

Building Back Better and Advancing Equity with Green Jobs

For too long, the economy has only worked for a few. As a result of current and historic economic marginalization and exploitation, communities of color and those with low incomes, as well as others with marginalized identities, have been left out or left behind in building sustainable livelihoods. Millions of people work in jobs with low wages, few or no benefits or protections, and no pathways for career advancement. Women, people with disabilities, opportunity youth, and people impacted by the criminal legal system face especially egregious hiring discrimination and inequitable employment opportunities. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) workers, youth and young adults, and Latinx workers all experience disproportionately high unemployment. Building back requires solutions rooted in economic justice.

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) thanks Congress and the Biden-Harris Administration for their commitment to improving economic security for all through the Build Back Better framework and proposed once-in-a-generation investments in public employment. Subsidized employment is a proven workforce intervention with a decades-long history of putting people to work in economic downturns and redressing labor market inequities when the economy is healthy. As such, the administration and Congress must continue to prioritize subsidized employment in the Build Back Better framework to advance an economic recovery agenda that centers equity and prosperity for all.

Here's what you need to know about proposed investments in public and subsidized employment in Build Back Better:

Green investments create high-quality employment opportunities

Alongside continued economic hardship, the climate crisis is a real, persistent, and imminent threat **disproportionately felt** by BIPOC communities and among people with low incomes. Recognizing this, Congress and the Biden-Harris Administration have proposed a historic **Civilian Conservation Corps program**, \$5 billion of which will flow directly to workforce development programs aimed at supporting people who historically face economic marginalization in getting connected to work.

This groundbreaking climate workforce investment will employ over 300,000 people in **paid job opportunities** like apprenticeships and subsidized jobs through five programs—a new youth employment program, the Reentry Employment Opportunity program, YouthBuild, Jobs Corps, and pre-apprenticeships and registered apprenticeships. These programs will prioritize individuals from communities with low incomes and communities experiencing climate crises as well as the programs that serve them. Workforce investments will also create opportunities for existing and new programs to serve more people in new places across the country as states and cities model federal best practices.

1. A youth employment program - \$350 million

Our nation's post-pandemic success hinges on an economic recovery targeting those hit hardest by the COVID downturn and **overlooked by the pre-pandemic economy**: children, youth, and their families, particularly in BIPOC communities. In service of this goal, the framework proposes investing \$350 million over five years to

provide in-school and out-of-school youth with paid work experiences at public agencies and nonprofits like community-based organizations. This new program is designed to prepare participants for high-quality, unsubsidized employment opportunities in industry sectors or occupations related to climate resilience or mitigation. In addition, it will help participants prepare for postsecondary enrollment or entrance into a registered apprenticeship program. This funding also provides for supportive services so youth can meet their basic needs as they participate in and complete the paid work experience. Throughout implementation, administrators must scale this program to guarantee access to quality jobs for young people who have been historically excluded from economic opportunity.

2. Reentry Employment Opportunity program - \$1 billion

One in three adults have an arrest or conviction record that creates additional structural barriers too often precluding them from finding quality employment. Subsidized employment and transitional jobs are a proven intervention for supporting and creating pathways to employment for **people impacted by the criminal legal system** and returning from incarceration. New investments of \$1 billion over five years in the Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO) program aim to create and align high-quality employment opportunities in industry sectors or occupations related to climate resilience or mitigation for people impacted by the criminal legal system. Subsidized employment models that are a part of a career pathway—such as pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, transitional jobs, and other types of integrated education and training models—can help those with criminal legal histories find meaningful employment and **reduce further contact with the criminal legal system**. Subsidized employment is a model employment program for REO grantees for just this reason. When implemented well, subsidized employment can also drive **job quality and career advancement**.

3. YouthBuild - \$450 million

As many as **10 million young people** need the opportunity a subsidized job provides. The pandemic has devastated the economic outlook for youth and young adults, particularly Black, Indigenous, and other youth of color. Even as the nation enjoyed record low unemployment between 2016 and early 2020, young people experienced unemployment rates twice as high as the national average. As the economy begins to recover, employment rates among Black and Latinx workers continue to lag relative to their white counterparts—reflecting a consistent pattern going back generations. Young people need a leg up now to get their first foothold in the labor market.

The framework proposes \$450 million over five years to support high-quality employment opportunities in industry sectors or occupations related to climate resilience or mitigation. These investments will also improve and expand access to services, stipends, wages, and benefits for YouthBuild’s community-based pre-apprenticeship participants.

4. Job Corps - \$450 million

Over **4 million young** people remained disconnected from school and work at the beginning of the pandemic, with Black, Latinx, and Native American young people experiencing far higher rates of disconnection. **Research** shows that subsidized employment is particularly effective for people with minimal work experience—including youth and young adults. Employment programs are critical for youth and young adults, and particularly young adults of color, because they face staggering rates of joblessness that could have lifelong negative consequences for their earnings and housing stability without intervention.

Proposed investments of \$450 million over five years will support high-quality employment opportunities in climate resilience or mitigation occupations or industry sectors. This funding will also improve and expand access to allowances and services, like the Job Corps residential program, and increase wage floors for all participants.

5. Pre-apprenticeships and registered apprenticeships - \$1.9 billion

Apprenticeships are highly effective workforce training programs with overwhelming bipartisan support. These jobs are family-sustaining opportunities, supporting a worker and their family's economic security. However, long-standing inequities in apprenticeship participation and completion mean not all workers are able to benefit from these programs. Developing new apprenticeship pathways in non-traditional industries such as climate resilience **creates new pathways** to economic opportunity for people and communities who have been left on the sidelines.

New investments of nearly \$2 billion in pre-apprenticeship and registered apprenticeship programs present the opportunity to expand "apprenticeable" industries and high-quality career pathways. Diverse pre-apprenticeships and registered apprenticeships have the potential to help people access a career path that offers living wages and benefits. The framework specifically outlines funds to aid in creating partnerships with community-based organizations; targeting non-traditional industries and occupations; and prioritizing the participation of people with barriers to employment, including individuals with disabilities or non-traditional apprenticeship populations like women or BIPOC.

New and increased investments will support pathways to good jobs for all

In addition to targeted investments in paid employment opportunities like subsidized jobs, **the Build Back Better framework will increase the U.S. Department of Labor's annual spending on workforce development by 50 percent for each of the next five years.** BBB makes numerous investments in our country's public workforce system through funding increases to support high-quality education, training, and workforce programs that create equitable pathways to employment for millions of people and their families. A federal public service jobs program grounded in the green economy will deliver on decarbonization targets while investing in the economic empowerment of people in marginalized communities. The Build Back Better framework is the first step in an economic recovery that redresses past entrenched inequities and charts a promising new path toward economic security for BIPOC communities.