



## POLICYMAKER PRIMER:

# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



Recognizing the need for a skilled workforce with the necessary capabilities to construct, maintain, and operate critical infrastructure, APWA supports federal policies and dedicated, full funding for workforce programs that ensure a pipeline of public works professionals well into the future. Public works faces serious challenges: an aging workforce, the growing gap in technical expertise and trade skills, and a lack of awareness about public works careers.

The following key areas should be considered as workforce development legislation and regulations are drafted and implemented.

### PUBLIC WORKS CAREER AWARENESS

Despite the importance of public works professionals to our communities and the stability of state and local government positions, many students, graduates, and mid-career jobseekers are unaware of opportunities in public works. Efforts should be made to ensure that all career counseling professionals are equipped with information to educate individuals about these possibilities.

The Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics operates a Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system used by many of the nation's career counselors. Ensuring the wide range of public works careers are properly outlined in this system is critical to raising jobseeker awareness.

### WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND PUBLIC WORKS CAREER INTEGRATION

A wide range of federal, state, and local programs support public works through credentialing, on-the-job training, and certification. These three main areas require continued federal investment and support:

- Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs provide state and local workforce development boards with the resources to assist employers and jobseekers with hiring, training, and retention.
- Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs under the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) provide the skills necessary for a wide range of public works careers.
- Apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs under the National Apprenticeship Act (NAA) provide on-the-job training, which is vital for many public works positions that require significant practical instruction outside of a classroom.
- Establish a clear legislative definition of public works.

Increased cooperation between workforce boards and public works agencies, establishment of clear public works career pathways in CTE, and greater engagement of sectors including the water and transportation workforces in apprenticeships are examples of possibilities for increased engagement. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) offers tremendous programmatic opportunities to tackle the workforce challenge.



### PUBLIC WORKS ELIGIBILITY FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FUNDS

Public works agencies are an important component of the transportation, water, and emergency management workforces, among others, but in some cases have been excluded from eligibility for new workforce development funds and programs aimed at these sectors. Establishing a clear legislative definition of public works agencies and ensuring they are specified as eligible recipients in future bills/regulations could enhance their worker training capabilities and better prepare for changing technology and the future of work.

## SUPPORT INNOVATIVE TRAINING PROGRAMS

Public works departments across the nation have implemented innovative training programs targeting populations-in-need, including outreach to veterans and workforce reentry programs for currently or formerly incarcerated individuals. These programs provide a smooth transition into the workforce for individuals by providing them with the necessary skills, training, and certifications in public works professions. Policies promoting and incentivizing these initiatives can bring benefits to individuals and the overall community. As the leader in public works education and credentialing programs, APWA encourages and values continual education and professional growth opportunities for public works professionals and is supportive of policies that encourage this vision.



## LICENSE PORTABILITY

Numerous public works professions, including water/wastewater operators, construction inspectors, and engineers, are regulated by state licensing programs. Despite broad consistency among most states' programs, license portability is generally limited. Increased mobility of licensure would better allow for training in areas with greater employment needs. Incentivizing states to consider increased collaboration on license portability requirements will help alleviate workforce challenges.

\*\* Policymaker Primers supplement APWA's official Public Policy Priorities, providing additional information and context for issues tangential to emergency management, transportation, and water resiliency.

The American Public Works Association (APWA) represents over 32,000 public works professionals across North America, dedicated to providing essential, high-quality equitable and sustainable services to millions of people in rural and urban communities, both small and large.

APWA members serve in the public and private sectors, providing expertise to the local, state, and federal government levels. Working in the public interest, our members plan, design, build, operate, and maintain, and oversee our vast infrastructure networks essential to our economy, environment, safety, and way of life.

APWA collaborates with all levels of government and supports federal investment in our shared infrastructure. APWA is opposed to unfunded mandates and any effort to impede the appropriate use of public right-of-way, and strongly encourages industry to partner with public works, and all state and local government entities.

**APWA Government Affairs  
Policymaker Primer**

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