



**ILLINOIS WORKS**  
Pre-Apprenticeship Program

# 2023 ILWPP ANNUAL GRANTEE CONFERENCE

OCTOBER 2 - 3, 2023

DOUBLE TREE | BLOOMINGTON, IL



# Monday, October 2, 2023

**11:30 AM – Registration Opens – Outside Brickyard 1 & 2**

**12:00 PM – 1:00 PM Welcome Lunch & Keynote Presentation – Brickyard 1 & 2**

**Welcome Remarks** – Dr. Norman Ruano, PhD, Deputy Director, Office of Illinois Works

**Conference Icebreaker** – Steve Scott, Grant Manager, Illinois Works Pre-apprenticeship Program

## **Keynote Presentation: Registered Apprenticeship Programs in Illinois**

During this session, attendees will hear from the Illinois State Director for U.S. DOL regarding the strategy her team and U.S. DOL at large are advancing to pursue the goal of increasing under-represented populations in construction and the building trades.

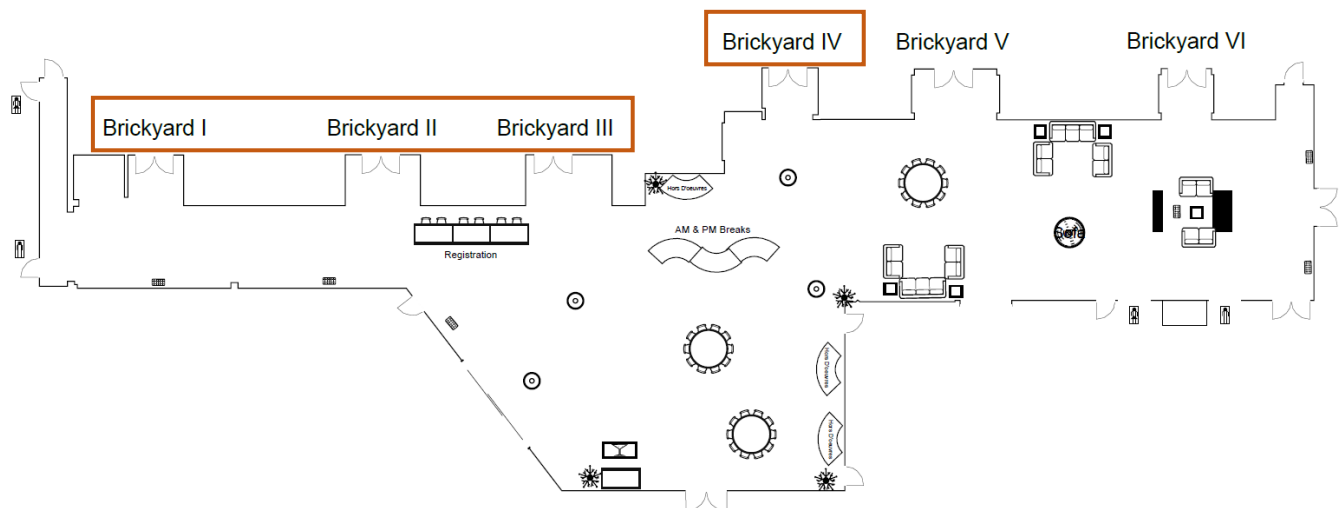
*Keynote Presenter:*

### **Debra Cremeens-Rinsinger, Illinois State Director, United States Department of Labor**

Debra Cremeens-Risinger, was born and raised in a small rural village in Central Illinois. Debra completed two registered apprenticeship programs, the first with the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 649 in Peoria, Illinois where she just received her 35-year pin. The second, Registered Apprenticeship was as Apprenticeship and Training Representative (ATR) with the Office of Apprenticeship.

She has served for 27 years with the Office of Apprenticeship, first as an Apprenticeship & Training Representative (ATR) in Springfield, IL. Debra accepted the State Director position, in Nebraska for 6 years. She then accepted the State Director in Missouri for 2 years before accepting the State Director position in Illinois.

Debra is passionate about providing opportunities and resources to companies who need to develop skilled workforce to meet their needs to be the most productive they can be. This can only happen when we provide the Registered Apprenticeship Sponsors (companies); applicants across all different backgrounds, races, genders, sexual orientations, and abilities are pursuing career paths that start with apprenticeship. Recognizing that diversity is a cornerstone of apprenticeship.



**1:00 PM – Break**

**1:15 PM – 2:15 PM - Session I**

**Topic A: Building Inclusive Environments for Long-Term Support – Brickyard 4**

Developing an internal culture of inclusivity is essential to participant success during and after pre-apprenticeship programs. Once complete, pre-apprenticeship graduates still need a network and supportive culture to succeed in their careers. However, building a culture that lasts beyond program completion can be a challenge. In this session Sandra Brudent, Case Manager of Chicago Women in Trades will share her strategies to build lasting graduate networks.

*Presenter:*

**Sandra Brudent, Case Manager, Chicago Women in Trades**

Sandra Brudent is the Case Manager of the Women Build Illinois Program at Chicago Women in Trades (CWIT). Women Build Illinois is a pre-apprenticeship training program designed to help women enter union and non-union construction trades jobs. Sandra received her Bachelor's degree in Applied Psychology with a minor in Criminal Justice from University of Illinois – Chicago. She gained experience as a Case Manager through her work running an employment program for the inner-city youth located on the West Side of Chicago and as a Community Violence Support Service Case Manager helping victims of violent crimes in Chicago's Austin neighborhood. In addition to her professional work, she was integral in developing an intensive mentoring program, LOTUS, focused on empowering young women in civic engagement and personal growth. Sandra loves her work with CWIT, especially helping women succeed in breaking barriers in a male dominant field, because it has been said: *"This is a man's world, but it wouldn't be nothing without a woman or a girl!"*

**Topic B: Illinois Works Pre-apprenticeship: An Equity-Focused Program - Brickyard 3**

Diversity, Inclusion, Belonging, & Equity (DIBE) is at the foundation of ILWPP program culture. By the end of this session, attendees will have a greater understanding of the DIBE model and how to implement this model in their organizations and program participants.

*Presenters:*

**Candace Dickerson, M.Ed, Center for Governmental Studies**

Candace Dickerson, M.Ed., joined the Center for Governmental Studies in March of 2021. At the center, her work concentrates on workforce development policy and practices with a focus on apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships. She is a dedicated and driven workforce professional with a mission to foster an inclusive and equitable labor market for all. As a state partner with the IL Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), her role is also to provide technical assistance to grantees, employers, and any other interested party that is seeking guidance on implementing DEIA strategies. Previously, she was an Apprenticeship Specialist at Prairie State College She has a strong background working with special populations including the underrepresented/underserved, out-of-school youth, minorities, and first-generation college students. Candace earned a Master of Science degree in Higher Education-Administration and Leadership and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science, from Louisiana State University.

**Dr. Brian Richard, PhD, Assistant Director, Workforce Development, Center for Governmental Studies**

Brian Richard leads the Center for Governmental Studies' Workforce Development and Economic Analysis team. At CGS, his most recent work concentrates on the evaluation of state and local workforce development and training programs. He also has extensive experience estimating the impacts of economic development projects, local retail and industrial analysis, and research into the health of regional economies. Recent projects include an evaluation of WIOA Title I programs in Colorado, the legislatively mandated report Apprenticeship and Work-based Learning in Illinois, an evaluation of local workforce boards training expenditures, the economic impacts of Illinois' community college system and the Illinois defense industry. Previously, Brian was an Assistant Professor in the Department of Economic and Workforce Development at the University of Southern Mississippi where he taught courses focused on research methods, economic development finance, and business recruiting and retention.

**2:15 – Break**

**2:30 PM – 3:30 PM - Session II**

**Topic A: Creating an IWRS Data Plan – Brickyard 4**

Data management in any grant-funded program is essential to program improvement and success. However, data can only be used in this way if it is accurate and up to date. In this session, attendees will hear directly from Brittany Jones, Program Coordinator at Bethel Family Resource Center on how she develops and implements a data management plan that keeps BFRC in good standing all year long.

*Presenter:*

**Brittany Jones, LSW, Program Coordinator, Bethel Family Resource Center**

Brittany Jones has over 8 years of case management experience and has recently been promoted to Program Coordinator at Bethel Family Resource Center (BFRC). As a Program Coordinator, she brings her years of experience and expertise to BFRC's Illinois Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program. Over the past several years, Brittany has dedicated her professional career to not only advocating for others but seeking legislative help for the homeless, youth aging out of foster care, elderly rights, and more. Brittany is a licensed social worker with a Master of Social Work degree from Governor State University and a Bachelor's degree from Illinois State University in Criminal Justice.

**Topic B: Pioneering a Diverse Future: Harnessing Past Cohorts to Champion Inclusion in Construction – Brickyard 3**

In 2022, Lumity joined the ILWPP network as a high-school based program. However, after challenges working with that model, they opted to go back to the drawing board and reinvent their program in Maywood, IL. That change put them on the fast track to success achieving their annual outcome metrics in a single cohort. Attendees to this session will hear from Director of Programs, Asia Ousley on how Lumity learned from challenges and made their second year a success.

*Presenter:*

**Asia Ousley, Director of Programs, Lumity**

A visionary, community leader, avid traveler, Asia Ousley is a dedicated asset to her community on a national, state, and local level. Leveraging her extensive social network, she has made a significant impact by establishing strategic partnerships that connect underrepresented black and brown young adults with previously inaccessible career opportunities. These initiatives are transforming how employers engage with and retain today's workforce, creating a seamless journey for young adults entering corporate industries.

**3:30 PM – Break & Afternoon Snack**

**3:45 PM – 5:00 PM - Popcorn Sessions – Brickyard 1 & 2**

In this interactive session each table will feature a topic and subject matter expert ready to provide a 15-minute lesson. After 15 minutes, attendees will “POP” to another table of their choice. Attendees need to move quick though because each table has limited seats! There will be four 15-minute rounds.

**Topic A: Pipefitters Apprenticeship Programs**

**Jami Carver, Local 99 Office Professional**

Jami Carver is the Training Coordinator for Local 99 Plumbers and Pipefitters Apprenticeship Training Program. Jami started as an apprentice of Local 99 herself and worked in the trade for 13 years. Eventually attaining a position as Office Professional for the Local 99 Apprenticeship Program. She has been in the office for over 9 years. The program has more than doubled in the last two years and now requires a full time Training Coordinator. Jami accepted the position as full time Training Coordinator in August 2023.

**Topic B: Electrical Apprenticeship Programs**

**Les Parker, Training Director JATC Bloomington**

Les Parker has been the Training Director with the Bloomington-Normal JATC for 18 months. Prior to accepting the role of Training Director, Les was the General Foreman for Zeller Electric where he served for 18 years. In May of 2001 he started his electrical apprenticeship program, and I went through the 5 year Inside Commercial Wireman Apprenticeship at the BNJATC and became a Journeyman Inside Wireman. Over his 20+ year career, he has worked on projects across McLean County and the surrounding area as an apprentice, Journeyman Wireman, and Foreman.

**Topic C: Outreach & Recruitment**

**Cristian Garcia-Velazquez, Outreach & Recruitment Coordinator, Rincon Family Services**

Cristian Garcia-Velazquez serves as the Outreach & Recruitment Coordinator for Rincon Family Services. Following his graduation from the University of Illinois -Chicago, Cristian began his career in the recruiting industry where he strengthened his skills in identifying and engaging potential candidates for employment opportunities. He brought his talent and experience to Rincon Family Services (RFS) in 2023 where he has successfully recruited participants for their ILWPP program. Through his dedication, Cristian has helped RFS surpassed their first-year enrollment goal and maintain good standing with ILWPP.

## **Topic D: Working with Young Adults & School Districts**

### ***Eric Hill, Executive Director, SkillsUSA***

Eric Hill serves as the executive director for SkillsUSA Illinois, Inc., a state-wide organization of nearly 10,000 students and instructors in career and technical education. Hill was appointed in 2015 to lead a staff that provides services to over 150 chapters (educational institutions). In this role, Eric focuses on cultivating strategic partnerships to develop workforce solutions. Eric has almost 20 years of experience with SkillsUSA, including being a state and national competitor, state officer, active alumnus, business and industry partner, and technical committee member. Eric is based out of the SkillsUSA Illinois State Office in Pekin and has a robust business and industry partner network. Outside of SkillsUSA, Eric is an entrepreneur owning several local companies and serves the local community as an elected school board member, chamber of commerce board member, and Pekin Marigold Festival committee member.

## **Topic E: Communities of Practice**

### ***Dr. Vera Lee Robinson, MPA, MATD, EdD, NCCER Master Trainer & ILW Program Coach***

Vera Lee Robinson has many years of experience as a higher-education, public, and non-profit sector professional. Her passion is advocating for success within underrepresented, and re-entry populations. She leads and coaches' community organizations, supports apprenticeship initiatives, develops workforce partnerships, and establishes construction training pathways for the non-traditional learner.

## **Topic F: TradesFutures MC3 Updates**

### ***Jack Mackuse, Data Manager, TradesFutures***

Jack Mackuse is the Data Manager at TradesFutures, a non-profit corporation organized for the purpose of developing, promoting, and improving Apprenticeship Readiness Programs ("ARPs"). Jack graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Economics from Wake Forest University in North Carolina in May 2021. He began his career in the Department of Education and Research at North America's Building Trades Unions (NABTU) in Fall 2021 and transitioned to TradesFutures in Spring 2023. He oversees the collection, tracking and, reporting of Apprenticeship Readiness Program participant data including participant demographics, outcomes, and other key metrics. Originally from the Philadelphia-area, Jack now resides in Washington, DC.

## **Topic G: NCCER Updates**

### ***Brad Kibbe, Senior Workforce Development Manager NCCER***

Brad is a Senior Workforce Development Manager with NCCER. He brings extensive knowledge of NCCER as an end user from his previous work as the Executive Director for the Florida Masonry Apprenticeship and Educational Foundation (FMAEF) and a former high school and apprenticeship instructor. Brad's experience in CTE and the construction industry has led to the development of strong partnerships between LEA's, colleges, industry, and corrections to provide nationally recognized articulation programs that train and employ the future construction leaders.

Brad is a graduate of the carpentry program at Blackstone Valley Technical School in MA, earned his contractor's license at 18, and owned his own construction company at twenty. Brad was a VICA national medalist in carpentry in 1989 and earned his BS in education at the age of 48.



## **Topic H: Supporting Participants Between Graduation & DOL RAP Acceptance**

### **Hector Tello, Hispanic American Construction Industry Association**

Hector Tello is the Sustainability Program Manager at HACIA and has been with the organization since October of 2022. He has been hard at work helping his program graduates find long term employment. Hector believes in an open communication line with all HACIA stakeholders and especially with his participants!

### **5:00 PM – Break**

### **5:15 PM – 7:15 PM – Networking Event – Outside of Brickyard 1 & 2**

Join ILW staff, fellow grantees, and speakers in a relaxed setting to catch up and share stories from the day. Heavy hors d'oeuvres will be served and cash bar will be available.

# **Tuesday, October 3, 2023**

### **8:30 AM – 9:15 AM - 2024 Administrator Update Meeting – Brickyard 4**

Each year, ILWPP updates the Grantee Manual and the Illinois Works Reporting System (IWRS) to adjust to program changes and address suggestions and concerns from grantees. During this session, Deputy Director Ruano will share key updates to the Grantee Manual and IWRS, then gather feedback from attendees on desired improvements to the data system.

**Program Administrators and one team member who is well versed in IWRS per organization should attend this session**

*Presenter:*

### **Dr. Norman Ruano, PhD, Deputy Director, Office of Illinois Works**

Norman Ruano, the Deputy Director of the Office of Illinois Works, has worked for over 20 years in the creation and implementation of construction workforce development programs for underserved community members and training programs for minority, women, and veteran-owned construction businesses. Through high quality and outcome focused programs, Dr. Ruano has opened doors of opportunity for thousands of Illinois residents. Before joining City Colleges of Chicago and subsequently St. Augustine College where he oversaw workforce development operations, Dr. Ruano held management positions in the medical technology and logistics sectors of the economy.

Norman Ruano holds a Ph.D. in sociology from Loyola University Chicago, and a Master's degree in sociology along with a Bachelor's degree in social studies from DePaul University.

### **9:15 AM – Break**

## **9:30 AM – 10:30 AM - Continental Breakfast & Keynote**

### **Changing the Construction Landscape: Women in Construction – Brickyard 1 & 2**

Women have long experienced discrimination in construction and the building trades based on misguided beliefs and stereotypes. In Illinois, women still make up only 5% of apprentices in the building trades, but the barriers that have long kept women out of this industry have begun to dissolve. In this facilitated conversation we will hear from those working to change the landscape of construction for women on the ground, with advocacy, and through federal requirements.

#### **Keynote Panelists:**

#### **Sandra Sigala, President, Painters Local 607, Chairwoman & Founding Member, Trades Women United**

Sandra Sigala has been a member of Painters Local 607 in Rockford for 18 years and currently serves as President. She is also the Chairwoman and Founding Member of Tradeswomen United of NW Illinois; a group designed to recruit and retain women in the building trades. In addition to her work in Illinois, she acts as a Group Leader and spokesperson for the Lean In Program through Tradeswomen Build Nations, a division of North American Building Trades Unions. This program provides supportive connections between trades women across the nation.

#### **Jayne Vellinga, Executive Director, Chicago Women in Trades**

Jayne Vellinga has been a leader in the field of workforce development for more than thirty years, assuming the role of Executive Director for Chicago Women in Trades in 2009 after ten years of service as the agency's Director of Programs. To advance women's participation in construction and other nontraditional occupations, Jayne has overseen a large-scale expansion of program services, the development of a comprehensive technical assistance program, the acquisition of a workshop facility, and the establishment of pre-apprenticeship and welding training programs. In addition to authorship of downloadable career education guides, curriculum and toolkits, Jayne has provided technical assistance to unions, industry leaders, community organizations, educational institutions and workforce agencies, and has presented at numerous conferences and meetings nationally and locally. Prior to joining the staff of Chicago Women in Trades, Jayne spent 13 years developing and delivering job training and placement services to Southeast Asian refugees.

#### **Meredith Thefford, Apprenticeship & Training Representative, United States Department of Labor**

Meredith Thefford is an Apprenticeship & Training Representative with the USDOL and in her second apprenticeship program through the Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration JATC for Apprenticeship & Training Administration. In 2007, Meredith completed the Chicago Women in Trades Technical Opportunities program and went on to join Pipefitters Local 597.

Prior to employment with the Department of Labor, Meredith was the lead instructor for Chicago Women in Trades Illinois Works Pre-apprenticeship program, Women Build Illinois.



**10:30 AM – Break**

**10:45 AM – 11:45 AM - Session I -**

**Topic A: Supporting the Transition of ILW Graduates and their Success – Brickyard 3**

Transitions in ILWPP are where the rubber meets the road. In 2023, ILWPP launched an initiative to increase the number of participant transitions to registered apprenticeship programs and strengthen grantee contacts with RAPs and employers. In keeping with this goal, ILWPP will debut a new internal team in 2024 – ILWPP Career Services. By the end of this session, attendees will understand the impact of the current transition intervention and the role the new ILWPP team will play.

*Presenter:*

**Dr. Norman Ruano, PhD, Deputy Director, Office of Illinois Works**

Norman Ruano, the Deputy Director of the Office of Illinois Works, has worked for over 20 years in the creation and implementation of construction workforce development programs for underserved community members and training programs for minority, women, and veteran-owned construction businesses. Through high quality and outcome focused programs, Dr. Ruano has opened doors of opportunity for thousands of Illinois residents. Before joining City Colleges of Chicago and subsequently St. Augustine College where he oversaw workforce development operations, Dr. Ruano held management positions in the medical technology and logistics sectors of the economy.

Norman Ruano holds a Ph.D. in sociology from Loyola University Chicago, and a Master's degree in sociology along with a Bachelor's degree in social studies from DePaul University.

**Topic B: ILWPP Intake Process – Brickyard 4**

The ILWPP Intake process begins with the application and ends with enrollment. During this period grantee staff are focused on evaluating eligibility and applicant needs, but most importantly building rapport with potential participants. In the session, attendees will take an in-depth walk through the intake process and test out their rapport building skills in small group activities.

*Presenter:*

**Christine Flynn, MSW, MPA, Grant Management Analyst, Office of Illinois Works**

Christine Flynn is a consultant through NIU's Center for Governmental Studies that has been dedicated to the Office of Illinois Works. As a social worker and public administrator, Christine has a passion for public service and cultivating equitable access to self-sufficient careers for all Illinois residents. Christine has been influential in the design, development, and implementation of the ILW Pre-apprenticeship Program and Bid Credit Program. Over the last ten years, she has acted as an advocate and leader in the public service space advancing in the areas of non-profit management, fundraising, and organization and program development.

Christine holds a Master of Program Administration degree from the University of Illinois – Springfield, as well as a Master of Social Work degree and Bachelor of Arts degrees in Political Science and History from Loyola University Chicago.

**11:45 AM – Break**

**12:00 PM – 1:00 PM – Lunch & Closing Keynote – Brickyard 1 & 2**

**Keynote Presentation** *Future of Illinois Works*

Looking forward to the fourth year of implementation, the Office of Illinois Works is diligently working to expand the impact of the three key programs. During this panel discussion, attendees will learn about exciting updates to ILW from key representatives of each program.

**Keynote Panelists:**

**Maria “Yesenia” Perez, Senior Apprenticeship Initiative Program Manager Illinois Works Apprenticeship Initiative**

Maria Perez is the Senior Apprenticeship Initiative Program Manager for the Office of Illinois Works. She has over 13 years of experience in coordinating programs that helped close the educational gap through equity and inclusion in underrepresented communities. Through the ILW Apprenticeship Initiative, Maria continues her efforts to partner with state agencies to give historically underrepresented groups such as minorities, women, and veterans in the construction sector contracting and employment opportunities

**Christine Flynn, MSW, MPA, Grant Management Analyst, Office of Illinois Works**

Christine Flynn is a consultant through NIU's Center for Governmental Studies that has been dedicated to the Office of Illinois Works. As a social worker and public administrator, Christine has a passion for public service and cultivating equitable access to self-sufficient careers for all Illinois residents. Christine has been influential in the design, development, and implementation of the ILW Pre-apprenticeship Program and Bid Credit Program. Over the last ten years, she has acted as an advocate and leader in the public service space advancing in the areas of non-profit management, fundraising, and organization and program development.

Christine holds a Master of Program Administration degree from the University of Illinois – Springfield, as well as a Master of Social Work degree and Bachelor of Arts degrees in Political Science and History from Loyola University Chicago.

**Becky Bailey, Senior Bid Credit Program Manager, Illinois Works Bid Credit Program**

Becky Bailey serves as the Senior Bid Credit Program Manager, bringing with her over 20 years of experience supporting the construction and trades industry in both the public and private sector. Throughout her extensive career, she has gained a variety of skills valuable to the implementation and management of the Illinois Works Bid Credit Program and is looking forward to using these to make the program a success.

**Closing Remarks** – Dr. Norman Ruano, PhD, Deputy Director, Office of Illinois Works

**Conference Evaluation** – Dr. Gia Suggs, Ed.D., Instructional Designer, Office of Illinois Works