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Unlocking Potential: The Inland Empire Black Worker Center's Transformative IE Works Program

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UNLOCKING POTENTIAL:

The Inland Empire Black Worker Center's Transformative IE Works Program



UCLA Center for the Advancement of Racial Equity at Work



JUNE 2023

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ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS

IEBWC

The Mission of the Inland Empire Black Worker Center is to build a Black worker-led movement that successfully organizes for quality jobs, economic and social mobility, and advocates for policies through cultural practices that ensure Black workers, their families, and the community thrives. Established in 2021, The Inland Empire Black Worker Center has convened union organizers, community builders, educators and faith leaders to address the regional unemployment crisis within the Black community living in the IE. We need a space for Black workers to come together, learn together, analyze what's happening in the economy together and develop solutions together.

CARE at Work

The Center for the Advancement of Racial Equity at Work (CARE at Work), housed in the UCLA Labor Center engages Black workers and economic justice advocates and facilitates innovative solutions that address the needs of Black working-class people. Through a school-to-movement pathway of service, teaching, capacity-building, and research, our purpose is to reveal conditions of Black work in Southern California under global racial capitalism and model approaches for change.

IE Works

IEWorks is dedicated to strengthening the water/wastewater workforce in the Inland Empire. With substantial funding from the US Department of Education and the CA High Road Training Partnership, IEWorks partners with Bay Area-based JVS and BAYWORK to leverage their success and best practices. IEWorks will increase the number of highly qualified candidates for mission-critical positions in the water/wastewater industry, while ensuring economic equity across the Inland Empire. IEWorks will develop a diverse talent pipeline through apprenticeship, internship and career awareness opportunities.

UCLA Labor Center

The UCLA Labor Center believes that a public university belongs to the people and should advance quality education and employment for all. Every day we bring together workers, students, faculty, and policymakers to address the most critical issues facing working people today. Our research, education, and policy work lifts industry standards, creates jobs that are good for communities, and strengthens immigrant rights, especially for students and youth.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



“How do we systematize the Black Worker Center model to build dynamic worker networks where families and communities in the region can thrive?” That was the rallying question for a group of Black-led, Inland Empire based organizations in 2019. These groups went one to complete a study of Black workers in the Inland Empire and form a planning table that would later stand up the Inland Empire Black Worker Center. Two things were immediately clear with the study completed and planning beginning. First, the Black jobs crisis is alive and well in the Inland Empire, with Black workers having the highest unemployment rates and lowest median earnings across the region. Second, building on the model created by the Los Angeles Black Worker Center, they sought to create a center that could support partnerships to support career pathways to quality jobs. This intention led the Inland Empire Black Worker Center to anchor the pre-apprenticeship program of the larger IE Works initiative.












IE Works is composed of a consortium of water and wastewater utilities, and community groups in the Inland Empire. The goal of IE Works is to address the challenges of the water sector as a whole (an aging workforce, lack of racial and gender inclusivity and an overall lack of awareness of the sector from young workers) and workers in the Inland Empire. The program aims to provide stability, living wages, and a career path to support families through first-of-its-kind programming. This is achieved utilizing



a three-pronged approach: 1) internships for active college students, 2) pre-apprenticeship for those new to the trades, and 3) apprenticeship programs. IEBWC has anchored the development and implementation of the pre-apprenticeship program for IE Works, as well as outreach and recruitment required as part of its inaugural programming since officially opening January 2022.

IEBWC has anchored the development and implementation of the pre-apprenticeship program for IE Works, as well as outreach and recruitment required as part of its inaugural programming. As an emerging Black worker center their staffing throughout the implementation of this program fluctuated from two to three full time staff. Ordinarily that would prohibit their ability to hold such an important part of IE Works, not to mention anchoring the broader IE Works program. But existing at the intersection of all of these organizations perfectly positions IEBWC to rally their supporters and allies to support program participants. Partner organizations included: IE Works, Jewish Vocational Services, BLU Educational Foundation, and San Bernardino Valley College as technical assistance providers; Starting Over, Inc., Project LEELA, Operation New Hope as Community Outreach Partners; Congregations Organized for Prophetic Engagement as their fiscal incubator, and the Center for the Advancement of Racial Equity at Work as a program evaluator. From long standing Black led and centered organizations, community colleges, workforce development organizations, faith based organizations, and water utility consortiums IEBWC has convened a diverse group of organizations to implement this program. Creating a model for community centered workforce development primarily targeting Black workers in the Inland Empire which has not been done in recent history.

Pre-apprenticeship Program Elements and Outcomes

The following shows the pre-apprenticeship program elements and outcomes that demonstrate the success of the program one full year after launching.

OUTREACH	CURRICULUM	CASE MANAGEMENT
<p> Text-banking and over-the-phone encounters, and tabling when possible</p> <p> Zoom and in-person orientation sessions that provided more information about the program and requirements.</p> <p> Simple application that confirmed eligibility and interests.</p> <p> Outreach partners Leela Project, Starting Over Inc., and Operation New Hope to get the word out about their program.</p>	<p> Technical: Required water sector and math classes as well as OSHA-10 Training supported by San Bernardino Valley College, Jewish Vocational Service and other partners</p> <p> Soft-skills: Interview and resume preparation, worker panels, mindset/resiliency, worker rights sessions, and financial literacy by IEBWC staff, BLU Educational Foundation, and other IEBWC partners.</p> <p> Cohort 1: 12 weeks</p> <p> Cohort 2: 15 weeks. Extended to allow for increased math instruction to include a water distribution class and state exam as part of the program.</p>	<p> Wrap-around support and barrier removal in collaboration with JVS during and for a year after program completion.</p> <p> \$600 stipend for participation, Gas Cards</p> <p> Additional support as needed related to tutoring, childcare, transportation, etc.</p>

 COHORT 1 - 12 WEEKS	 COHORT 2 - 15 WEEKS
<p>15 PARTICIPANTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 women • 10 men • 12 Black • 3 Latinx • ages 18- 47 	<p>12 PARTICIPANTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 women • 10 men • 9 Black • 3 Latinx • ages 19- 61
<p>OUTCOMES - 1 YEAR FROM COMPLETION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 completed the program • 4 full-time water sector employment • 3 IE Works internships • 8 fulltime work in other sectors with 3 continuing to pursue education and certifications 	<p>OUTCOMES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 completed the program • full outcomes pending as the program completion was March 2023, and this report was written April 2023

Once in the program IEBWC staff and its partners created a strong sense of belonging, a democratic space, while offering a career pathway towards an improved workplace and crucial wrap-around support for the participants. Those are all integral components to a Black worker center model for workforce development that prioritizes the respect and dignity of participants in all program elements. This is intentional in IEBWC's design and implementation of the program, and their positionality with strategic partners enables them to meet the needs of participants in most cases. This not only improves the experience of participants, but it also serves as a model to participants of what a dignified and democratic workplace could look like. While the goal of the program is similar to most workforce development programs, the methods employed by IEBWC conveners is unique to their role as Black worker center. This community centered workforce development model is what makes this program both unique and successful.

Recommendations for Continued Success

The success of the program in this short time is clear, but maintaining the success and growing the program is important to consider as well. Based on the results of the listening sessions, interviews, and gallery walks with stakeholders we make the following recommendations for the continued success and improvement of the program:

Develop a strong pathway to a full employment model for IE Works. The longevity of the pre-apprenticeships success is dependent on a full employment model that provides workers a clear pathway from pre-apprenticeship to full employment. Guaranteed/concurrent placement into an apprenticeship or internship program that leads to full time work is the ideal outcome that most participants are looking forward to for future participants. For this to be possible at minimum the following has to occur:

- The State of California needs to increase the funding and funding diversity of the pre-apprenticeship programs using IEBWC as a model to scale.
- State Water Resources Control Board prioritizing IE Works and IEBWC's pre-apprenticeship. For example, their SAFER Program prioritizing IE may allow access to previously untapped funding sources.
- Identifying more hands-on skills that

participants can gain within the pre-apprenticeship.

- Expanding offerings beyond pre-apprenticeship, to include mid-career workers in the trades.
- Continue to expand the relationships with unions, workforce development organizations, and community based organizations.
- Collectively launch narrative campaigns targeting Black workers restoring honor and dignity to trade work.

Prioritize non-restrictive funds for increased stipends and wrap around support.

Foundations and organizations with non-restrictive dollars looking to invest in this IEBWC model for workforce development should look to how their non-restrictive dollars can improve overall program experience and efficiency. Many participants are still working while in the program as the current \$500 stipend does not cover 15 weeks worth of living and personal expenses. Securing non-restrictive dollars to cover these costs can not only improve experience, but open the program up to those who cannot afford to work and complete the program at the same time. Additional funding for supportive services partnerships could support the following:

- Increased social-emotional support, especially for justice/system impacted participants.
- Providing Black worker justice training and awareness for mentors to give them the cultural competency needed to guide new workers in the water sector.
- Building in retention strategies upon graduation for participants that complete the program awaiting placement opportunities.
- Increase workers rights and anti-discrimination training in the program.
- Maintain connections with cohort members, especially those who have been placed in the water sector already and can mentor newer job seekers and alumni who are currently looking for work.

INTRODUCTION

Shortly after the pandemic shutdowns began, representatives from Black-led, Inland Empire-based organizations rallied around a key question: “How do we systematize the Black Worker Center model to build dynamic worker networks where families and communities in the region can thrive?” The group intended to emulate the success of Los Angeles Black Worker Center model, and provide services and organizing capacity for Black worker justice.² With this northstar goal in mind, leaders sought to organize Black workers in the Inland Empire and create a center that could support partnerships to support career pathways to quality jobs. This intention led the Inland Empire Black Worker Center to anchor the pre-apprenticeship program of the larger IE Works initiative.

Before embarking on the pre-apprenticeship the group launched a study on Black workers in the Inland Empire to better understand the needs of Black workers in the region. That study revealed that the Black jobs crisis, as characterized by Black workers in the Inland Empire experiencing disproportionate levels of unemployment and underemployment, as well as systemic anti-Black racism, was alive and well.³ Based on their analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data from Black workers, this advisory group made recommendations on how the group can operationalize a path forward for Black worker justice in the Inland Empire. Creating and supporting accessible pathways to quality jobs was one of the major themes of the recommendations. Concurrently, some members of this advisory group were aware of the Water Utilities Career Pathways Program.

The Water Utilities Career Pathways Program (WUCPP) is a public-private-community effort to expand access to mission-critical roles for underrepresented communities. Jewish Vocational Services (JVS) launched this program in the Bay Area with a consortium of over 33 water and wastewater utilities. The goal for the WUCPP is, “to recruit, train and upskill job seekers and build new career pathways for the water and wastewater Industry.” JVS accomplishes this goal in the Bay Area by engaging both utility employers and labor unions to develop solutions to address industry needs, while also working with community organizations to reach folks who are least represented in the field. The Inland Empire Black Worker Center (IEBWC) has worked with JVS to expand this model to San Bernardino and Riverside counties.

Through an initiative named, IE Works, IEBWC has gathered technical assistance providers with grassroots community groups to provide a career pathway for the water sectors with funding from California High Road Training Partnership and the United States Department of Education. IEBWC, with support from its fiscal incubator, Congregations Organized for Prophetic Engagement (COPE), worked to bridge technical assistance providers with community outreach groups to build a pre-apprenticeship career pathway for underrepresented workers in the water sector. Other partners work in collaboration with IEBWC to anchor an apprenticeship and internship. Since March of 2022, two pre-apprenticeship cohorts totaling to twenty-three participants have completed the program, and recruitment of a third cohort is currently underway.

The first two cohorts are successes with over a 95% program completion rate, 25% of the participants are in full-time roles in the water sector, with the remainder pursuing continued education and other full time employment. Throughout the pre-apprenticeship program, IEBWC staff worked to establish that this program as a model for community centered workforce development by ensuring the space was conducive to participants’ overall emotional-social well-being and would remain a positive environment for apprentices to work toward their individual career goals. The remainder of this report will give greater insight into the context of the program, program outcomes, and just how the IEBWC community centered workforce development model contributed to the success of this pre-apprenticeship.

CONTEXT FOR THE IE WORKS PRE-APPRENTICESHIP

The Black jobs crisis persists in part because Black workers are disproportionately represented in unemployed populations and low-wage sectors. Occupational segregation/exclusion in the water and wastewater sectors is part of the Black Jobs Crisis as highlighted in the data and findings of *Ain't No Sunshine*. Black workers in the Inland Empire have the highest unemployment rates compared to other racial groups, and have the lowest median earnings across the region. Beyond the numbers and census data, Black workers also said they faced underemployment when they were able to find jobs where they were not given enough hours to pay their rent and other bills.⁴

The group that would eventually become the IEBWC Advisory Board sought to create a labor-community partnership to develop a career pathway for Black workers into sectors with higher union density and family sustaining wages. Union jobs bring with them the benefits of collective bargaining agreements, higher wages and improved health and safety conditions.⁵ The water and wastewater industry was identified as a sector whose jobs were unionized and well compensated, and lacked Black workers particularly in all of the sector's high-skilled mission-critical occupations— including electrician and machinist work.⁶ Even more, the industry as a whole is facing a growing worker shortage as the bulk of their workforce is reaching their retirement age, and new workers are not replacing them fast enough.⁷ This alignment and opportunity between the needs of Black workers in the Inland Empire and the needs of the water and wastewater sector made the focus of IEBWC's first program a clear choice.

IEBWC Advisory Board saw this as an opportunity to address this critical labor shortage by removing barriers to entry and providing a pathway for its least represented population. Thus, addressing a vital water sector need, while uplifting Black workers and opening up career pathways to good-paying union jobs. Some of the barriers-to-entry IEBWC had to consider included a lack of awareness among people who are not already familiar with the building trades and overall declines in career and technical education (CTE) offerings in public schools. Moreover, existing hiring practices and workforce development programs exclude nontraditional workers (including women, people of color and others). The field itself is also constantly changing as a result of new types of field work, design guidelines and increasing automation, this results in ever-changing and complex requirements for candidates. The IE Works Initiative and the IEBWC Pre-apprenticeship aims to address these barriers.

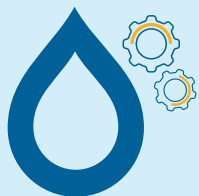


WATER SECTOR BACKGROUND - NATIONALLY



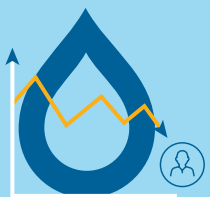
In the last decade, nearly 2 million workers across 212 occupations worked in the water sector, this included electricians, technicians, as well as white collar occupations like financial and administrative managers. Jobs in this sector tend to pay more on average, as well as 50% more at 10th and 25th percentile level. Moreover, many of these jobs require less higher education, and require on-the-job and vocational training. Nationally, the demographics of this profession are rather homogenous, with the vast majority of workers being men and white (85% and 66%, respectively). Workers in this area also tend to be older, and the average age is approaching retirement within the next ten to fifteen years.⁸

WATER SECTOR WORKFORCE BACKGROUND - CALIFORNIA



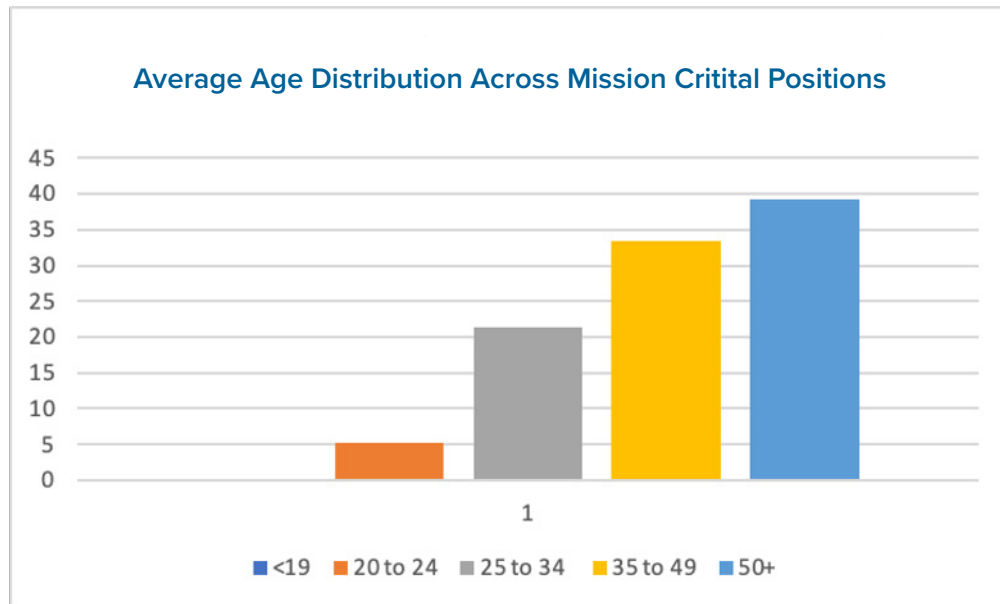
The Centers for Excellence for Labor Market Research (COE) is the authority on regional workforce data and for the California Community College system, and has recently concluded a statewide research study on the water/wastewater sectors. Mission-critical occupations fall into three categories: electrical, maintenance and operational. “Electrical” includes electricians and technicians who work with controls and automated systems. “Maintenance” includes general workers and calibration and instrumentation technicians who work with supervisory control and data (SCADA) systems. This category also covers workers who install and repair pumps, motors and other equipment in treatment facilities. “Operational” workers include three distinct occupations that are essential to the core operations of a water/wastewater treatment plant: engineers and construction equipment operators, machinists, and plant operators. While the specifics of the needs of IE may differ slightly, these statewide mission critical occupations paint a broad picture of the overall needs in the sector. Average entry-level wages for these mission-critical operations hover between \$23 to \$28 per hour, while experienced workers can expect to earn upwards of \$40 to \$50 per hour⁹.

WORKER SHORTAGES IN THE WATER SECTOR - CALIFORNIA



The water sector is facing three major challenges: 1) an aging workforce, 2) struggling with racial and gender inclusivity and 3) an overall lack of awareness of the sector from young workers. As indicated in Figure 1 below more than a third of the water sector’s workforce is above the age of 50, and there are not enough young workers to replace them as they approach retirement age. According to a recent California statewide survey by the Centers for Excellence in Labor Market Research, almost 40% of the water workforce is above the age of 50 and majority of the remaining workers are between the ages of 35 to 49.¹⁰ Less than a quarter of workers are between the ages of 25 to 34, while around 5% are between the ages of 20-24 and there are no workers under the age of 19. This means that the majority of the workforce is rapidly approaching retirement age. Some older workers are working beyond retirement age to fill this gap, but there aren’t enough younger workers to mentor and transfer vital institutional knowledge to.

FIGURE 1:
Average Age Distribution Across Mission Critical Positions in the Water Sector in CA
 (Source: Centers for Excellence in Labor Market Research)¹¹



In addition to an aging workforce, the water sector also has a racial and gender diversity challenge. The water workforce is largely white and Latino male-dominated, with little to no representation of Black workers as seen in figure 2 and 3 below.

FIGURE 2:
Mission-Critical Occupational Demographics by Ethnicity in CA
 (Source: Centers for Excellence in Labor Market Research)¹²

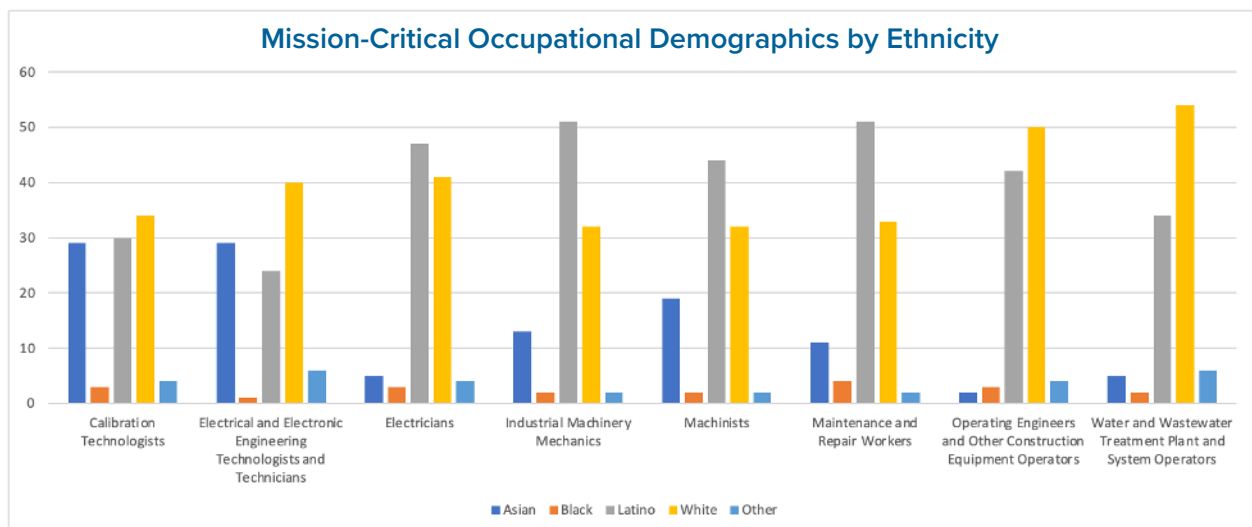
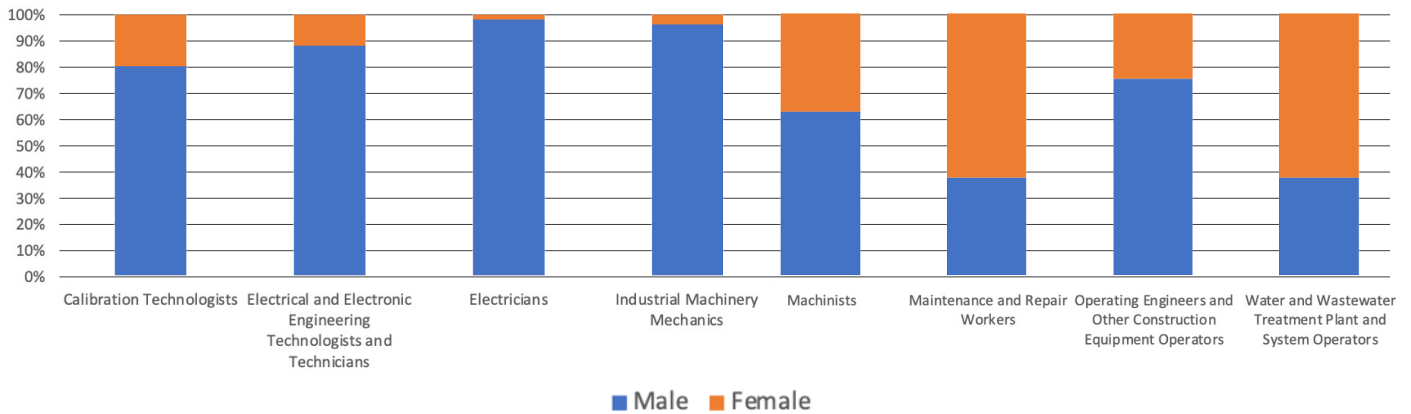


FIGURE 3:
Mission Critical Job Occupations by Biological Sex in CA
 (Source: Centers for Excellence in Labor Market Research)¹³



These regional statistics largely match the reality of the water sector labor market in the Inland Empire, where a supply gap exists between the average number of annual job openings and the number of certifications awarded to graduating individuals.¹⁴ These worker shortages coupled with changing demographics and increasing demands on the Inland Empire’s infrastructure raise an important question for both utilities and community organizers, “How can more underrepresented individuals serve in mission-critical roles that water utilities have listed as priorities?” IEBWC worked with JVS partners to develop an innovative solution to this multifaceted problem through the creation of IE Works. The pre-apprenticeship program held by IEBWC as connected to the full apprenticeship and internship program coordinated by JVS is one solution that allows for underrepresented workers to get a head start in a mission-critical industry that needs a new pipeline of workers.

THE SOLUTION

IE WORKS PRE-APPRENTICESHIP

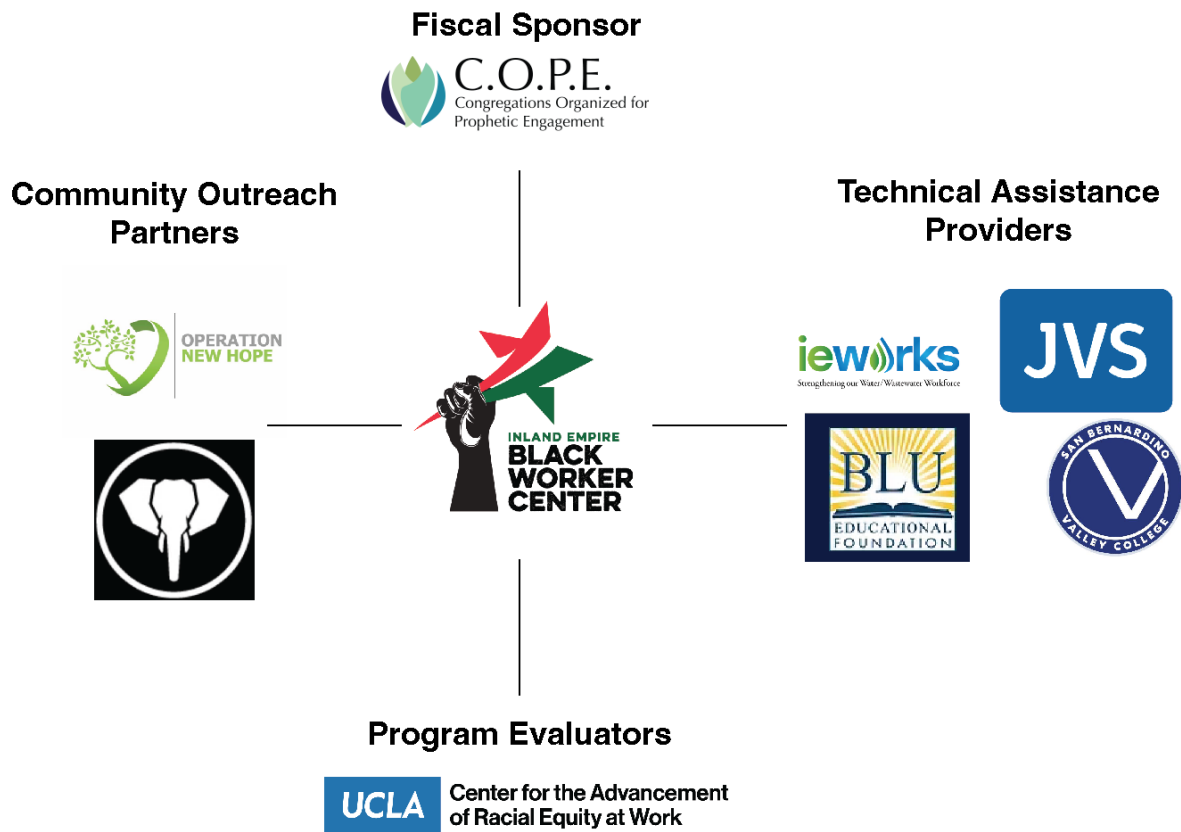
IE Works is composed of a consortium of water and wastewater utilities, and community groups in the Inland Empire. The goal is to provide stability, living wages, and a career path to support families through first-of-its-kind programming. This is achieved utilizing a three-pronged approach: 1) internships for active college students, 2) pre-apprenticeship for those new to the trades, and 3) apprenticeship programs. IEBWC has anchored the development and implementation of the pre-apprenticeship program for IE Works, as well as outreach and recruitment required as part of its inaugural programming since officially opening January 2022. IEBWC's staff and advisory board are well positioned to manage and maintain the IE Works pre-apprenticeship because of its staff and board's expertise in workforce development and their relationship with underrepresented communities. The Inland Empire Black Worker Center, with support from its fiscal incubator, Congregations Organized for Prophetic Engagement (COPE), worked to bridge technical assistance providers with community outreach groups to build a pre-apprenticeship career pathway for underrepresented workers in the water sector. The program is now in its second year of programming with funding from California High Road Training Partnership and the United States Department of Education, with recruitment for a third cohort underway at the time of the writing of this report.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS



Underpinning all of this is IEBWC's unique ability to bridge alliances between government agencies, water utilities, non-profits, other community based organizations, and funders. As an emerging Black worker center their staffing throughout the implementation of this program fluctuated from two to three full time staff. Ordinarily that would prohibit their ability to hold such an important part of IE Works, not to mention anchoring the broader IE Works program. But existing at the intersection of all of these organizations perfectly positions IEBWC to rally their supporters and allies in support program participants. Figure 4 illustrates at a high level the amount of partners IEBWC rallied, collaborated with, and coordinated with for the success of this program.

FIGURE 4:
Partnership Matrix

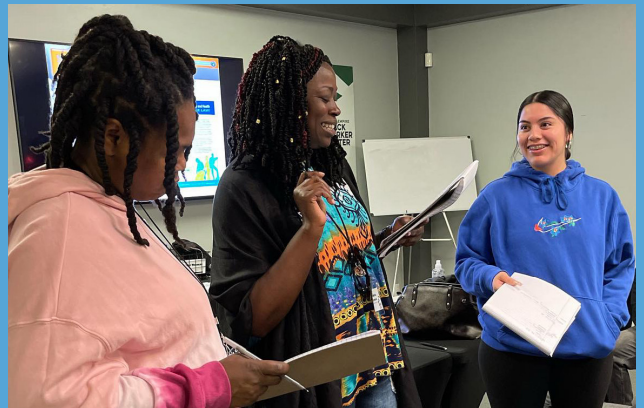


From long standing Black led and centered organizations, community colleges, workforce development organizations, faith based organizations, and water utility consortiums IEBWC has convened a diverse group of organizations to implement this program. This speaks to the very nature of community centered workforce development which aims to leverage the skills that community already possesses while also creating new skills. IEBWC has done just that through these strategic partners. Creating a model for community centered workforce development primarily targeting Black workers in the Inland Empire which has not been done in recent history. Not only do these partnerships play a role in the successful implementation of all aspects of the program (outreach, curriculum, and case management) these partnerships play a huge role in legitimizing and institutionalizing this program. IEBWC has created a pathway for community and workforce partnerships that utilizes everyone's strengths to build a cohesive program for participants. This strengthens the program and makes each organization better positioned to extend their impact without being the primary convener. In being the anchor and convener of these partnerships IEBWC is building strong working and contractual relationships with old and new organizations in the IE. Thus expanding the reach of each org, and expanding the reach of IEBWC. Which is deeply important to an emerging Black Worker Center in a region with limited history of worker organizing, let alone Black worker organizing. The success of this program speaks to the potential of their success as a Black worker center.

PROGRAM ELEMENTS

Outreach:

While the IEBWC worked with its partners to deliver the core curriculum, they were also working to reach the Inland Empire's Black community. The Inland Empire's vast geographical scale presented challenges for the team's outreach efforts. Moreover, the organization's fledgling status in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the team from making in-person contact with potential participants. Outreach efforts were largely restricted to online and over-the-phone encounters in the beginning—building on the outreach done with the SoCal Black Worker Hub as a part of the Covid Workplace Outreach Program in 2021. Launching the Center amidst the pandemic limited in-person contact, and presented challenges in outreach to ensure potential participants knew who IEBWC was and that this was a real opportunity. Extensive texting banking using voter data with the support of SoCal Black Worker Hub, and tabling when possible was done to turn out potential participants to orientation sessions that provided more information about the program and requirements. From there those still interested were able to apply to the program using a simple application that confirmed eligibility and interests. IEBWC was also able to work with IE Works outreach partners Leela Project, and Operation New Hope to get the word out about their program.



Curriculum:

IEBWC's IE Works Pre-apprenticeship aimed to not only provide workers with the hard skills needed to be competitive and prepared for the internship or apprenticeship, but also with the soft skills needed to navigate the water sector as an underrepresented worker in the industry. For the technical and soft-skill training aspects of workforce development programs, they coordinated with their partners, Jewish Vocational Services (JVS), BLU Educational Foundation and San Bernardino Valley College (SBVC) and more to deliver many of the training aspects of the program. This included but was not limited to required water sector and math classes, interview and resume preparation, worker rights training, financial literacy, mindset and resiliency, labor history and advocacy, Know Your Rights training, and OSHA-10 Training, and more. In the first cohort this curriculum was delivered over the course of 12 weeks, and after feedback from the first cohort they extended the length of the program to 15 weeks to accommodate more math instruction, as well as to allow for students to take the Water Distribution 1 (D1) course at SBVC and to sit for the D1 and D2 State Examiners. These additional opportunities were found to increase opportunities to students seeking jobs.



Case Management:

The curriculum delivery was just one part of IEBWC's role, case management in collaboration with JVS allowed for wrap-around support and barrier removal—two key aspects of the IEBWC's pre-apprenticeship program. This included but was not limited to supporting participants in transportation, childcare, and other emergencies during the program, as well as support in navigating the water sector for a year after the completion of the pre-apprenticeship. In addition to that they are able to provide participants one time \$600 stipend for participating in the program. IEBWC's ability to develop and maintain strategic partnerships, which will be detailed later, enables them to deliver a well-rounded program to participants.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The combined outreach efforts anchored by IEBWC was able to attract applications from 20 cities across the Inland Empire, including 11 applications from San Bernardino. Ultimately, in the first cohort 15 applicants were accepted from 10 cities, and all but one, finished the 12 week version of the program. In the second cohort 9 applicants were accepted from 10 cities, and all finished the 15 week version of the program.¹ Full outcomes can be found in Figure 5.

FIGURE 5:
Program Outcomes for Cohort 1 and 2

 COHORT 1 - 12 WEEKS	 COHORT 2 - 15 WEEKS
<p>15 PARTICIPANTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 women • 10 men • 12 Black • 3 Latinx • ages 18- 47 	<p>12 PARTICIPANTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 women • 10 men • 9 Black • 3 Latinx • ages 19- 61
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While comprehensive data on average completion rates for pre-apprenticeships are limited, completion rates over 90% for pre-apprenticeships is quite high based on our literature review.¹⁵ Furthermore, the relative geographic, racial/ethnic, and age diversity showcase this program as centering Black workers and uplifting all workers. The full success of the pre-apprenticeship will show over time as many pre-apprenticeships still have to go through the remainder of the pathway (internship or apprenticeship) to reach full employment. Since successful completion of a pre-apprenticeship has been shown to improve completion rates in apprenticeships, and thus prospects for full employment in the trades, the early success of the pre-apprenticeships indicates long term quality employment for graduates of the program.¹⁶

Quantitatively the pre-apprenticeship is a success, the remainder of this report will detail the key components that participants, staff, and stakeholders lifted up as key to this success. These components coalesce as a community centered workforce development program - IE Works pre-apprenticeship. The report will end with what's needed to truly meet the goals of full time employment for all participants who completed the program.

¹ The program was extended 3 weeks for the second cohort to accommodate more math instruction, allow for students to take the Water Distribution 1 (D1) course at SBVCC, and to sit for the D1 and D2 State Examiners.

A BLACK WORKER CENTER MODEL FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

While the goal of the program is similar to most workforce development programs, the methods employed by IEBWC conveners is unique to their role as Black worker center. Their positionality and proximity to both communities and decision-makers allowed the program to take on a distinct, community-centered approach. While this was intentional, it was also strategic and took advantage of the center's existing strengths—its relationships and connection with grassroots-led community organizations. The organizers utilized cold-calling and texting to reach participants via registered voter records, while also leaning on their community partners to get the word out about their new program. Many participants said they learned about the program through trusted messengers such as Operation New Hope, the Leela Project and Starting Over, Inc.—all of which are community-based groups in the Inland Empire. Once in the program IEBWC staff and its partners created a strong sense of belonging, a democratic space, while offering a career pathway towards an improved workplace and crucial wrap-around support for the participants. All integral components to a Black worker center model for workforce development that prioritizes the respect and dignity of participants in all program elements.



STRONG SENSE OF BELONGING



This familiarity and connection beforehand strongly contributed to the group’s overall sense of cohesion and belonging. When asked in both individual and group settings, participants consistently remarked that they felt welcome and comfortable in the space, *“This whole cohort... shows love; everybody is good and helpful to each other.”* Their strong sense of belonging led them to feel open and safe about exploring a career path in the water sector that they had never considered. *“you’re able to kind of relax and be more yourself, you know?”* Sense of belonging has been extensively discussed in social psychology literature, and early studies have drawn links to improved workplace safety, retention and wellness for minority workers in homogenous sectors.¹⁷ This sense of belonging translates into real benefits for cohort members; several participants brought up instances where they met outside the program to study and revise materials, *“[Once a week], we [meet] from 12 to maybe 4 to study and do some work together.”* These informal study sessions not only allowed participants to review material together, but they were also socializing and decompressing spaces.

DEMOCRATIC SPACE

The program’s democratic group dynamics were also helpful as numerous participants remarked on how they could voice their opinion and feel heard by program staffers, “here we’re able to voice our opinion and they’ll [try their best] to change things”. Furthermore, participants felt that program staffers were genuinely concerned about their wellbeing, *“they check on all us and whether we need some assistance or help... We have a good rapport and communication. They [don’t] treat us like slaves. They don’t treat us like nobody, but the teachers are part of the family.”*

IEBWC staff remarked that the democratic space was intentional in part to subvert a culture of gatekeeping that exists in many high-skilled, blue-collar occupations. Participants are not passive entities to deposit knowledge into, but are active and viable agents of change who will go into industries where they might be the only Black person in the room. Creating a space where they feel safe and comfortable to push for change is a vital part of their training and preparation to enter the water sector. It is because this space created that the second cohort length was extended from a 12 week program to a 15 week program, a request made in the first cohort that was implemented for the second cohort.



CAREER PATHWAY TOWARD BETTER WORKPLACES

Another hugely contributing factor to the environment IEBWC created was creating space for workers to experience a just and dignified work centered space. One participant in particular compared his experience in IEBWC's program to past employers, "Cause a lot of people [in other] industries, don't accept you for who you are". In fact, all participants had at least one negative experience with a past employer. Often in conversation this experience of a strong democratic sense of community created in this work centered space was in stark juxtaposition to the prior exploitative and discriminatory work spaces.

The most common grievance was witnessing discrimination against others, as well as facing it themselves, "I've worked for two large fortune 500 companies for over 20 years... you see a lot of stuff and you know... once you go higher and higher, you hit that glass ceiling.". One participant remarked that in addition to facing racism as a Black person, he also faced ageism as a middle-aged person. Another participant was fired shortly after requesting personal leave to spend time with his newborn daughter. Another remarked about working in a warehouse and having his car broken into on two occasions. He witnessed management allowing other, non-Black workers to move their cars closer to the building, while not being given the same opportunity. Facing health and safety issues without adequate support was another point that several participants brought up. One participant who was a single parent and worked in hospital housekeeping had concerns about putting herself and family at risk by working in a hospital during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another recounted a disturbing story where one of his longtime co-workers died by suicide. He described the workplace they both worked at as toxic and as a newer person on the job, he and his co-worker were subject to hazing and bullying.

Understanding that in addition to quality job access, creating a new framework for what work experiences could be like further reinforces the sense of belonging of democratic space that contributed to this community centered workforce development. A strong sense of belonging and democratic space serve as an excellent workplace model where workers are empowered and are supported when faced with health and safety issues. All workplaces should strive to be spaces where workers can raise issues free of fear of retaliation from their supervisors. These recurring themes from conversations with participants tell us that they are often motivated to join and complete the pre-apprenticeship program in part to leave workplaces where they face discrimination and safety issues. While there is no guarantee they won't face it in the water sector, the IEBWC allows them to build the power and confidence to fight unlawful workplace discrimination and ensure that their working conditions are safe.

CRUCIAL WRAP AROUND SUPPORT



In addition to the program and the space created for participants, there were also a multitude of services and resources made available to participants. Many cited these resources as the reason they were able to actually complete the program. For example, one important characteristic of the program is that it is completely free and participants also receive mileage reimbursement to attend in-person sessions in San Bernardino. This in-kind and monetary support was vital for all participants, particularly those who come from low-income backgrounds. In their own words, one participant remarked that the support was vital in his motivation to complete the program. Several participants specifically cited the gas stipend as the, “perfect” resource. Others said that the laptop and wi-fi extender allowed them to participate, and allowed them to participate when they may have otherwise been unable to. This support allows the program to meet the participants where they’re at when it comes to their needs.

The support that participants receive goes beyond the temporal confines of the program with cohorts receiving supportive services and job search assistance for one year. This support gave participants the ability to independently explore classes and professional development and boosted confidence in their chances of success after the program. Having access to San Bernardino Valley College’s tutoring resources was also helpful for one participant’s math proficiency. He went on to say that the support he received (both materially and emotionally) built his confidence to seek college credit and professional development opportunities independently. The California Workforce Development Board sees ‘effective support services’ as crucial to the success of pre-apprenticeships.¹⁸ IEBWC took this in conjunction with the Black worker center model laid out by LABWC to honestly and transparently support the participants how they could. This type of deeply personal support is largely possible because of the space IEBWC created where participants felt as if they can come to staff with the challenges and needs, and actually be heard and seen.

This wrap around support has looked different for every participant. To illustrate this the following will share four worker profiles summarized from interviews for how wrap around support contributed to their successful completion of the program.

PARTICIPANT PROFILES (ANONYMIZED)



JESSICA (she/her), 40 years old

Jessica is participating in the IEBWC's pre-apprenticeship program because vocational training will allow her to find a good job to support her family. Jessica juggles multiple caregiving and earner responsibilities in her family and is dedicated toward improving her and her family's life.

Nevertheless, meeting these responsibilities requires Jessica to overcome numerous obstacles, including childcare, fuel costs and general cost-of-living. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Jessica faced further obstacles related to public health quarantine measures. Her youngest daughter had just started kindergarten and needed support for virtual learning.

The IEBWC's support in removing these barriers were integral to Jessica's success. This included providing monetary support for high-quality childcare for two elementary school aged children, a mobile hotspot and data plan, and supporting her with commuting and car maintenance expenses for her long drive from the desert to San Bernardino. Without those needs covered, Jessica would not be able to complete the program and pursue a high-paying job in the water sector.

Childcare and other resources from the IEBWC allowed her to pursue the pre-apprenticeship program, while continuing to meet her obligations as a caregiver and breadwinner for her family.



CHRISTOPHER (he/him), 34 years old

Christopher is the father of a toddler and a resident of Corona, California. He studied to become an Electrician and worked in the solar and railway industries. Looking to spend more time with his family, he sought a job that came with union benefits and could provide better pay and flexibility. The IEBWC's pre-apprenticeship program is giving him the opportunity to pivot work in a field where he can support his family and give them the life they deserve.

Prior to joining the Inland Empire Black Workers' Center Pre-Apprenticeship program, Christopher trained to be an electrician at a local college. He's had experience working in the solar industry and for a railway company. Despite both those fields paying more than his prior work in the warehouse or fast-food industry, Christopher often found himself working the graveyard shift and in unsafe conditions during his time as a railroad worker. Like many rail workers, Christopher was also forced to work overtime. When he requested time off to bond with his newborn daughter and take her to medical appointments, he was unjustly fired.

Despite the slightly higher pay, Christopher found that working for the railway company was not worth the time he spent away from his newborn daughter. He wanted a career where he could earn a family sustaining wage for his new family. He then learned about the IEBWC's program through a friend. After doing his own research and speaking with IEBWC's Interim Director and Community Organizer, he felt confident that the program would allow him to apply the skills he learned as an electrician in the water sector.

While he had some anxiety about being in a new environment and around different people, Christopher felt that he was welcomed with open arms by the program staff and felt a strong sense of belonging with his cohort. The financial support allows him to put more focus on studying and learning, and working with a tight-knit cohort gives a sense of community and boosts his confidence.

Christopher said that the cohort felt more like family and that their close connections encouraged them to meet outside class hours and study together. He not only felt reassured by his cohort, but also the IEBWC staff who would help him or navigate him to the appropriate resources. Having a strong connection with both his cohort and colleagues pushed Christopher to explore out of his comfort zone. This included pursuing resources at SBVC independently and speaking publicly in front of his colleagues. Christopher described himself as a very shy person prior to the program, but he now feels much more comfortable speaking and networking in unfamiliar circles.

Upon graduating from the program, Christopher plans on continuing on his path toward the water sector and wants to take more classes from SBVC. While the one year of support will come in handy, the program has convinced him that education is an investment worth making and Christopher is committed to paying out of pocket for his education if he feels it's necessary. His advice for future cohorts is to trust the process and don't quit!



MICHAEL (he/him), 46 years old

Michael received his Bachelor's Degree in Business Management from a CSU in the early 2000s. He worked at a managerial level within food production for two decades prior to entering the pre-apprenticeship program.

Michael has felt that there is a shortage of good jobs in the IE, especially around his home in Moreno Valley. He finds that most jobs he is qualified for (and offer competitive compensation) would require him to commute to OC, LA, or neighboring areas.

Because he is Black and relatively older, Michael has been held back by an invisible Glass Ceiling in his private sector roles, "Once you go higher, you hit that glass ceiling... [your employer] doesn't say you can't go any higher, but you see it". He knows that while employers are barred from discriminating against their employees outright, that doesn't stop them from doing it in more subtle ways.

In his management role, Michael himself witnessed discrimination against undocumented people, youth and otherwise marginalized individuals, "I saw so many things I haven't seen in my whole career... it's saddening to see the way people are treated, where they can't [speak up]". His desire to leave the private sector was morally driven, and he found community, belonging and support with the IE Black Worker Center, "Everybody shows love and is good to each other in this cohort"

Michael was drawn to the water trades because he was in search of more meaningful work. Having had a successful career in the private sector, Michael was not in need of "just another job", he wanted to have a meaningful role and provide a much needed service to his community, while also being able to support his three kids and wife.



MUHAMMAD (he/him), 25 years old

Muhammad is a resident of Redlands, CA. Prior to entering the Pre-Apprenticeship program, he worked for Stater Bros for six years and hopped between warehousing jobs. Muhammad has always had a passion for education and learning and had taken some classes at SBVC prior to the program and was still looking for the right fit.

He found out about the water sector and the IEBWC's program through two of his relatives, who work as water operators. Muhammad ultimately decided to apply for the program after speaking with program staffers about his goals and realizing that it would indeed be a good fit. While Muhammad currently works in maintenance operations at a local school and loves to engage interpersonally with customers, he wanted a more lucrative career path where he can grow and build long-term economic security for himself and his family. Shortly after completing the program, he was hired into an entry level Wastewater Collection Operator position. The program provided additional funding toward obtaining his CDL license which was required within 6 months of hire.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report shows that IEBWC's IE Works Pre-apprenticeship has been a success both quantitatively as it relates to participant outcomes over time, as well as qualitatively as it relates to the experiences of the workers in the program itself. These findings show the need for continued and deeper investment in Black worker center anchored workforce development programs. Based on the results of the listening sessions, interviews, and gallery walks with stakeholders we make the following recommendations for the continued success and improvement of the program:

- **Develop a strong pathway to a full employment model for IE Works.** The longevity of the pre-apprenticeships success is dependent on a full employment model that provides workers a clear pathway from pre-apprenticeship to full employment. Guaranteed/concurrent placement into an apprenticeship or internship program that leads to full time work is the ideal outcome that most participants are looking forward to for future participants. For this to be possible at minimum the following has to occur:
 - **The State of California needs to increase the funding and funding diversity of the pre-apprenticeship programs using IEBWC as a model to scale.** The IEBWC's pre-apprenticeship program could be better institutionalized by tapping into more funding to support the partners, participants, and overall operations of the program to increase size and frequency of cohorts. Hiring more staff would also allow for leadership to look out for the "bigger picture" and focus on auxiliary operations that can complement the pre-apprenticeship program.
 - **State Water Resources Control Board prioritizing IE Works and IEBWC's pre-apprenticeship.** Aligning with IEBWC's goals might allow the center to access previously untapped funding sources, such as the State Water Resources Control Board's SAFER Program. Community workforce development and training for water systems serving "small disadvantaged communities" is one mandate of this program. Determining the eligible Census Designated Places (CDP) in the Inland Empire per the program's determination guidelines could open up this avenue of funding and placement for participants
 - **Identifying more hands-on skills that participants can gain within the pre-apprenticeship.** Some of the participants who were currently employed in the sector had experience in the trades and/or working with tools. This experience has made them more marketable, and expanding these offerings in the program itself would allow participants to look at other sectors where they can find good work opportunities (beyond the water sector).
 - **Expanding offerings beyond pre-apprenticeship, to include mid-career workers in the trades.** Participants in the program who came with a background in the trades often were at an advantage as not everything about the water sector was new to them. Thus, a specialized program for those with trades experience looking to pivot into water would allow IEBWC to reach workers at different phases of their career, and connect new job seekers with more experienced ones. It would also allow for deeper partnerships with labor unions and water districts.

- **Continue to expand the relationships with unions, workforce development organizations, and community based organizations.** The strengths of this program are the broader coalition of organizations that IEBWC is able to align with the needs of the pre-apprenticeship. As more focus and attention is placed on IE in the coming years strengthening and expanding the coalition of organizations supporting this work, particularly the independent non-affiliated unions at the various water districts will prepare the region to face the challenges referenced throughout this report head on. This model of community centered workforce development works well to meet the needs of all when the labor-community-management relationships are as strong as the program itself.
- **Collectively launch narrative campaigns targeting Black workers restoring honor and dignity to trade work.** The general lack of awareness of the field and trades as a whole is a large barrier to entry that in part is solved by this program that addresses the culture of gatekeeping in high-skilled trades. A region wide narrative campaign in collaboration with IE Works partners narratively institutionalizes not only the purpose of IE Works but also why this work is important to both Black workers and the water and wastewater sector itself.
- **Prioritize non-restrictive funds for increased stipends and wrap around support.** Foundations and organizations with non-restrictive dollars looking to invest in this IEBWC model for workforce development should look to how their non-restrictive dollars can improve overall program experience and efficiency. Many participants are still working while in the program as the current \$600 stipend does not cover 15 weeks worth of living and personal expenses. Securing non-restrictive dollars to cover these costs can not only improve experience, but open the program up to those who cannot afford to work and complete the program at the same time. Additional funding for supportive services partnerships could support the following:
 - **Increased social-emotional support, especially for justice/system impacted participants,** can support positive outcomes. Furthermore, providing a clear understanding of offenses that may disqualify applicants/participants from entering the water sector can help the center pivot and place them in adjacent skilled trades industries. While these practices are inherently exclusionary, they are outside the control of program staffers, and often need specialized support.
 - **Providing Black worker justice training and awareness for mentors** can help give them the cultural competency needed to guide new workers in finding their place in the water sector.
 - **Building in retention strategies upon graduation for participants that complete the program can help keep them engaged from the very beginning.** An example of this can be access to additional trainings (hands on, professional development, safety, etc) that can help them advance in their career, or pivot to another field (if desired).
 - **Increase workers rights and anti-discrimination training in the program.** Educate workers about a broad array of civic matters such as worker rights, equal employment opportunity, and more. Many of the previous experiences referenced by participants were potential violation of their rights as workers, so ensuring that regardless of where they work after the pre-apprenticeship participants leave with knowledge of their rights as a Black worker is important.
 - **Maintain connections with cohort members,** especially those who have been placed in the water sector already and can mentor newer job seekers and alumni who are currently looking for work. This will not only create space for alumni to support and mentor current participants, but also space to continue to connect and support one another as they enter workplaces that have very few Black workers on the job.



METHODOLOGY

The UCLA Labor Center’s CARE at Work team was asked to assist with program evaluation efforts for the Inland Empire Black Worker Center’s inaugural workforce development program, a pre-apprenticeship program dedicated to providing a pathway for underrepresented workers to enter the water sector. We utilized a participatory approach by speaking with program staffers and participants about their experience in the program. By speaking with both participants and staffers, we kept in mind both the process and outcome. While participant outcomes are highly important, we wanted to ensure that the IEBWC space was conducive to their overall well being and was a supportive environment for apprentices to reach their career goals.

The Center for the Advancement of Racial Equity (CARE) at Work within the UCLA Labor Center collaborated with the Inland Empire Black Worker Center (IEBWC) to conduct a case study on their IE Works Pre-Apprenticeship program. The goal of this case study is to provide an in-depth examination of the IE Works pre-apprenticeship, and provide an evaluation of IEBWC’s role in program implementation as well as participant experience and outcomes. The study was completed throughout the first two cohorts of the program, as those were the initial pilot cohorts outlined in early funding for the program. The study used a research justice model and centered the experience and expertise of IEBWC involving them and their partners in the design, fielding, analysis, and dissemination plan.

Keeping in line with best practices for workforce development program evaluation, we aim to examine the following: 1) What is working for participants, and what can be improved, 2) Articulating what the program (and its participants) have accomplished, 3) Identifying “effective practices for replication.”¹⁹ To meet the goals of the case study, researchers from CARE at Work attended early planning meetings, completed a literature review of relevant programs, conducted focus groups (listening sessions) and semi-structured 1-1 interviews with participants, as well as data workshops with program staff and stakeholders.



-  CARE at Work researchers attended the IEBWC IE Works planning retreat in December 2021 to observe and take notes on how the program was being planned and what the vision of the program was from the perspective of IEBWC and their partners.
-  The in-depth literature review included a brief summary of *Ain’t No Sunshine*, a collaborative report written with both the IEBWC and the CARE Center, best practices on workforce development program evaluation as well as the latest labor market data available on the water sector in California and the Inland Empire from the Centers for Excellence in Labor Market Research. .

💧 The participant focus groups, which were referred to as listening sessions in an effort to make the sessions more accessible, were conducted with participants during open sessions towards the end of the program. For cohort one it occurred during week 10 of a 12 week program in person. For cohort two it occurred during week 12 of a 15 week program on zoom (due to weather). We utilized a semi-structured focus group guide with three sections: 1) the outreach and recruitment experience; 2) the program experience; and 3) recommendations for future iterations. We posed open-ended questions to participants and opened the space for them to talk and respond to each other as much or as little as they wanted in each section. Their response was recorded (with their verbal consent), transcribed and then open-coded.

💧 The participant interviews were conducted after the focus groups to offer space for more personal experiences to be shared. For the first cohort we interviewed 6/15 of the participants in person. For the second cohort we interviewed 3/8 of the participants on zoom (due to weather). We utilized a semi-structured individual interview protocol with three sections: experience with 1) past employers and IEBWC outreach/recruitment; 2) the program itself; and 3) future recommendations for IEBWC Staff. We posed open-ended questions to participants and opened the space for them to talk as much or as little as they wanted on each section. Their response was recorded (with their verbal consent), transcribed and then open-coded.

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