



Modernizing America's Infrastructure

U.S. Chamber of Commerce



THE WORKFORCE NECESSARY TO REBUILD OUR INFRASTRUCTURE

Rebuilding America's infrastructure will require skilled workers ready and able to take on new projects. Yet today – before any major new investment in our infrastructure, 78% of construction firms report that they are having a hard time finding qualified workers.

The USG+U.S. Chamber of Commerce Commercial Construction Index has found that, though demand for new projects increases, a majority of contractors struggled to find skilled workers in 2017 and anticipate facing the same challenge in 2018.

In 2017, there were an average of 192,000 unfilled construction jobs openings per month (through November). That is up 119% from an average of 88,000 a month five years ago.

If we do not expand the construction workforce, it will be impossible to move ahead with the projects that need to be undertaken.

Congress and the administration must take key steps to help address the worker shortage. To increase the number of skilled workers, policymakers should:

1. ***Reauthorize the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education (CTE) Act*** – Capitalize on the opportunity to update the long-overdue Perkins Act to modernize our nation's K-12 and community college career and technical education programs, which are a key source of talent and a driver for young adults to pursue careers in the growing construction industry.
2. ***Leverage the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)*** – Use WIOA, reauthorized in 2014, to expand the national network of sector-based construction partnerships so that public workforce training funds and incentives can be utilized to grow America's construction workforce.
3. ***Modernize America's Apprenticeship System*** – Advance the recommendations of the apprenticeship Task Force, as convened by President Trump's Executive Order in 2017, to support the business sector as they build new opportunities for earn and learn pathways, including within the construction industry.

It is also important that we keep the skilled workers currently in the workforce thanks to programs like DACA and TPS. Approximately 41,000 DACA recipients are employed in the construction industry, as are approximately 51,000 TPS beneficiaries. Congress should act now to ensure that these workers can continue to live and work in this country.

Ultimately, Congress needs to enact immigration reform so that we can attract and admit the skilled workers our nation needs.