

Eastern Workforce Innovation Board In-Demand Skilled Trades Project: Union sector
Survey results/summary.

As part of the In-Demand project undertaken in the fall of 2019 a majority of the major trade unions representing workers in Eastern Ontario were contacted. From October 3, to November 26, 2019, eleven union organizations were contacted regarding participation in the study. These unions represented over 5000 skilled trades workers in the region who are assigned to a multitude of unionized skilled trades employers including contractors, developers and other companies of varied sizes working in the construction, industrial and residential sectors. The unions and groups included the following:

- IBEW, local 115; 570 members, electricians, Construction and maintenance, Industrial
 - UA local 401, 1000 members, plumbers, steamfitters, welders, industrial, residential
 - Carpenters District Council, local 249; 500+members, carpenters, drywallers, flooring installers, industrial, construction sector
 - LIUNA local 183, 1500 + members Eastern Ontario, construction craft workers, labourers, brick and stone masons, concrete finishers, home framers
 - IUEC, local 96. 318 members, Eastern Ontario, Elevating Device Mechanic, Elevator Contractors, Industrial, Construction, residential
 - Millwright Regional Council, local 1410, 200 members, Eastern Ontario, Industrial Millwright, Commercial, Industrial, construction
 - Ironworkers, local 765, 700-800 members. Ironworker, Structural and Ornamentalist/generalist Industrial, commercial, construction
 - International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, local 114. 103 members, painters, glaziers, drywallers, industrial, commercial, construction, residential
 - Sheet Metal Workers International local, 130 members, sheet metal workers, roofers, industrial, commercial, construction, residential
 - Ontario Heat and Frost Insulators, local 95, Heat and frost Insulators, Industrial
 - Quinte- St. Lawrence Apprenticeship Committee/Electrical Mechanical Contractors Association, Director Jeff Green. This group works with unions and major contractors in the region supplying electrical, sheet metal and labourer workers and operates a joint Apprenticeship committee in selecting apprentices.
 - Eastern Ontario Construction Trades Association, group includes representatives from major trade union groups listed above. Project coordinator, Will Geris, was invited to a monthly meeting Nov. 26, 2019
 - International Union of Operating Engineers, local 793, Hoisting Engineers, Heavy Equipment Operators, industrial, excavation, site preparation
- Note: all membership numbers are approximate and subject to change

Of the unions or organizations listed above all but the Operating Engineers participated in the project through a personal engagement meeting with the project leader, Will Geris (10) or by agreeing by phone to complete the online survey (Ironworkers and Elevator Mechanics). Of the 10 who agreed to meet 5 also completed the online survey with the remaining 5 engagements completed based on discussions with the interviewer.

The results of the union surveys were generally consistent in many of their responses. With a few minor exceptions they reported that their union associations had sufficient journeypersons and apprentices to meet the demand of employers in the region. Several actually reported that some of their workers and apprentices were not consistently working as demand depended on sufficient work requests by employers and that employment in their sector was cyclical. All unions were heavily involved in skilled trades education for their members often acting as training delivery agents for their trade apprenticeship programs and providing safety training on an ongoing basis. All unions were constantly updating skills for members to keep abreast of rapid technological changes in building systems, processes and tools.

Several groups such as carpenters, drywallers, Insulators, floor covering installers, roofers and brick and stone masons for example, expressed frustration that their trades were not considered compulsory and thus not subject to better working conditions, pay, benefits and pensions.

All unions employ a form of group sponsorship for their apprentices with the union acting as the sponsor as apprentices get assigned to one or multiple employers as required. All felt that union membership insured their workers a fair wage, good benefits and pensions and that these conditions led to sufficient applicants for journeyman and apprentice positions in their union.

Opinions as to government management of the apprenticeship system was varied as reported in the survey results. Most unions felt that the current apprenticeship system works well under a union based model but that competition for skilled trades workers with non-unionized employers was problematic and drove down wages and benefits for all. Several union representatives noted a lack of trust in the government around skilled trades regulation, the College of Trades, apprenticeship training and possible plans to de-skill trades through the implementation of skill setting. All suggested improved wage subsidies and funding and supports for apprentices while completing in school training.

As for issues around attracting more young people into the skilled trades and apprenticeship system all of the union groups agreed that this was a priority for them in the future. Most have been proactive in promoting their trades careers with young people through school presentations, career and job fairs etc. and all offered an open and well advertised process for apprentice application and selection. Many noted the need for strong math skills and trades and experiential educational opportunities for students in high school and suggested that more needed to be done to promote skilled trades as a career option for youth.

In summary the unionized trade associations contacted for the project played an important part in describing the current demand for skilled trades workers in the study area. Given the large numbers of unionized workers in Ontario, union membership has an important voice in describing their experience in the complex skilled trades landscape and in suggesting means for improvement.