possible for new workers to get their hours in at one site that will undergo multi-year construction, or at several sites that are all party to the PLA.
- **Project labor agreements include job quality standards.** As a result, new workers who get into construction jobs through PLAs are more likely to earn good wages and benefits and to get access to a career pathway with long-term stability and advancement opportunities.
- **Project labor agreements are signed by all the entities** whose buy-in and participation is necessary to make targeted hiring work: the developer, the general contractor, the building trades council and its affiliates. Other vehicles for targeted hiring requirements typically do not get approved by all of these entities. This is particularly important because making targeted hiring programs work often requires some or all of these entities to deviate from their standard operating procedures.
- **Project labor agreements are part of the construction industry** standard operating procedure. On large public projects, they are seen as the overarching document that sets out how hiring is going to work.

Following are short descriptions of the substance and operations of two exemplary PLAs that include strong targeted hiring language.

I. The Modernization and Aviation Project Labor Agreement (MAPLA) for the Port of Oakland

From 2001 - 2008, the Port of Oakland implemented the MAPLA, a project labor agreement covering over a billion dollars' worth of large infrastructure projects at the Port, and including strong targeted hiring requirements. Due to broad support from labor and community advocates, the program has been aggressively implemented and is still in effect.

Targeted Hiring Requirements:

- The MAPLA requires that 50% of all construction hours be worked by residents of the Port's local impact area, which includes the neighboring communities of Alameda, Emeryville, Oakland and San Leandro.
- The MAPLA also requires that 20% of all hours worked be performed by apprentices from the local impact area, providing an entry-point into construction careers for new and aspiring construction workers.
- The MAPLA laid out a detailed and thorough implementation plan, which included a committee of Port staff, contractors, labor union representatives and community advocates who evaluated each contractor's compliance with these requirements.

Outcomes

By 2007, the MAPLA had achieved the following results:

- 31% of all hours worked were performed by local residents
- 12.8% of all hours worked were performed by apprentices
- 6.2% of all hours worked were performed by local resident apprentices

Although these numbers fall short of the aspirational goals of the initial program, the numbers have risen over the years and are well beyond the resident participation that would have been achieved without the program. Stakeholders agree that ineffective implementation in the program's first few years dragged down the initial numbers. Because apprenticeship provides the entry-point for most new workers, greater apprenticeship utilization, as we have seen in recent years, is increasing the likelihood that low-income local residents will get firmly established in a construction career path.

A broad range of labor and community advocates, and the Port management itself, have pronounced this project a success because of the extent to which it encourages collaborative approaches, buy-in from multiple parties, and has in fact resulted in a significant number of new workers in quality construction careers.

More information

Policy language, reports from Port staff, and outcomes reports available at:

<http://www.communitybenefits.org/article.php?list=type&type=40>

See also Making Development Work for Local Residents, p54 – 59 available at:

<http://www.communitybenefits.org/downloads/Making%20Development%20Work%20for%20Local%20Residents.pdf>

II. Construction Careers Policy – Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency

The Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles (CRA) is the largest local redevelopment agency in the country, overseeing almost \$1 billion in assets. Like many agencies across the country, the CRA has a mandate to redevelop urban properties and neighborhoods -- but unlike many of its counterparts, the CRA has a clearly defined mission to make strategic investments to create economic opportunity and improve the quality of life for the people who live and work in L.A.'s neighborhoods.

In 2008, the CRA enacted its Construction Careers Policy, pertaining to all development subsidized at \$500,000 or more or occurring on land owned by the CRA. The CRA negotiated a PLA that will cover all construction work on these projects, and that includes the following targeted hiring requirements:

- 30% of work hours will be performed by community area and local residents
- 10% of work hours be performed by hard-to-employ local residents, including job-seekers with criminal records and those leaving public assistance
- 50% of all apprentice work hours will be performed by local resident apprentices.

The policy is in effect on several current projects, and is anticipated to cover 15,000 apprentice-level jobs over the next five years. This will provide apprenticeship opportunities for up to 5000 new construction careers entrants.

The policy further provides an important connection to the greening of the City of L.A. Because the CRA also requires all subsidized development to meet LEED Silver Certification standards, the Construction Careers Policy will support creation of thousands of green construction jobs in the next five years, and will ensure that new construction workers are getting recruited and trained at a time when the technology and skills are evolving to meet the demands of a more energy efficient economy.

Like the process that gave rise to the MAPLA, the campaign that resulted in the policy built new alliances among community and labor leaders. At the public hearings staged as part of its passage, African-American clergy with churches in low-income neighborhoods stood up alongside union workers to demand strong job quality standards and easier points of access to union jobs for their congregants. The process achieved broad buy-in from a wide variety of stakeholders. This broad public support

led to a rare unanimous city council vote, when the policy went to city council for ratification.

More Information

UCLA Labor Center report, "Helping LA Grow Together"

http://www.communitybenefits.org/downloads/CRA%20Report%202%2008_FINAL_loRes.pdf

PLA Language, FAQs and other policy information

<http://www.communitybenefits.org/article.php?id=1197>

Local governments in San Francisco, Cleveland and New York have developed innovative construction careers pathways for low-income people using community workforce agreements as the foundation. Learn more about their experiences, as well as the City of Los Angeles, the LA Unified School District and the LA Community College District use of these agreements at <http://www.communitybenefits.org/cwa>.