



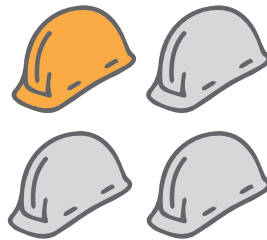
NUCA

We Dig America

Workforce Development / Labor

NOT ENOUGH APPLICANTS

349,000 additional employees will need to be hired in 2026 to meet the demand for construction labor alone.



Source: Associated Builders and Contractors, Jan. 2026

92% OF CONTRACTORS CAN'T FILL CRAFT POSITIONS



Roughly **one-half** of the water utility construction workforce is eligible to **retire** in the next 10 years.

Source: Associated General Contractors of America, Aug. 2025 survey

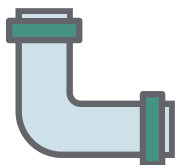
PROJECTS FACE DELAY FROM NOT ENOUGH EMPLOYEES

45% of contractor firms said their projects are being delayed because of **workforce shortages**.



Source: Associated General Contractors of America, Aug. 2025 Workforce Survey

CLOSING THE WATER INFRASTRUCTURE GAP CREATES JOBS



Closing the water infrastructure investment gap would create more than **800,000** jobs.

Source: "Bridging the Gap: The Power of Investment In Water (2024)," asce.org

Issue background:

The U.S. utility construction and excavation industry faces a significant shortage of qualified employees, including pipelayers, commercial drivers, welders, equipment operators, mechanics, data analysts, and other skilled field and office personnel.

With new resources flowing into the industry over the next five years from this session's \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the continuing need to repair our aging infrastructure, we must ensure that our industry has the workforce available to carry out these tasks. However, the U.S. utility construction industry today remains affected by a long-standing labor shortage in the construction trades.

An August 2025 Associated General Contractors/Sage Economics survey found that 80 percent of commercial construction contractors reported a moderate to high level of difficulty in finding skilled employees.

Labor shortages continue to negatively affect the utility construction industry. According to a January 2025 report by the Associated Builders and Contractors, construction companies in 2026 will need to find 349,000 new employees on top of normal hiring to meet industry demand, and that does not take into consideration the demands of new projects from infrastructure funding. A 2021 report also stated that every \$1 billion in extra construction spending generates an average of 5,700 construction jobs.

What is NUCA's position?

As the U.S. labor shortage persists, construction companies and clients struggle to find qualified workers. Factors include the Great Resignation, an aging workforce, immigration restrictions, and inflation-driven wage pressures. In 2027, the construction industry will need to attract 456,000 net new workers to meet demand as spending growth resumes, per Associated Builders and Contractors' January 2026 model (following 349,000 needed in 2026).

The long-term outlook remains challenging: too few young people enter the sector, despite competitive salaries and low barriers in utility construction trades. Many still pursue debt-heavy four-year degrees over vocational paths, while community colleges and vocational programs face declining enrollment.

Congress must tackle two key workforce issues: a skills gap (lacking credentials for infrastructure jobs) and a people gap (businesses unable to find needed employees timely). In the long term, promote programs like Perkins V CTE funding (reauthorized in 2018 by President Trump at nearly \$1.4 billion annually, level-funded through FY 2025–2026), though results take years.

The Workforce Pell Grant (via the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, H.R. 1, July 2025) expands aid starting July 2026 to short-term training (150–599 hours) in trades like construction, accelerating affordable entry for low-income students.

Apprenticeships offer another path. Recent 2025 actions, including Executive Order 14278 and DOL grants, aim to expand Registered Apprenticeships toward over 1 million participants, emphasizing construction and high-growth sectors.

In the short term, NUCA urges Congress to avoid policies that shrink the available workforce for infrastructure.

NUCA supports bills protecting contracts from PLA mandates, ensuring fair competition for all contractors—including small, women-, and minority-owned firms. PLA requirements often exclude experienced bidders and limit workforce access. We urge passage of H.R. 2126 / S. 1064 (Fair and Open Competition Act of 2025) to keep workforce development and transportation legislation free of PLA mandates.

What can Congress do to help?

Congress needs to also focus attention on creating and supporting workforce development programs that will address today's labor shortages and provide significant funding for future apprenticeship and training programs.

- **Pass H.R. 2126/S. 1064** (the Fair and Open Competition Act of 2025), introduced by Sen. Todd Young (R-IN) and Rep. Clay Higgins (R-LA) in the 119th Congress. **Supported by NUCA.**
- **Expand the existing H2-B work visa program** to include critical infrastructure construction jobs and streamline the application process. Significantly expanding annual quotas can help, too.
- **Revise the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)** to allow ages 16 and up to work in underground utility construction. Lowering the age will expand the pool of potential employees and allow more work-study programs for students interested in the heavy construction industry.
- **Reduce apprenticeship hours required by federal regulations** to 650 hours for on-the-job training and 48 hours for RTI. Current USDOL apprenticeship programs require too many hours for our industry's growing workforce needs.
- **Mandate public school guidance counselors provide significantly increased hours of trades promotion**, and mandate technology classes for students for modern trade positions (i.e., geomatics, 3D-tech, drone operation).
- **Create a program that allows infrastructure job opportunities to be combined with future paid post-secondary or trade education.** This "G.I. Bill" would pay for industry training programs such as CDL certification, welding, heavy equipment operations, and other essential infrastructure trades.

National Utility Contractors Association

3925 Chain Bridge Road, Suite 300, Fairfax, Virginia 22030-3938
www.nuca.com | 703-358-9300

Government Affairs Office:

Zachary P. Perconti, *Chief Advocacy Officer*
zackp@nuca.com | 703-677-6049