

Why Continued Funding for the UTIP Program Is Essential for Alberta's Skilled Trades Future

As Alberta continues to face critical shortages in skilled trades, the need to invest in proven, effective training models has never been clearer. One such model—union training centres—has been delivering exceptional results for decades. With state-of-the-art facilities, industry-recognized instruction, and deep-rooted connections to employers and communities, these centres are uniquely positioned to train the next generation of tradespeople. Continued funding for the Union Training and Innovation Program (UTIP) is not just a smart investment—it's an essential one.

Union training centres like the Electrical Industry Training Centre of Alberta (EITCA), UA Local 488's Alberta Pipe Trades College, and the IUOE Local 955 Training Centre provide more than just technical instruction. They offer real-world learning environments led by experienced, union-certified tradespeople who understand the standards of excellence demanded on Alberta job sites. These centres are also deeply embedded in the communities they serve and work with a wide range of partners to build inclusive pathways into the trades.

Through partnerships with the Trades Winds to Success program, union training centres have been instrumental in preparing Indigenous Albertans for careers in construction and the mechanical trades. By combining cultural support with pre-apprenticeship training, these initiatives provide long-term career opportunities and help diversify the workforce.

The same is true for veterans, who often face a difficult transition to civilian employment. Programs like Helmets to Hardhats Canada (H2H) work directly with union training centres to connect former military personnel to apprenticeships in the skilled trades. These partnerships respect veterans' unique experience and provide them with a clear, supportive path into a new and meaningful career.

Union training centres have also embraced their role in supporting newcomers to Canada. In particular, many centres have stepped up to train displaced Ukrainians who have arrived under the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) program. These individuals, many of whom have technical backgrounds, are given access to upgrading, safety tickets, and mentorship to help them integrate into Alberta's labour market.

Beyond community partnerships, union training centres play a strategic role in recruiting and retaining young Albertans in the skilled trades. The Educational Partnership Foundation (TEPF)'s high school Skilled Trades Program gives students hands-on experience and early exposure to trades like electrical, plumbing, and welding. For many students, this is their first opportunity to work with tools, explore the trades, and envision a future in the industry.

These are not abstract successes. They're measurable. Union training centres consistently produce apprentices who complete their programs at higher rates, pass certification exams with better results, and stay in the industry longer. The combination of wraparound supports, mentorship, and on-the-job opportunities is what makes these programs so effective.

With Alberta's economy continuing to grow and infrastructure demands on the rise, we can't afford to take our foot off the gas. We need more tradespeople—not just to meet today's needs, but to build tomorrow's economy. The UTIP program has been critical in allowing training centres to expand facilities, update equipment, and deliver innovative programming that keeps pace with new technologies and industry standards.

Cutting or reducing UTIP funding would be shortsighted. Instead, this is the time to double down on what works. Union training centres are not just pipelines into the trades—they are pillars of our communities, engines of economic mobility, and champions of diversity and inclusion in construction.

Supporting the UTIP program is not just about funding training—it's about building a workforce that reflects the values and strength of Alberta itself.

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