

TAKING THE HIGH ROAD

High Road Training Partnerships: A Path To Reimagine & Rebuild Our Economy

UC Berkeley Labor Center
May 2020

Overview

As California plans and invests for the future, all efforts should build and sustain a dynamic and globally successful economy that offers all—including the most disadvantaged—a higher quality of life. We can do that in ways that simultaneously address multiple major challenges, including climate change, public health, economic resilience, and systemic inequities.

High Road Training Partnerships (HRTPs) provide a proven successful model for working toward these goals. Supporting HRTPs has been a key part of both the Brown and Newsom administrations' strategic plans to reorient workforce development resources, programs, and institutions to support building skills for "high road" employers. High road firms compete on quality of product and service, achieved through innovation and investment in human capital, and thereby are able to generate family-supporting career-track jobs where workers have agency and voice. HRTPs are intentional efforts by leaders within a particular industry—including employers and workers—to come together to solve immediate problems and overcome longer term challenges in their industry. They are, at their core, a problem-solving infrastructure. They can address multiple contemporaneous challenges with strategies designed to support economic and environmental resilience in industries and communities.

What Makes a High Road Training Partnership?

1. Industry-Led Problem Solving

Foundational to the H RTP model is that the industry—including industry leaders representing both employers and workers—directs efforts to develop and sustain the current and future workforce that is needed in that particular industry. Industry participants must be at the center of the solutions that are developed. H RTPs are not formed to build training programs per se, nor do they simply serve in an advisory capacity to training programs that exist in the community. They provide a systematic but also dynamic way to meet what the industry itself determines is needed. In short, successful H RTPs start with the jobs. They are able then to bring the demand (jobs) and the supply (workers) sides of the equation together very directly, in ways they have determined are most effective to meet their industry's unique needs.

Why Especially Important Now

As the impact of the current COVID-19 and economic crisis varies by industry, H RTPs can be truly responsive to what any particular industry needs precisely because they are industry led. The solutions they generate can be tailor-made and fine-tuned to those needs. In addition, they can have maximum impact because they can operate at scale—be it across multiple employers/unions in one industry and/or across multiple geographies/statewide.

2. Partnership Itself Is A Priority

Central to H RTP success is that the industry leaders explicitly agree to collaborate not just for one project or program but in an ongoing way, allowing them to continually re-evaluate the challenges and opportunities in their industry. In the H RTP model, sustaining the partnership itself a priority, thereby rendering a durable infrastructure viable beyond any particular people, projects, or problems.

Why Especially Important Now

H RTPs provide a vehicle for generating solutions that can be nimble enough to respond to the current crisis, precisely because they have an existing infrastructure. Those that have been in place for years are “shovel ready” to move funding and practical supports out the door with assurances that resources will be spent well. Any investments made now can continue to pay off into the future as they won't be just a one-time stimulus but rather will reinforce a high-road problem-solving capability for the state.

3. Incorporate Worker Wisdom Throughout Partnership Efforts

Core to what defines an H RTP is its commitment to integrate worker wisdom into the full continuum of partnership activities, from the process of determining industry needs, to developing, implementing and reinforcing trainings, to evaluating success, to reinforcing a culture of continuous learning and collaboration. H RTPs incorporate worker voice into their problem solving as part of their DNA.

Why Especially Important Now

The solutions H RTPs develop and implement in response to the COVID crisis are based on what is needed “on the ground,” in the real world where workers and their families live and where businesses operate. Because the workforce of many H RTPs is highly diverse, the impact they can make on improving equity is significant for the communities that will need effective solutions the most as they have been hardest hit.

4. Industry-Driven Education and Training Solutions

Having the above three elements in place allows industry leaders to then collectively identify the most relevant ways to train, develop, and support workers to succeed for the specific jobs and needs they have identified. Note that the order of this process is important. Decisions around education and training programs are dependent on the industry *first* determining the needs, and *then* problem solving together to uniquely shape what will be developed and delivered. This upends the traditional approach to workforce development because it allows the industry to *pull in* the education and training resources it needs rather than have the workforce development or community college system try to *push out* solutions they believe may work for those industries and workers. The H RTP can tap into community colleges and other education and training providers as appropriate and contextualize the learning specific to their particular jobs and workers. It can choose to utilize what is already out there, develop and deliver their own programs, or use a hybrid approach specific to their particular workforce needs.

Why Especially Important Now

In a downturn economy, workforce training programs are obvious solutions to counter-cyclical economic trends. When the magnitude and urgency of the need is as great as it is right now, this H RTP approach ensures greater effectiveness with whatever investments are made to upskill and re-tool workers for the needs ahead. This is much more effective than trying to engineer training solutions from outside the industries themselves. It also allows workers and employers to proactively shape what may be needed for any “new” jobs and activities that should evolve out of this crisis so they can best compete on the high road going forward.

SHOWING THE WAY: Getting Results on Multiple Metrics That Matter

Fortunately, HRTPs already exist across California in industries that collectively comprise a significant portion of the state's economy. They have shown that the high road approach is not just possible, but that it can provide significant and meaningful results. The California Workforce Development Board (CWDB) invested in an initiative beginning in 2017. Its Equity, Climate and Jobs program funded eight different HRTPs operating in seven diverse industries across the state, including both the public and private sectors: Hospitality, Health Care, Building Services, Construction, Transit, Freight & Goods Movement, and Water & Utilities. More detail on the HRTPs and the initiative itself at: <https://cwdb.ca.gov/initiatives/high-road-training-partnerships/>

While each H RTP is different, they hold many important aspects in common:

- All include high road employers, choosing to compete on innovation and skill rather than on low wages and externalized environmental costs, and all include a formal role for worker voice.
- All face major challenges in their industries that affect their competitiveness, including the risk of losing experienced workers due to their aging workforces, rapid advancements in technology, and the urgent need to respond to drastic climate changes and now the impact of COVID-19 as well.
- All have chosen to plan and prepare in order to get ahead of these changes and challenges, and to work collaboratively for the strongest possible positioning not only for current but also future needs.
- All have made a powerful impact on increasing sustainable and low-carbon practices, building resilient communities, advancing equity for those who have been disadvantaged, and ensuring quality jobs.

Each of these HRTPs has undertaken significant work—some over the course of decades and some more recently—to solve industry challenges. Their efforts result in measurable impacts in multiple areas—most importantly, moving workers into higher paying jobs, advancing equity, and reducing energy use. For example:

Workers Advance Into Higher Paying Jobs

In the private sector health care industry, the SEIU-UHW Education Fund, a partnership between the largest health care union in the state and 16 different employers covering over 100,000 workers, prepares learners for the jobs and skills needed by those employers. While the dominant source of training for allied health workers in the state is through for-profit providers that have been found to leave workers in debt and unable to achieve sufficient career advancement to pay off those debts, the Education Fund provides a more effective high road approach that delivers for participants in its H RTP programs who are more than 80 percent women and more than 70 percent people of color:

- ❖ **Graduation rate: 93 percent completion rate for those in degree programs.**
- ❖ **Career advancement: 40 percent higher internal job mobility for Education Fund participants.**
- ❖ **Pay Increases: 36 percent average wage increase for those who completed and moved into higher level jobs.**
- ❖ **Lower hiring costs for employers: 30+ percent reduction in turnover rates.**

Improved Equity and Environmental Resilience

Building Skills Partnership (BSP), a joint effort between SEIU-USWW and major commercial buildings and janitorial companies, specializes in designing workforce development approaches for immigrant workers. Most of the workers BSP serves are from Latin America (95 percent), 70 percent are women, less than 30 percent are formally educated beyond the sixth grade, and many are monolingual Spanish speakers. BSP created a Green Janitor Education Training Program (GJEP) in which janitors gain a sense of responsibility for how sustainability practices help mitigate climate change, while employers gain a trained workforce that helps meet local and state climate standards. GJEP is now an industry best practice and has been incorporated into initiatives to meet LEED sustainability standards for buildings. Key results include:

- ❖ **From 2013 to 2016, 76 percent of GJEP buildings saw a decrease in energy and water usage.**
- ❖ **GJEP buildings used 5.6 percent less energy on average in 2016 than non-GJEP buildings.**
- ❖ **In addition, by sharing green practices with their families, friends, and neighbors, GJEP janitors are magnifying the program's impact by creating healthier and more resilient communities.**

Improved Equity, Career Advancement, and Operational Improvements

In public sector transportation, the South Bay Valley Transportation Authority and the ATU union formed the Joint Workforce Investment (JWI) as a partnership that is now part of the larger California Transit Works! network of transit HRTPs across the state. JWI launched a formal peer mentoring program in which veteran coach operators help novice drivers transition from training to driving a route; it also has created Coach Operator and Service Mechanic apprenticeships.

JWI's H RTP has institutionalized pathways into family-supporting careers for non-traditional workers. Women, immigrants, and workers of color have all found success through the apprenticeship programs. The apprenticeship cohorts have near-perfect completion rates. In addition, from 2009 – 2016:

- ❖ **Employee absenteeism fell from 4.3 percent to 1.6 percent.**
- ❖ **Rider complaints about service fell from 5.8 per bus operator to zero.**

In the hospitality industry, the Hospitality Training Academy (HTA), an H RTP with Unite Here Local 11 and major hotel and airport concessionaires in Southern California, has developed its own program for English language learners that contextualizes learning so that the language skills acquired are most relevant for specific jobs. This has provided learners who are predominantly immigrants from all over the world not only with the language skills but also the particular technical skills needed to obtain and retain employment on a career path in the hospitality industry.

- ❖ **Graduates of this training were referred to high road hospitality employers for entry-level positions, which serve as on-ramps for well-paid, family-sustaining jobs.**
- ❖ **Among the first cohort, 100 percent of participants received job offers.**

Solving Public Health Needs Through Cultural Affinity

The Worker Education and Resource Center (WERC) is a leader in preparing frontline healthcare workers who share cultural affinity with LA's patient populations. Working with SEIU Local 721 and Los Angeles County, the H RTP covers 22,000 workers in four public hospitals and seven health centers and community clinics. Based on the needs identified through the partnership, WERC developed the Community Health Worker Program and has recruited and trained over 230 community health workers to deliver services in their own neighborhoods. WERC's Community Health Worker Program serves as a model

for maximizing the documented efficiencies produced by having trusted, culturally similar health workers embedded within local communities. WERC also created the Care Navigator Apprentices program. Most of the apprentices were low income or unemployed when they entered the program. Approximately 50 percent of the apprentices had a college degree but lived in underserved communities without access to career positions. The cohort was 70 percent Latinx and 30 percent African American, and all were bilingual Spanish speakers. By providing apprentices with clinic experience, the Care Navigator Apprenticeship serves as an entry point for healthcare positions with the County of Los Angeles and creates a critical career opportunity for workers from low-income communities. It improves the marketability of apprentices for county civil service jobs and with other community health providers.

- ❖ **After apprentices completed their first six months on the job, clinics were already seeing positive changes: more patients were returning for needed follow-up appointments than prior to the program.**

Expanding the High Road Approach

Based on the results and lessons learned in the demonstration initiative, in 2019 the State authorized funding and support to expand the number of HRTPs. This decision was made prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and authorization was targeted specifically to support HRTPs working on the issue of carbon reduction.

Going forward, funding could be broadened even further to allow HRTPs to aggressively address economic, public health, and other challenges beyond carbon reduction, to ensure that supports arising from new COVID-19 programs go to those entities able to advance the high road. Committing to expand HRTPs can also be a cornerstone of a more comprehensive plan to reimagine and reallocate federal and state resources more efficiently throughout the state's workforce development, apprenticeship, and community college infrastructure.

Finally, it can help the state envision and implement a recovery that advances California's climate goals, encouraging the growth of high road, low carbon industries in the energy, transportation, manufacturing and other sectors impacted by climate policy."

For More Information

- Overview of the H RTP Initiative at CWDB
https://cwdb.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/43/2019/09/High-Road-ECJ-Brief_UPDATED-BRANDING.pdf
- Overview of Essential Elements of H RTP
https://cwdb.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/43/2020/01/H RTP-Essential-Elements_ACCESSIBLE.pdf
- Green Janitor program
<https://cwdb.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/43/2019/11/High-Road-to-Janitorial-11-25-2019.pdf>
- Operational Improvements: Transit
<http://www.catransitworks.org/metrics.html>
- Case Studies on Equity
 - » WERC/Health Care
https://www.cows.org/_data/files/WERCE_Case_Study_1.pdf
 - » TRANSIT/JWI
https://www.cows.org/_data/files/Case_Study_2.pdf