

# Evaluation Brief

MEETING DEMAND, PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES:  
A PRE-APPRENTICESHIP CASE STUDY

MARCH 2020



## BRIEF BACKGROUND

*This case study is part of SPR's evaluation of the California Apprenticeship Initiative.*

*The evaluation includes an additional three case studies, an apprenticeship brief, and a pre-apprenticeship brief, which can be found at :*

<https://caihub.foundationccc.org/Research-and-Reports>

Registered apprenticeship (RA) programs provide paid, hands-on training that leads to industry-recognized credentials. Apprentice graduates become highly skilled employees with expanded career options. Yet demographic data show a dearth of certain populations, such as women and people of color, in apprenticeships. In part to address this issue and provide more Californians the opportunity to become apprentices, in 2015 the California state legislature and governor created the ongoing California Apprenticeship Initiative (CAI) grant program, which is overseen by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (Chancellor's Office).

Between 2016 and 2018, the Chancellor's Office invested approximately \$15 million to develop 35 new and innovative pre-apprenticeship (PA) programs with the explicit goal of increasing the diversity of registered apprentices in the state. One of the grants was awarded to State Center Community College District (SCCCD) to support the creation of a construction and building trades PA program in partnership with Fresno City College, the Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission's Valley Apprenticeship Connections (FEOC-VAC) program, the Northern California Laborers Training Center (NORCALTC), and Laborers' Local 294. The initiative is called the Central Valley Pre-Apprenticeship Training Program (CVPAT). This brief describes the development of CVPAT and what apprentices and employers report about their experiences in the program. It concludes with a discussion of the program's sustainability.

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- **Engagement with RA Programs:** CVPAT has successfully engaged RA programs by helping them meet their demand for new apprentices.
- **Program Structure:** CVPAT's 12-week program includes six weeks of classroom-based work-readiness training, followed by six weeks of hands-on vocational training, with coaching and job placement services provided throughout. Pre-apprentices also have the opportunity to connect with RA program coordinators and learn about unionized careers.
- **Recruitment and Selection:** FEOC-VAC, the primary recruiter for CVPAT, targets members of the re-entry population and women; FEOC-VAC also assesses potential recruits prior to enrollment to ensure they are qualified for the program.
- **RA Program Perspectives:** RA program coordinators appreciate the exposure to CVPAT's apprentice candidates because of the preparation the program provides.
- **Participant Outcomes:** CVPAT participants are finding success in transitioning into construction careers, with the majority of completers entering apprenticeships.
- **Sustainability:** Program partners are looking to replicate and customize the PA program design to build pathways into industries beyond construction.

## Implementation Findings and Lessons Learned

Feedback from college staff, program staff, and program partners indicates several key findings and lessons that may help others who are developing PA programs.

### Program Design

CVPAT's program lasts for 12 weeks. The first six weeks are spent in classroom-based employment readiness skills training conducted by FEOC-VAC. This training is followed by six weeks of hands-on training in construction based on an adapted Laborers' Infrastructure Construction Skills Training.

- **Building partnerships was critical to program development. SCCCD, the program administrator, partnered with several area adult schools to host the program on their campuses** so that its location can rotate among the campuses of those schools, as well as with Fresno City College, to reach students in disparate geographic areas of the Central Valley.
- **Building partnerships with multiple apprenticeship partners was also important so that pre-apprentices have multiple opportunities.**
  - **During the employment readiness training, FEOC-VAC creates opportunities to connect with the apprenticeship coordinator for each of the connected trade unions.** This face-to-face contact with RA coordinators is designed to give participants insight into the culture and expectations of RA programs and to facilitate contact between them and various unions.
  - **FEOC-VAC also provides job search support for connecting to non-union opportunities, such as the RA program with Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC).** To support ABC's need for apprentices, SCCCD has hosted several job fairs and recruitment events. FEOC-VAC staff also support participants who elect to pursue other local, non-RA construction-related jobs.

## RA Program Engagement

- **FEOC-VAC and SCCCD developed a program concept and then approached local unions about partnering on the development of a PA program to help them and their union contractors meet the demand for new apprentices.** They conducted this outreach at networking and partnering events organized by local workforce development boards and other economic development entities. Outreach staff tailored their messaging to respond to the construction industry's need for more robust pipelines of qualified labor.
- **The PA program presented an opportunity for the RA to reach more potential apprenticeship candidates.** The work that SCCCD and FEOC-VAC did before PA participants applied to the RA program—to make sure they were committed to and realistic about careers in construction, ready to work, and in possession of valuable skills and credentials—ameliorated some of the risk that RA programs take on when they hire new apprentices. Specifically, FEOC-VAC, the primary recruiter for CVPAT, targets members of the re-entry population and women and assesses potential recruits to ensure they are qualified for the RA program.

## RA Program Perspectives

Representatives from the Laborers' RA program described PA in general, and CVPAT in particular, as beneficial for the following reasons:

- **The Laborers' union gets qualified apprentices from its PA partners.** As unions are dependent on a flow of new workers to keep working, having partners who recruit, screen, and send qualified applicants is a big advantage. Concerning CVPAT specifically, the Laborers' PA director underscored the value of the six weeks that CVPAT participants spend with FEOC-VAC doing career readiness and basic skills, noting that it makes a huge difference in helping them succeed in the hands-on training component led by the Laborers.
- **PA participants go on to become apprentices.** Program staff report that as of the end of 2018, the majority (74%) of completers had entered an apprenticeship, 20 percent entered a non-apprentice construction job, and six percent entered a non-construction job. The average hourly wage among all people finding jobs was approximately \$23.
- **Additionally, CVPAT is an important partner in recruiting and preparing women for apprenticeship programs.** Requirements from the state for trade unions to increase women's enrollment has made CVPAT an important partner in recruiting and preparing women ironworkers.

*“Employers are happy [with the apprentices who come from CVPAT]....These people are dependable.”*

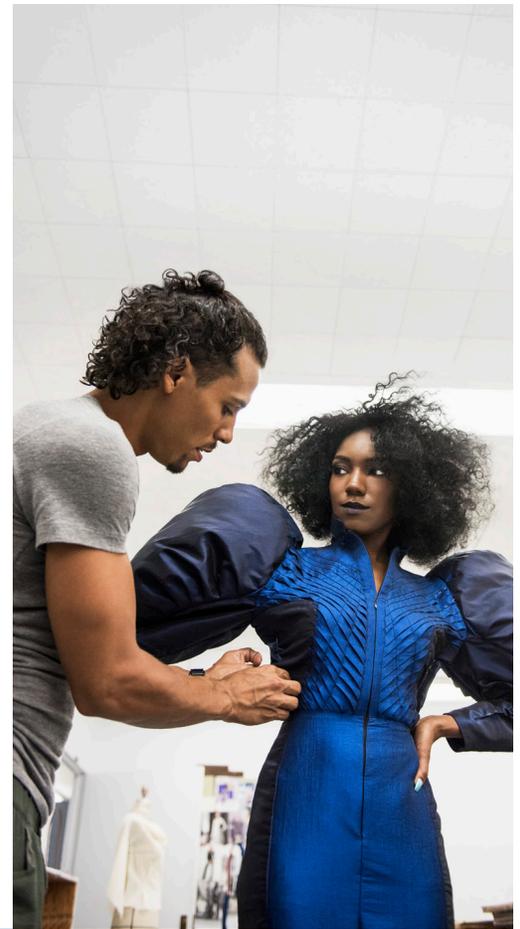
**—NORCALTC Director of Pre-Apprenticeship**

## Program Sustainability

Moving forward, CVPAT leadership is balancing the desire to serve participants, employers, and RA partners with the realities of the construction industry's need for new workers, which are cyclical and unpredictable.

- **Program staff members from the various partners are exploring alternative sources of funding that could be used to support the full 12-week CVPAT program.** These sources include philanthropic funding as well as Community Development Block Grants to support local work to advance efforts to combat poverty and support workforce development activity. Adult Education Block Grants are another funding option available to SCCCD. In addition to these sources, the Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission anticipates that high-speed rail funding, available from Proposition 1A, will lead to more official partnerships with other unions, which may also lead to additional funding.

- **Despite the uncertainty of the sustainability of a program that feeds students into a sector with fluctuating demand for new labor, the core partners will continue to work together.** Based on the positive working experience between the two organizations so far, SCCCD has become the Local Education Agency for the Laborers' Northern California Apprenticeship Program. SCCCD staff also spoke highly of their partners—in particular, of FEOC-VAC and their skills in engaging high-barrier adults—and they hope to work with FEOC-VAC staff in the future.
- **SCCCD is expanding its pre-apprenticeship work into the manufacturing industry.** Building on the success of the CVPAT program design, SCCCD has already started to put together a draft curriculum, identified a set of employers interested in onboarding mechanic apprentices, and secured letters of commitment from the San Joaquin Valley Manufacturing Alliance and the Greater Madera County Industrial Association to develop formal agreements to give PA program graduates an invitation to apply to their RA programs.



## ABOUT THIS SERIES

Suggested citation for this brief: Oettinger, J., van Docto, C., Aron, L., Hebbar, L., Dunham, K. (2019). *Meeting demand, providing opportunities: A pre-apprenticeship case study*. Oakland, CA: Social Policy Research Associates.

Other briefs in this series can be found [HERE](#) and include:

- CAI Apprenticeship Evaluation Brief
- CAI Pre-App-Evaluation Brief
- Columbia College Case Study
- Mission College Case Study
- SCCCD Pre-Apprenticeship Case Study
- WERC Case Study Brief

