



City of Seattle

# Priority Hire

*Updated May 2021*



# Priority Hire

## *Undoing racism through economic equity*

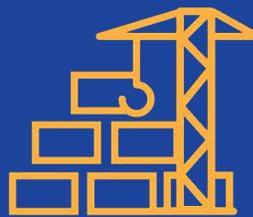
The City of Seattle's Priority Hire program puts people living in economically distressed communities to work on the City's construction projects. By focusing on the entire worker development process – from pre-training to construction careers – Priority Hire creates economic opportunities and invests tax dollars back into the city's communities. The program works by:



Recruiting  
diverse workers



Training workers



Helping workers  
get hired



Giving workers  
ongoing support

Nearly 80% of job openings in Washington through 2021 — particularly those with living wages and upward growth — will require postsecondary education. Priority Hire offers a pathway to these jobs for those living in economically distressed communities, people of color and women: construction apprenticeship.

Starting <b>construction apprenticeships</b> pay <b>\$18 – \$34</b> an hour	Entry-level <b>healthcare</b> jobs pay <b>\$12 – \$18</b> an hour	Entry-level <b>information technology</b> jobs pay <b>\$13 – \$21</b> an hour
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Sources: Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County, 2018; City of Seattle, 2020.

The City works closely with stakeholders, including community groups, construction labor unions, contractors, training providers and other regional partners to sustain a successful Priority Hire program.

For more information on Priority Hire, go to

[www.seattle.gov/priorityhire](http://www.seattle.gov/priorityhire)

# Achieving Priority Hire Goals

The City began Priority Hire with a pilot on the Elliott Bay Seawall Project in late 2013. Through 2019, Priority Hire had 39 active or completed projects with 4.6 million combined hours.

Since late 2013, workers living in economically distressed communities earned

**\$45.4 million**

This is **\$20.1 million** more in wages than before Priority Hire.

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Since 2016, the City invested

**\$4 million**  
**in recruitment, training  
and support services**

for workers living in economically distressed ZIP codes, women and people of color

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**274** Priority Hire individuals recruited and placed into construction by community organizations

**659** Trained pre-apprentices and Priority Hire clients placed in construction

**228** Priority Hire individuals who received targeted retention support still working at least one year after services began

**174** Individuals obtained or regained their driver's licenses

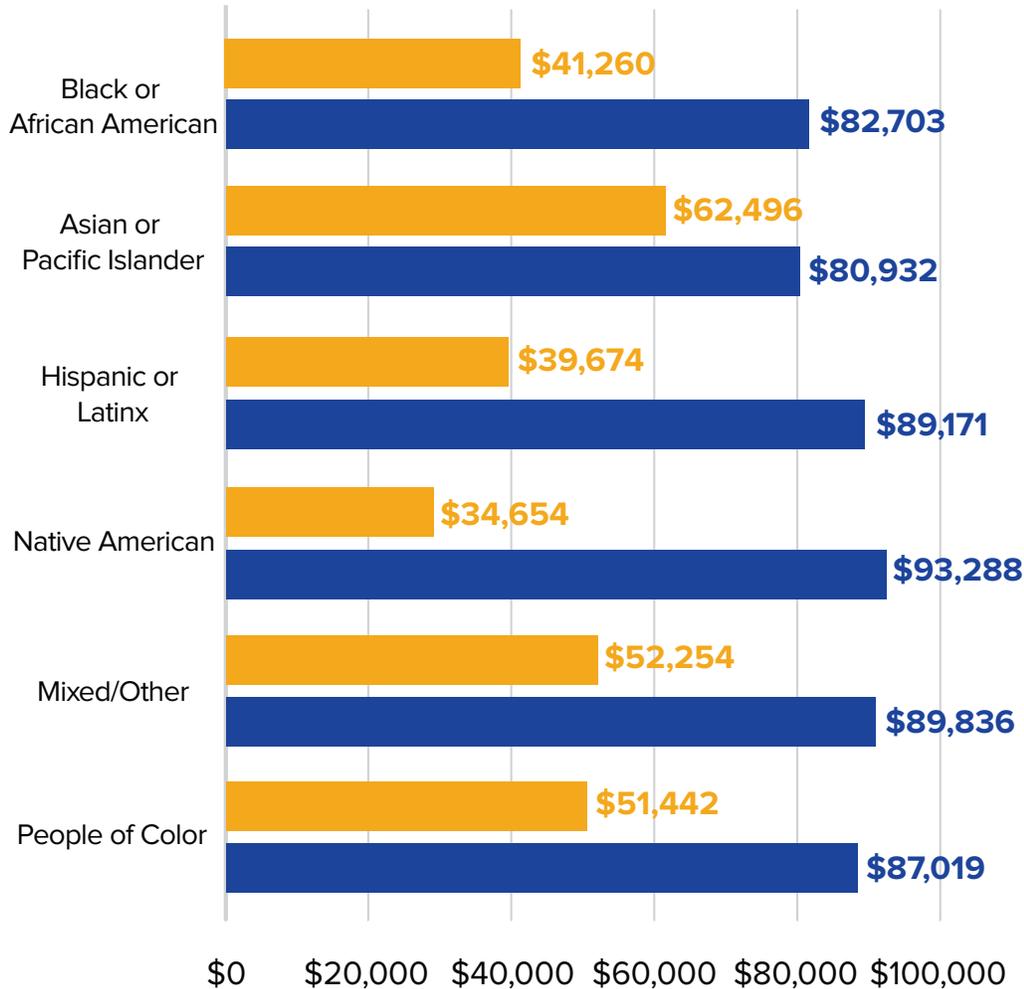
**1,200+** Workers who received Acceptable Work Site training to prevent bullying, hazing and harassment

Source: City of Seattle, 2021.



# Closing the wage gap

Priority Hire helps offset wage gaps among workers of color and women. These workers earn more working on Priority Hire projects than the regional average income for people of color and women.



**AVERAGE ANNUAL INCOME IN SEATTLE METROPOLITAN REGION (2018)**

**ESTIMATED AVERAGE ANNUAL INCOME ON PRIORITY HIRE PROJECTS (2020)**

*Sources: National Equity Atlas, Advancing Equity in Seattle, 2021; City of Seattle, 2021. The estimated average income on Priority Hire projects is based on 2020 wages divided by hours, multiplied by the 1,920 hours a construction worker is likely to perform in a year.*



# Priority Hire in Action



## Emelia

One of Emelia's first construction jobs was to Climate Pledge Arena, a public-private partnership project with Priority Hire requirements. As an ironworker apprentice, Emelia worked on the Arena about a year, earning over \$62,000, plus benefits. Originally from American Samoa, Emelia had never imagined working in construction, especially as an ironworker. But she loves it! "I'm gaining confidence every day. I love my career choice. Busting rebar on my first job was brutal — mentally and physically challenging. It was go, go, go all day, every day. Once I got through that, and it didn't break me, I knew this was the career for me." One of Emelia's favorite things about construction are the living wages; for the first time, she doesn't have to worry about finances. In fact, she's saving money!



## John

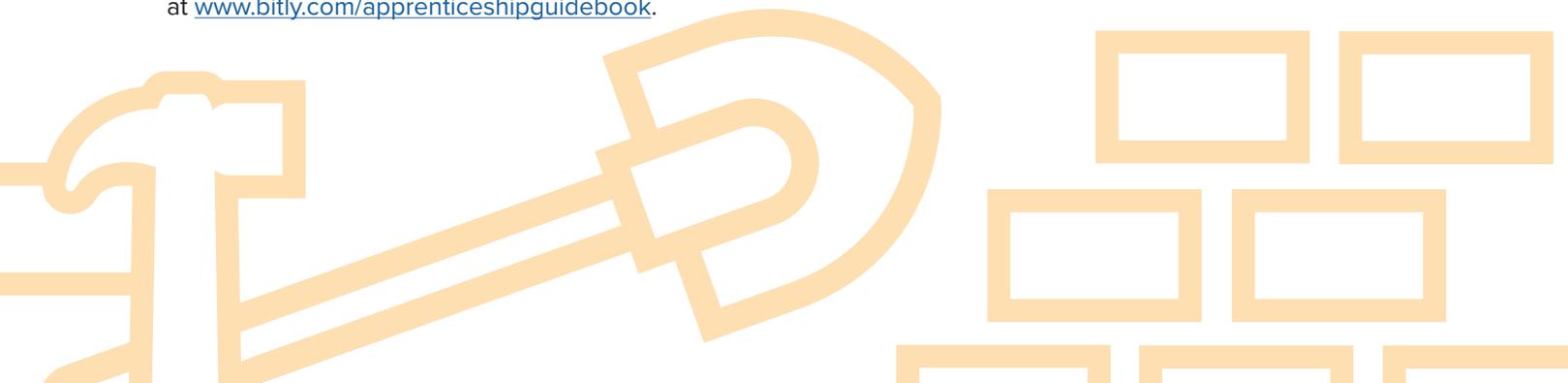
John is a journey laborer who graduated from the PACE pre-apprenticeship program. Prior to entering construction, John spent time in a correctional facility. After his release, PACE provided the opportunity to train for a living-wage career, and Priority Hire provided the opportunity to work. John started working for Gary Merlino Construction on a Priority Hire project in the summer of 2017, and has continued his career with them ever since. They love his drive, reliability and work ethic. John is now working on a pipe crew, honing his craft and developing leadership skills. John loves everything about construction, from working with his hands to building the city he lives in. He now enjoys taking vacations, cruising in his new vintage car and saving money. His next goal is to buy a home. John's proud of his accomplishments and is loving his freedom, his job and his new life.



## Vianeth

Vianeth is a cement mason apprentice working on a Priority Hire project. Though she's new to construction, she's used to hard work, having spent a decade in the medical field. But her medical career wasn't what she expected — she wanted more. She heard about construction, and was attracted to its physicality, better pay, benefits and room for career growth. That's why she applied to and completed the Cement Mason's pre-apprenticeship. Now an apprentice, she is learning the trade, earning great wages and getting benefits. Vianeth could not be happier with her decision to transition her career. She started at nearly \$27 an hour, with no previous construction experience. This wage is 50% higher than other entry-level positions in the region.

For more information on starting a construction career, check out the Construction Apprenticeship Guidebook at [www.bitly.com/apprenticeshipguidebook](http://www.bitly.com/apprenticeshipguidebook).





**Seattle**

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