

➤ 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.

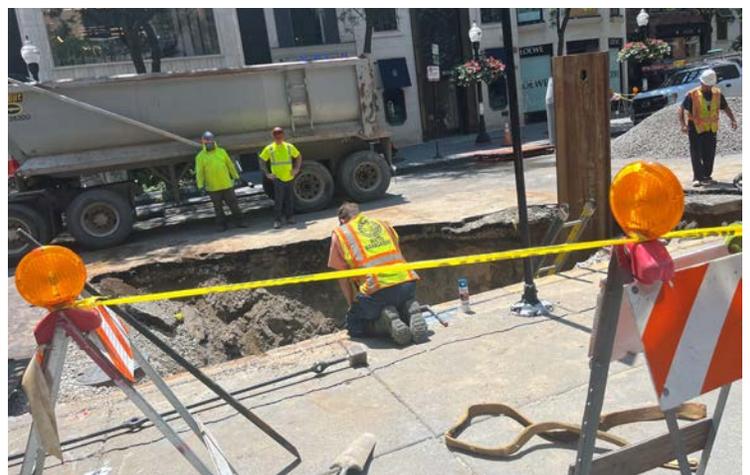
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Expanding access through pre-apprenticeship programs will be critical to fostering a stronger workforce by including those who have too often been left out and helping them thrive in these high-demand careers.

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.

recommendations continue on next page



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.



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.

➤ Recommendations: **Leveraging Lead Service Line Replacement for Workforce Inclusion and Growth**

The following recommendations present a framework for delivering more equitable, efficient, and effective lead service line replacement (LSLR) across Illinois.

As LSLR initiatives roll out statewide, there is an unprecedented opportunity to align infrastructure development with broader goals of workforce diversity, inclusion, and community engagement.

Whether by promoting the use of apprentices, mandating hiring from disadvantaged communities, or integrating community outreach efforts, these recommendations seek to foster

long-term workforce development and strengthen local economies. By implementing these strategies, Illinois can transform its LSLR program from a public health necessity into a model for inclusive economic growth, community empowerment, and the development of a sustainable, skilled workforce.

FUNDING

Recommendation: Increase Funding for LSLR	
Actor	Action Step
Illinois General Assembly	Dedicate funding for LSLR to enable more contracts, more hiring, and more opportunities to bring new, diverse talent into the LSLR workforce.

CONTRACTING

Recommendation: Implement Block-By-Block Contracts	
Community Water Supplies	Complete LSLR block-by-block when possible to create economies of scale and more opportunities for apprentices to participate in the work.

Recommendation: Embed Inclusion in Bid Documents	
Community Water Supplies	Include all diversity and inclusion goals in bid documents to ensure these are fundamental to project requirements.
Community Water Supplies	Include in project contracts requirements for utilizing small, minority-owned, and women-owned businesses, veteran-owned businesses, and businesses owned by persons with a disability (henceforth referred to as D/M/WBE and VOSB firms) to promote broader participation and access to LSLR contracts.
State of Illinois	Require that D/M/WBE and VOSB firms are utilized as subcontractors or prime contractors, ensuring equitable access to LSLR contracts.

HIRING FROM DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

Recommendation: Hire from Disadvantaged Communities	
State of Illinois	Mandate that contractors and subcontractors hire women and individuals from socially and economically disadvantaged communities, as defined by publicly funded workforce programs such as the Climate Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program and Illinois Works.
Community Water Supplies	Ensure that hiring practices align with requirements in subsections (n) and (o) of the LSLR and Notification Act pertaining to good faith efforts around utilization of D/M/WBE and VOSB firms.

ACCESS TO TRAINING AND EQUIPMENT

Recommendation: Support D/M/WBE and VOSB firms	
State of Illinois	Support D/M/WBE and VOSB firms in competing for contracts by providing training in bidding, project management, and business operations.
Community Water Supplies	Facilitate access to training and support programs for D/M/WBE and VOSB firms, ensuring these firms can compete effectively for LSLR contracts.

UTILIZATION OF APPRENTICES

Recommendation: Integrate Apprentices into LSLR Projects	
State of Illinois	Encourage the integration of apprentices into LSLR projects as feasible.
Community Water Supplies	Encourage the integration of apprentices into LSLR projects as feasible.
Contractors	Work closely with State-funded pre-apprentice training providers to source and hire candidates, maintaining collaboration to meet diversity and equity goals.

Recommendation: Reduce Barriers to Participation in Apprenticeship Programs	
State of Illinois	Provide funding and support to help individuals from disinvested communities overcome barriers to participation in pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Recommendation: Coordinate Community Outreach	
State of Illinois	Provide dedicated funding for Community Outreach Coordinators based on contract size.
Community Water Supplies	Establish roles for Community Outreach Coordinators on each LSLR project to act as liaisons.

SUPPORT AND OVERSIGHT

Recommendation: Track Progress in Meeting Goals	
State of Illinois	Provide support to project owners to track and report on the success of contractors in meeting diversity goals.
Community Water Supplies	Convene regular meetings with contractors and training providers to monitor progress toward diversity and equity goals, including conducting regular check-ins and unscheduled site visits, and adjust strategies as needed.

Recommendation: Promote Opportunities Statewide	
State of Illinois	Promote and provide information about LSLR opportunities statewide, focusing on 1) reaching contractors in smaller communities, especially D/M/WBE and VOSB firms; 2) publicizing distant opportunities for firms willing to travel.