



Promising Practices

Washington's Trades Related Apprenticeship Coaching (TRAC) Program

Individuals with criminal records struggle to find gainful employment, both upon their release from jail or prison and throughout their lives. [One study](#) found that the rate of unemployment for formerly incarcerated individuals is over 27 percent, which is higher than the general U.S. unemployment rate during any historical period. In Washington, the [Trades Related Apprenticeship Coaching \(TRAC\)](#) program helps women leaving Washington prisons train and prepare for gainful employment in the trades.

[TRAC began in 1997](#) in the Washington Corrections Center for Women and has expanded to include the other women's prison in the state, Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women. This pre-apprenticeship program selects 12 participants for each 16-week session, where participants receive [460 hours of both theoretical and hands-on experience and training](#). Participation in the program is highly competitive and physical—women must be able to dig ditches, haul materials and carry 80-pound rebar. The program recreates the everyday tasks of union employees and teaches participants key entry-level skills that are needed to become union apprentices. Once an apprentice joins a union, they complete 6,000 hours of paid on-the-job training and work toward gathering the experience to work without supervision. TRAC also includes a classroom component, where students learn interview skills, resume writing and financial literacy.

About TRAC



Within the program, participants can learn a variety of trades for apprenticeship, including [carpentry, construction, ironworking, plasterwork and cement masonry](#). To graduate, participants must complete one of three skills-based tests: carpentry, ironworking or labor skills. The program's success rests on its prison-based program, but also on its strong emphasis on successful and holistic reentry, which is obtained through strong connections with the state's unions, teaching soft skills in addition to hands-on learning and the strength of TRAC's community connections. [For example](#), union representatives visit the prison to allow women to take the entry test before being released. Additionally, the ironworkers' union specifically changed its regulations to allow TRAC graduates to receive an immediate safety orientation and evaluation, rather

than waiting weeks for a normally scheduled group evaluation session. Once a graduate is released from prison, TRAC's community partnerships help with basic needs such as transportation and housing, including a network of sober housing across the state. TRAC's partners typically use grant funding to cover the costs of initial apprenticeship, including membership dues and purchasing the required tools.

Ironworker apprentices in Western Washington, for example, have a starting hourly wage of \$32, plus benefits, which increases to \$50 per hour at the end of the four-year apprenticeship period. After this period, the individual is designated a "journeyman/ journeywoman," meaning they are no longer an apprentice and now could earn more than \$100,000 a year. Program graduates have worked on several well-known projects including Seattle's light rail and



Interstate 90. Helping returning citizens, both before and after release, and setting women up for success by teaching them a highly skilled trade that will allow them to hold gainful employment and support themselves and their families, is a huge programmatic win.

Success and Expansions

The success of the program has led to its expansion. Men in five Washington prisons can participate in a pre-apprenticeship program modeled on TRAC called Construction Trades Apprenticeship Preparation (CTAP). Both TRAC and CTAP are registered preparatory apprenticeship programs with the state of Washington, and TRAC is also a registered program in Oregon. From 2014 to 2022, 35 percent of the women in the Washington TRAC program achieved a registered apprenticeship, 6 percent achieved journey-level status and 59 percent obtained other employment. Importantly, graduates of this program have a recidivism rate of less than 5 percent, compared to the 15 percent general rate for women in the state. This program is an important model, encompassing soft and tangible skills needed for gainful employment upon release and preparing women for a career after incarceration based on self-sufficiency and the program's holistic reentry support services.

Do you have a Promising Practice
from your jurisdiction you
want to share?

Contact us at
strategicplanning@ncja.org !