



# **Sandy Build It Back:**

## **Workers Rebuilding Their Own Communities**

**A Report Produced By ALIGN**

**Endorsing Members: ALIGN, Community Voices Heard, Faith in New York, Intl' Union of Painters and Allied Trades District Council 9, Make the Road NY, Metallic Latherers and Reinforcing Ironworkers Local 46, NYC Building and Construction Trades Council, NYC District Council of Carpenters, NYC Plumbers Local 1, NY Communities for Change, VOCAL-NY, Workers Justice Project**

# Sandy Build It Back:

## Workers Rebuilding Their Own Communities

*Since the beginning, we have been committed not just to our recovery, but to providing opportunities to New Yorkers in our hardest-hit neighborhoods. . . We are now increasing our capacity so that more Sandy-impacted New Yorkers can access these life changing opportunities.<sup>i</sup>*

- Mayor de Blasio on the Build it Back hiring program.



Tyrone Gooding on a recent project.

“The Build it Back program changed my life. I started working construction when I was 17 years old. I’ve done everything – I’ve pushed brooms, I’ve done demolition, I was a carpenter’s helper, I did roofing for NYCHA. I was lucky if I got \$11 an hour. After 15 years in construction the most I ever made was \$18 an hour. I am the proud father of, and provider for, five children. I’ve taken every kind of job you can imagine. I’ve done UHAUL, I’ve done Home Depot in Kentucky, Recycling in Indiana, I worked for the Parks Department, etc. . . . But I never had the chance to have a career, until now. I came through the Construction Skills program’s Build it Back class, and I have been working since April, steadily, as a union Lather with Local 46. My life has changed. I have security – no more worrying the foreman is going to fire me because he doesn’t like the way I look, I have respect – I am learning a trade, a craft I can be proud of – since I started with Local 46 I’ve worked on the Kosciusko bridge, I’ve worked on the FDR. I can show my kids my work - with pride. You can’t buy that.”

- Tyrone Gooding, Member of Ironworkers Local 46, trained by Construction Skills through the Build it Back Project Labor Agreement.

## **Rebuilding after Hurricane Sandy**

Hurricane Sandy made landfall in New York City on October 29, 2012, forever altering our City. The storm permanently changed our physical landscape, and also changed the way New Yorkers view climate change and inequality. Hurricane Sandy exposed the city's vulnerabilities that are produced by the lack of appropriate and significant interventions to the problems that create climate change and economic inequality. We know that we must take drastic measures to mitigate our emissions and protect ourselves from extreme weather. We also know that while climate change can impact everyone, women and low-income people of color are most deeply affected and their needs must be front and center as we build a carbon-free and resilient City.

As we approach the four year anniversary of Hurricane Sandy, it is important for New Yorkers to reflect on the progress we have made not only building a more resilient City, but also in building a more just and equitable City. One effort in particular, the Sandy Build it Back program, has made headlines due to slow and costly residential rebuilding. However, it has quietly and with very little fanfare embarked on a precedent setting local hiring program that has created good, career-track jobs for low-income Sandy impacted residents. The Build it Back program's emphasis on equity in the rebuilding of our residential neighborhoods is the focus of this white paper and offers important lessons to be learned for how to replicate this program elsewhere, while improving on certain areas of concern.



"I am a first year apprentice, I've been on the job for three weeks. I came in through N.E.W. (Nontraditional Employment for Women). This is my first job as a carpenter. I love the work and the crew is great. I'm from Staten Island so I get to help rebuild my community."

Lisann Brooks, on a Build it Back job as an apprentice with the Carpenters union, and trained by Nontraditional Employment for Women (NEW).

## **The Vision to Rebuild with Equity**

Once the extent of the devastation from Hurricane Sandy was realized, community, labor and faith advocates banded together to ensure that our City was rebuilt in a just and equitable manner. The Alliance for a Just Rebuilding was formed in early 2013, representing nearly 50 organizations across all five boroughs, and demanded that the City set community hiring and good jobs standards to ensure that jobs created by the recovery effort benefited low-income and Sandy-affected New Yorkers. A primary agenda item in the Alliance for Just Rebuilding is that: "Our next mayor should ensure that Sandy recovery and rebuilding dollars create thousands of good local jobs."<sup>ii</sup>

Upon taking office in 2014, the de Blasio administration took over the recovery effort from former Mayor Bloomberg, and drastically restructured the Build it Back program to, among other things, promote good, local jobs. The Mayor solidified a commitment to good jobs by negotiating a project labor agreement with the NYC Building and Construction Trades Council that covered Build it Back work. In addition, the City and the Building Trades negotiated a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that included a 20% local hire goal for Sandy-impacted residents. The Mayor also committed to a plan to directly recruit and train at least 100 New York City residents, with an emphasis on Sandy-impacted residents into union affiliated pre-apprentice programs and union construction apprenticeship programs with funding from the Community Block Grant money applicable to the program.

*Mayor de Blasio's drive for a strong and equitable recovery relies on including the people most affected by Hurricane Sandy. Today we are connecting residents of these communities with access to pre-apprenticeship training and opportunities for long-term careers in the unionized construction trades. Through Sandy Recovery Workforce 1 and Build it Back, we are working with the unions and our contractors to ensure that Sandy impacted residents are working on recovery projects.<sup>iii</sup>*

- Amy Peterson, the Director of the Mayor's Office of Housing Recovery.

Build it Back became the first federally-funded single family home disaster recovery program built under a Project Labor Agreement (PLA). The PLA and the MOA ensure good jobs, apprenticeship training and a jobs pipeline for local residents impacted by the disaster to access good middle class careers.<sup>iv</sup>

PLAs are important tools for creating good jobs with health and retirement benefits, as well as safety training that are safer for workers and the public. Across the country, disaster recovery programs typically have relied on a low wage, undocumented labor force with few health and safety protections. Rebuilding New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina provided a case in point: Workers, most of whom were day laborers, were routinely abused on the job. The speed and intensity of post-disaster cleanups, coupled with exposure to mold, asbestos and other dangerous debris, exacerbated the danger to workers. Some employers resorted to wage theft and other abuses, silencing immigrant workers with threats of deportation.<sup>v</sup> The Build it Back PLA was intended to mitigate this trend that is prevalent in disaster recovery efforts. The PLA was critical in restricting the ability of employers to engage in these unscrupulous activities.

Single-family home rebuilding post-Sandy has not occurred without serious hiccups. While the program planned to have completed all of its rebuilding by the end of 2016, this has not come to pass. The City has acknowledged that it will not meet its self-imposed goal of completing its work by the end of this year. In addition, the de Blasio administration had to reallocate \$500 million to Build it Back to address cost overruns.

The de Blasio administration released its Build it Back Progress Update in October 2016, which highlighted some of the challenges that have faced the program.<sup>vi</sup> Some key considerations include complex site conditions, which have made designing and rebuilding thousands of individual homes difficult. The fact that many homes moved through the program at once during the most competitive construction market in decades, led to competition for contractors. Additionally, some homeowners were unwilling or unable to move out of their homes to allow construction to begin.

The delays in rebuilding have real life consequences for families that, four years later, are still not back in their homes. Further improvements to the Build it Back program must be made in order to address the needs of these community members, and incorporate the lessons learned so far.

## Worker Training Spotlight: Pre-Apprentice Training

The aftermath of Hurricane Sandy exposed significant inequalities facing low-income communities of color in NYC.

- Forty-one percent of New York City housing units impacted were designated as low-income, subsidized, rent-stabilized or Mitchell-Lama housing.
- Fifty-five percent of the storm surge victims in New York were very low-income renters, whose incomes are \$18,000 a year on average.
- Nearly 20,000 undocumented immigrants lived in Sandy-affected areas, and many are excluded from relief.
- Over 400 New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) buildings—housing about 80,000 residents—lost essential services, such as electricity, heat, hot water and use of elevators. Most residents sheltered in place due to poor health, lack of mobility, fear, unclear evacuation plans, and lapses in communication from NYCHA.
- Over 622,000 New Yorkers live in storm surge zones that are within a half-mile of the City's six Significant Maritime & Industrial Areas—430,000 of these residents are people of color.

Access to good career-track jobs for low-income people living in Sandy-impacted communities is essential to address the vulnerable position of low-income and climate-vulnerable communities. In response to these challenges, the City leveraged existing Direct Entry programs that provide pre-apprenticeship training and access to careers in the unionized construction industry. Programs include, The Edward J. Malloy Initiative for Construction Skills, Nontraditional Employment for Women, Helmets to Hardhats.



"I see myself giving back to my community by taking what I've learned here at NEW and rebuilding what we had before Sandy and hopefully getting our community back to the way it was. The amenities that we had, like parks and basketball courts, I want to bring those things back to our old Rockaways." Safaria Jimenez, from Rockaway Queens, aspiring to be an ornamental iron worker and currently training in a pre-apprentice program through Build it Back at Nontraditional Employment for Women (NEW).

The first step in the pipeline to a career in the building and construction trades is a pre-apprenticeship training program. Pre-apprenticeships are preparatory programs that groom individuals who want to begin an apprenticeship in a certain industry or trade. These programs equip workers with expertise and real-life experience. Pre-apprentice programs have direct entry agreements with certain apprentice programs, thus creating a seamless pipeline into a career in the trades.

Build it Back utilizes existing direct entry agreements between the Building and Construction Trades Council member unions and existing pre-apprentice programs and provides funding for Sandy-impacted residents to enter into pre-apprenticeship programs free of charge. The key programs providing training for Sandy Build it Back include Nontraditional Employment for Women (NEW), Helmets to Hardhats, the Edward J. Malloy Initiative for Construction Skills, and Building Works.



"People in Far Rockaway getting new jobs and solid careers would definitely change the economics of Far Rockaway. There is a lot of poverty in the Far Rockaways. Some people lost everything in the storm... let's build it back. Let's get together and make this community better than it was before. I think that should be the end goal of the Build it Back hiring program." Eulalia Boutin from Far Rockaway, aspiring to be an electrical worker and in pre-apprentice training funded through Build it Back at Nontraditional Employment for Women (NEW).

## **The Example Set by Build it Back**

Build it Back's primary successes:<sup>vii</sup>

1. Mayor Bloomberg, under whom the disaster recovery efforts began, did not rebuild a single unit of housing before leaving office. Under Mayor de Blasio, 90% of program applicants will have received reimbursement checks and/or commenced construction.
2. More than 200 contractors have been approved to work on Build It Back projects, 87 of which are approved to work as primes and nearly 38% of which are M/WBEs. An additional 116 contractors are approved to work as subcontractors.
3. Efforts by key trade unions have successfully increased the workforce dedicated to Build It Back. Unions have promoted the opportunity to work on Build it Back and provided increased flexibility regarding union referral practices.
4. The 20% local hire goal has been met. The most recent numbers released by NYC Build it Back show that contractors under the program have hired a total of 997 workers, and at least 221 (21%) are from Sandy-impacted communities.
5. The City and the Building and Construction Trades Council planned to recruit and train 100 NYC residents with an emphasis on local, disadvantaged workers into Sandy rebuilding jobs with the use of funding from the Community Development Block Grant funding. The program has exceeded this goal, to date having trained and placed 108 workers into career-track jobs rebuilding their communities, with additional classes, on-going enrollment, and a Sandy-specific class scheduled for January.
6. Local residents who were impacted by Sandy have demonstrated a deep sense of pride in rebuilding their own communities, evidenced by the testimonials throughout this white paper.
7. Local residents who are successfully placed into union apprenticeship programs in the building and construction trades have career track jobs and pathways out of poverty. Union jobs, paying the prevailing wage with benefits, including health care and a pension plan, and a clear ladder for advancement in the trades, creates financial stability and job security that is sorely lacking in some sectors of the construction industry.

Build it Back's hiring program demonstrates how we build an equitable and resilient City. Providing good, career-track jobs to low-income community members in Sandy-impacted areas reduces the vulnerability of these communities to climate change.

## Community Spotlight: Organizing for Good Jobs Rebuilding our own Communities

In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, devastated communities across the City organized to build their communities back better than before. From Coney Island and the Rockaways, to Staten Island and the Lower East Side, community-based organizations advocated for an equitable rebuilding and good local jobs. Community Voices Heard, Make the Road New York, New York Communities for Change, and Faith in New York, to name a few, were at the center of this effort. Sherman Margaret Stewart Lester is one example of this effort. Together with other members of her church and congregations throughout the Rockaways, Sherman worked with Faith in New York and the Alliance for a Just Rebuilding in calling for a rebuilding that addressed many of the long standing racial and economic disparities in the Rockaways by creating pathways to careers in rebuilding. They marched, rallied, and fought to assure that there was local hiring for union careers in Build it Back construction.



Fr. Fulgencio Gutierrez Pastor of St. Mary Star of the Sea addresses Amy Peterson, Director of the Mayor's Office of Housing Recovery and NYC Councilmembers Treyger and Richards in front of a packed audience at the FINY and AJR co-sponsored Faith and Community Forum on July 29, 2014.

Since June, Sherman has been working with Faith in New York to assure that this vision was realized. She has done outreach at weekend services in congregations from South Jamaica to Far Rockaway to Coney Island. In this outreach she has connected thousands of Sandy-impacted residents to the opportunity to join a union - and the feedback has been incredible. She has referred more than 100 residents to the program.

"As someone who survived Hurricane Sandy and has been involved in my community, it is essential that when we are creating opportunities for employment they are not just short term minimum wage jobs, but are truly careers with training, livable wages and benefits. It is amazing that this Sandy recovery opportunity has been offered to residents in my community." –Shermane Margaret Stewart Lester, Faith in New York member.



At the one year anniversary of Hurricane Sandy, the Alliance for a Just Rebuilding held a "Turn the Tide" rally calling on the City to turn the tide towards a more just and equitable NYC. Signs mirroring the waves of Hurricane Sandy read "We Deserve Good Jobs" and "We Demand Affordable and Repaired Housing."

## **Lessons Learned from the Build it Back Hiring Program**

The Build it Back program is an unprecedented effort to create good, career-track jobs for Sandy-impacted residents. As this is largely unmarked territory, it has opened new and creative opportunities for access to good jobs for low-income communities, and enabled us to learn valuable lessons on local hiring programs. These lessons will allow the City to improve and expand the program into other areas, creating additional opportunities to address the vulnerabilities of inequality that are exacerbated by climate change.

Key lessons learned:

- The City needs to collaborate with the union affiliated direct-entry programs and union apprentice programs to ensure that schedules are created at least six months in advance to provide enough lead time for community based organizations to recruit and organize local workers for these opportunities.
  - Scheduled class dates and times allow pre-apprenticeship programs, city vendors, and community based organizations to work together in a coordinated and collaborative fashion. This coordination improves outreach, which in turn greatly increasing community awareness and enrollment.
- The City needs to fund and support tutoring and/or invest in classes for TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education) testing preparation.
  - Some applicants for the pre-apprenticeship were eligible but not able to pass the Department of Labor mandated TABE tests. Layering TABE tests prep with the outreach schedule would greatly increase eligibility.
  - Model these classes after existing tutoring programs offered by organizations such as Nontraditional Employment for Women's and NYCHA's Office of Resident Economic Empowerment & Sustainability (REES).
- The City needs to fund and support translation of outreach materials into the different languages of New York's many immigrant communities.
  - Some communities that could benefit from the training and employment program were unaware of the opportunities due to lack of translated outreach materials.
- The City needs to fund and invest in GED classes that can be paired with pre-apprenticeship opportunities.
  - Pre-apprenticeship programs offer an important pathway to the middle class, but they require that participants have a High School diploma or GED. We recommend that the city invest in contextualized GED courses linked to pre-apprenticeship opportunities and timed to finish in time for enrollment into union pre-apprenticeship programs.
  - The GED classes should also be categorized in a central place by Workforce1.
- The City needs to collaborate and partner with the construction training industry to ensure the NYC Department of Small Business Services (SBS) and contracted agencies at Workforce1 centers on these programs are well educated on the operations of the pre-apprentice programs and union apprentice programs.
  - SBS and its subcontractors manage the recruitment and referral into the Build it Back through Workforce One centers. There is uneven information about the different pre-apprenticeship programs within these different Workforce One providers. The City initiated training by pre-apprenticeship program providers, but it came very late in the process. These trainings should be done up front to ensure community members access accurate information.
- Partner with local CBOs and fund those CBOs to do outreach to increase program enrollment.
- Workforce1's Industrial and Transportation Career Center's construction trainings should include training on workers' rights to organize.



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<sup>i</sup> NYC Office of the Mayor, at <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/475-16/mayor-de-blasio-additional-opportunities-sandy-impacted-residents-enroll-in>

<sup>ii</sup> Alliance for a Just Rebuilding, July 2013, Turning the Tide: How Our Next Mayor Should Tackle Sandy Rebuilding, <http://www.rebuildajustny.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Turning-the-Tide-Sandy-Agenda-FINAL-7-31-13.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> NYC Office of the Mayor, at [http://www.nyc.gov/html/sbs/html/pr/2015\\_05\\_14\\_SandyRecoveryWF1.shtml](http://www.nyc.gov/html/sbs/html/pr/2015_05_14_SandyRecoveryWF1.shtml)

<sup>iv</sup> Specifically, it is the first HUD Community Development Block Grant for Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program that is subject to a Project Labor Agreement.

<sup>v</sup> Remember the Second Responders, NYT Editorial Board, at [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/06/opinion/remember-the-second-responders.html?ref=daylaborers&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/06/opinion/remember-the-second-responders.html?ref=daylaborers&_r=0); See also Day Labor, Worker Centers & Disaster Relief Work in the Aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, Baruch College, at <https://www.scribd.com/document/181549739/Day-Labor-Worker-Centers-Disaster-Relief-Work-in-the-Aftermath-of-Hurricane-Sandy>

<sup>vi</sup> Build It Back Progress Update, Mayor's Office of Housing Recovery Operations, October 2016, at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/recovery/downloads/pdf/build-it-back-update-10-20-16-final.pdf>

<sup>vii</sup> Successes derived from Build It Back Progress Update, Mayor's Office of Housing Recovery Operations, October 2016, at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/recovery/downloads/pdf/build-it-back-update-10-20-16-final.pdf>; One City Rebuilding Together – Progress Report, 2015. <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/reports/2015/One-City-Progress-Report.pdf>; NYC Recovery, Build it Back and Workforce1 Contributions to New York City Jobs, at <http://www1.nyc.gov/sandytracker/#3510067012>; Jobs data on the Sandy Tracker updated from the Mayor's Office of Housing Recovery Operations.