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New York City's recovery depends on a skilled workforce

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There is a general consensus among [policymakers](#) that the state and nation will build their way out of the pandemic-induced economic downturn, with billions of dollars dedicated to a wide array of projects—from [affordable housing to road, bridge and even broadband improvements](#).

Those efforts all require one key element aside from funding: [skilled workers in construction management](#), as well as fields including plumbing, electrical, welding and masonry.



During the height of the Covid-19 crisis, the construction sector lost nearly 1 million jobs due to temporary site closures and reduced demand, representing approximately [13%](#) of the industry's national workforce. Across all sectors, many workers with years of experience responded by [taking early retirement](#).

The economy is starting to recover, and with the infusion of federal stimulus money, the construction industry is expected to boom. But the number of available workers—especially with some degree of training—isn't keeping up with rising demand. Available jobs across the five boroughs outnumber the qualified applicants to fill them, and the gap is likely to grow.

Even before the pandemic, the industry was having trouble attracting and retaining talent. A 2019 [survey](#) conducted by the Associated General Contractors of America in

partnership with Autodesk found that [80%](#) of construction firms couldn't find the skilled workers they needed.

The industry must grapple with the mounting shortage before it becomes a full-blown crisis. To do so, we must foster new partnerships to cultivate a pipeline of skilled workers. We need to do a better job of reaching young people who might be interested in a construction career and assuring they have the skills they need to find a job upon graduating.

[Building Skills New York](#) has focused on partnering with community colleges to help individuals gain the skill sets and certifications required for job in construction. The option is often a more [economical choice](#) than a four-year degree, which might not be for everyone.

For the past few years, [LaGuardia Community College](#) in Long Island City and Building Skills have worked collaboratively to prepare job seekers. Building Skills participants are encouraged to enroll in industry-recognized [electrical](#) and [plumbing](#) skills education, part of LaGuardia's [continuing-education division](#). A majority of graduates return to Building Skills and are placed in good-paying positions citywide. We are working to launch [additional programs](#) this summer and fall.

Making career and technical education accessible to local talent is a critical first step. Next, construction leaders need to spread the word by visiting high schools and even middle schools to educate students, teachers and administrators about career paths of which they are perhaps unaware. Also, we need to ensure that those underrepresented in construction—women and people of color—can access government-supported job training.

A successful economic recovery requires addressing construction's persistent labor shortage. If we realize the benefits of collaborating with community colleges we can begin to cultivate the next generation of skilled workers.

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