

Pre-Apprenticeship Program Puts Upper Manhattan Residents on a Path to Success in Growing Construction Industry

A new pre-apprenticeship program exclusively for minorities, women and Upper Manhattan residents has launched, opening doors through training and a direct feed to apply for union apprenticeship opportunities in New York City's burgeoning construction industry.

The new program in West Harlem is one of many that Pathways to Apprenticeship (P2A) operates across the city to help people from low-income communities gain access to union construction apprenticeships. New York City Small Business Services (SBS) provides financial support, with the West Harlem Development Corporation (WHDC) providing additional funding as well as training space at its West Harlem Skills Training Center. Columbia University provides interview space and outreach support, as well as hosting the graduation ceremonies.

The five-week, full-time pre-apprenticeship program for Upper Manhattan certifies participants with the key skills and required safety trainings needed to qualify for an apprenticeship opportunity with local construction unions, setting them on a career path toward stable jobs with good benefits. Of the first cohort, 23 students graduated June 17 at a ceremony hosted by Columbia University. The partner organizations are planning another cohort for October 2019.

"Pathways to Apprenticeship is honored to work with such great partners in the community of Harlem," said P2A Executive Director Lavon Chambers. "Together we will be creating pathways into the middle class. Our graduates will embark on a union career that will help them financially sustain themselves and their families."

"None of this would be possible without our union building trade affiliates and union contractors sharing our vision. We will continue to serve Harlem and create opportunities for those who enter into the building trades," continued Chambers.

As the first Upper Manhattan cohort completed the program, P2A has scheduled interviews with local construction unions so the newly minted graduates can apply for available apprenticeships. P2A tracks construction apprenticeship openings with unions citywide, and has established a network of peer mentors who provide graduates with résumé assistance, interview coaching, and aptitude test preparation.

Columbia has also helped establish key relationships between the participants and the University's construction management firm for the new Business School, Turner Construction Corp., to help candidates apply to related apprenticeships with area unions that may be available, including on Columbia's new Manhattanville campus development in West Harlem.

As New York City continues to add construction jobs in record numbers, with the highest annual total to date of 158,000 jobs in 2018 ([source](#)), new doors to opportunities across the region will continue to open.

“We are gratified by the successful collaboration among Columbia University, Pathways to Apprenticeship, Small Business Services, and West Harlem Development Corporation,” said Dr. Kofi A. Boateng, WHDC Executive Director. “Together, we are achieving outcomes that have the potential to catapult disconnected members of our community into middle-class livelihood. It is simply exciting!”

For Columbia, contributing to the pre-apprenticeship program is just one key element of the University’s overall package of commitments to the local community, which includes support for housing, healthcare, education, and employment.

“Skills development programs like this one are vital to empowering our neighbors,” said Christine Salto, Assistant Director of Compliance for Construction Business Initiatives. “We are pleased to be able to join Pathways to Apprenticeship, the West Harlem Development Corporation, and the City to help neighbors in Upper Manhattan succeed, and aim to continue to expand the skills trainings and professional development offerings we support.”