

➤ Leveraging Lead Service Line Replacement for Workforce Inclusion and Growth

Prepared by MKM Consultants in collaboration with

Current



Metropolitan Planning Council

Illinois faces a significant challenge in replacing its toxic water infrastructure, with nearly 667,000 known and 820,000 potential lead service lines throughout the state.

The replacement of these hazardous pipes offers a dual opportunity: protecting public health while creating job opportunities across a variety of industries.

Historically disinvested and low-income communities bear a disproportionate burden of lead exposure, and thus should be prioritized in every stage of the lead service line replacement (LSLR) process by accelerating replacement in vulnerable areas, creating job opportunities for historically disinvested communities, and ensuring small, underfunded water systems receive essential resources.



Students at Chicago Public Schools' Skill Trades Fair supported by HIRE360 and hosted by the Chicagoland Laborers' District Council Training & Apprenticeship Fund.

The State of Illinois will need to significantly increase funding for LSLR so that we can protect public health and create jobs across a variety of industries. Partnering with local community organizations and involving residents in decision-making will foster trust and ease LSLR implementation.

Based on job creation figures from the American Water Works Association and the Environmental Protection Agency, LSLR in Illinois is estimated to create more than 2,000 direct jobs and 9,000 indirect or induced jobs based on current funding, with a potential of 90,000 total jobs over a 10-year period. Key professional roles include plumbers, pipefitters, operating engineers, laborers, and community

outreach coordinators. Beyond direct employment, these projects generate ripple effects throughout the economy, stimulating demand in industries such as manufacturing, transportation, and logistics. To fully realize the employment potential of LSLR in Illinois, it is essential to support both the existing workforce and new entrants. Experienced plumbers and other tradespeople should have clear pathways to upskill or transition into LSLR-related work, including access to targeted training, certifications, and updated safety protocols.



Students working with pipes at Chicago Public Schools' Skill Trades Fair supported by HIRE360 and hosted by the Chicago Journeymen Plumbers Local Union 130 UA.

LSLR initiatives will provide opportunities for new entrants and apprentices in the building trades by increasing the amount of construction work overall. According to the Inclusive Economy Lab's 2025 analysis, in the Chicago region, 3.8% of registered apprentices in most building trades are women and 10% of registered apprentices are Black.

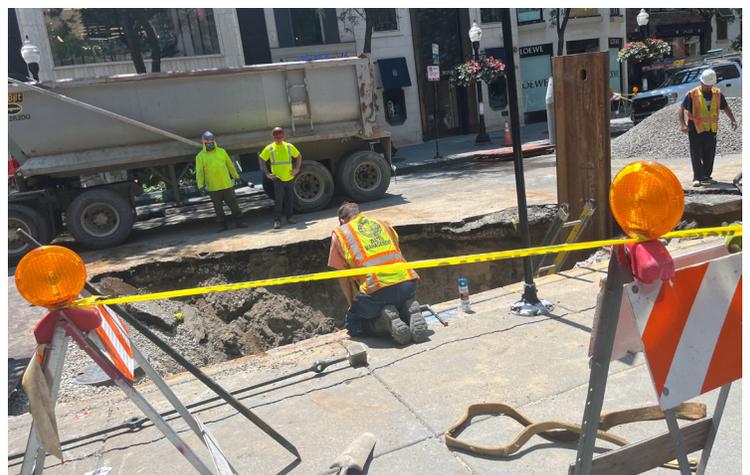
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Expanding access through pre-apprenticeship programs will be critical to fostering a stronger workforce by including those who have too often been left out and helping them thrive in these high-demand careers.

Illinois can leverage local partnerships and pre-apprenticeship providers to create more equitable outcomes in LSLR-related employment. Several workforce development initiatives aimed at promoting an inclusive, growing workforce in the trades already exist. The Illinois Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program and the Climate Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program provide targeted career pathways for people from disinvested communities, including residents from environmental justice areas and justice-involved individuals.



Top and middle images: HIRE360 pre-apprenticeship candidates touring Operating Engineers Local 150's Apprenticeship and Skill Improvement Program.



Bottom image: Lead service line replacements occurring alongside water main replacement.



Students learning about plumbing at Chicago Public Schools' Skill Trades Fair supported by HIRE360 and hosted by the Chicago Journeymen Plumbers Local Union 130 UA.

In addition to helping new individuals enter the field, LSLR will create opportunities for existing contractors and firms to grow their businesses, though some may need assistance to branch out into LSLR delivery. This may include administrative support for compliance with government funding and prevailing wage requirements, in addition to skills training and access to necessary equipment.

To support Illinois' ability to meet the needs of the moment, we convened a

stakeholder group and conducted one-on-one interviews with key partners from various sectors to explore programmatic opportunities, identify funding and policy needs, and ensure that those most impacted by lead in water are full recipients of the benefits generated by LSLR. These stakeholders comprised representatives of labor and the trades, workforce providers, nonprofit advocates, engineering firms, units of government, and education partners, among others.

Based on these conversations, we offer several key recommendations:



INCREASE FUNDING FOR LSLR

Illinois legislators should provide dedicated, sustainable, and predictable funding to close the gap for the over \$6 billion needed to replace Illinois' lead pipes. This will allow for accelerated, affordable, and geographically concentrated replacement of lead service lines, resulting in more contracts, more hiring, and more opportunities for diverse talent in the LSLR workforce.



IMPLEMENT BLOCK-BY-BLOCK CONTRACTS

Utilities and municipalities should assist building owners by compiling batches of replacements for block-by-block contracts; when possible, blocks in low-income areas and with large numbers of lead service lines should be prioritized. These larger contracts can provide opportunities for apprentices to work on these projects as larger crews will be needed. Rather than leaving individual building owners to try to manage the projects themselves, contractors can be hired by the municipality or utility, as has been implemented in Milwaukee. Packaging the projects this way also may facilitate easier communication with residents and building owners.



EMBED INCLUSION IN BID DOCUMENTS

All project owners, including municipalities and utilities, must integrate diversity and equity requirements and incentives into their project bid documents, ensuring that these provisions are integral to the contract requirements from the outset. All project owners should support contractors in efforts to utilize small, women-, minority-, and veteran-owned firms as subcontractors, promoting equitable access to LSLR contracts and fostering broader participation.

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HIRE FROM DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

Project owners should incentivize contractors hiring individuals from socially and economically disadvantaged areas, including women and those identified as equity-eligible under state workforce programs like Illinois Works and the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act. Project owners should implement hiring requirements and incentives for these equity-eligible individuals but avoid hyper-local hiring restrictions (such as from one zip code) that could disrupt employment continuity as projects move across neighborhoods.



SUPPORT SMALL, DIVERSE, AND VETERAN-OWNED FIRMS

The State of Illinois should support small firms, including women-, minority-, and veteran-owned businesses, and businesses owned by persons with a disability with training in bidding, project management, and compliance. Additionally, assistance should be provided for procuring specialized equipment necessary for LSLR work.



INTEGRATE APPRENTICES INTO LSLR PROJECTS

Contractors and project owners should hire graduates of pre-apprenticeship programs to source candidates from underrepresented groups. The State of Illinois has invested heavily in training people to become building trades apprentices, and LSLR investment is a prime opportunity for those candidates to become employed.



REDUCE BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS

The State of Illinois must fund initiatives that help individuals from disinvested communities overcome barriers to participating in pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs, such as childcare and transportation needs. This support is crucial for enabling these individuals to access LSLR jobs and complete their training.

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COORDINATE COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Project owners should establish Community Outreach Coordinator roles for each LSLR project, whether by partnering with community organizations or hiring local residents directly, to serve as the primary liaisons between the project teams and residents. These roles will help foster community trust and ensure effective communication about the health benefits and project timelines.



TRACK PROGRESS IN MEETING GOALS

The State of Illinois must provide substantial support to project owners to oversee contractor performance against requirements in subsections (n) and (o) of the LSLR and Notification Act pertaining to good faith efforts around utilization of small, minority-owned, and women-owned businesses, and businesses owned by persons with a disability. Many local utilities and municipalities do not have the capacity to implement these programs without support. As such, State departments will need appropriate funding and staff to provide support and oversight to local communities.



PROMOTE OPPORTUNITIES STATEWIDE

In order for communities outside of the Chicago region, especially smaller communities, to find contractors, and especially minority- and women-owned businesses and businesses owned by persons with a disability, the State of Illinois should provide a central location for all work opportunities to be advertised. Sharing this information and putting forth a concerted effort to recruit contractors to other parts of the state will be essential to completing this work.

LSLR initiatives in Illinois offer a historic opportunity to simultaneously improve public health, address social inequities, and create sustainable and successful career pathways. With thoughtful planning, targeted investments, and strong partnerships, Illinois can transform this infrastructure challenge into an inclusive economic development outcome. The adoption of equity-centered, fair, and balanced workforce practices will help ensure that all communities benefit from safe drinking water and new job opportunities, contributing to a healthier and more prosperous state.