



National Association of Home Builders and Boys & Girls Clubs of America Partnership:

Pilot Program Assessment (Executive Summary)



**BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
OF AMERICA**

Partnership Overview and Pilot Program Announcement

On February 9, 2022, NAHB CEO Jerry Howard and Boys & Girls Clubs of America President & CEO Jim Clark signed a proclamation in honor of their Workforce Readiness Agreement, emphasizing a shared commitment to building stronger communities by recruiting the next generation of skilled laborers in the housing industry.

To kick off the pilot program, ten local home builder associations (HBAs) worked with local Boys & Girls Clubs to mentor young people, showcase the multiple career opportunities available in the home building industry, and encourage them to consider a career in residential construction. In addition, the plan called for local HBA chapters to host events, including career panels, jobsite visits and job shadowing.

The Origins of the Partnership

John McKenzie is a leader in real estate development in Madison, Wisconsin and has been a Madison Area Home Builders Association (MABA) member for more than 30 years. It was a combination of his family approach to business, a concern for customers and the community and a heartfelt desire to improve the lives of others that first connected John with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Dane County, Wisconsin. He was impressed with their mission and wanted to do something with a broad reach and ongoing impact. He thought about how the workforce is short on skilled labor and The Boys & Girls Club was an opportunity to introduce skilled trades to young people. The initial concept was to create a place where young kids could participate in career introductory programming. Then, when the kids got to high school, a soft-skills program would be offered

to prepare young people for the skilled trades, followed by internship opportunities.

McKenzie and MABA found a building and raised \$31.4 million for the McKenzie Regional Workforce Center. He realized this approach could work across the country. "Every big city has a Boys & Girls Club and an affiliate of NAHB; this is such a no brainer," said McKenzie. "If we can teach Boys & Girls Club kids how to make and save money, we are not only helping our youth and the building industry, but we are also changing the nation for the better." Not long after, the Workforce Readiness Agreement between NAHB and Boys & Girls Clubs of America and the pilot program was announced.

Four Pilot Locations Interviewed

To assess and learn from the pilot programs, leadership from four pilot cities were asked to share their experiences. Sites participating in the interviews included Aberdeen, South Dakota; Atlanta, Georgia; New Haven, Connecticut; and Madison, Wisconsin. A total of 15 individuals who planned, managed, and conducted the pilot programs were interviewed including representatives from the local builders' associations, representatives from the local Boys & Girls Clubs, and local builders and other industry professionals who volunteered.

Pilot Program Descriptions

- The Aberdeen program ran from July through December with an activity of approximately once a month. The children in the pilot group were 10-16 years old (mostly 10-12). About 70% were boys and 30% girls. The group was diverse, but the majority were White. Sessions included topics and experiences ranging from a tool day to a tour of homes to hands-on activities both inside and outside of the classroom.
- The Atlanta program began mid-January and is scheduled for every other Tuesday through May. About 8 to 12 students attend each session. Most students are 7th and 8th graders, and most of the students are Black, with several Latinos, some multi-racial, and two White. There is one female and one foster care child in the group. The children are divided into three teams (companies), each focusing on their own housing development project. The program content begins with the steps involved in identifying and purchasing a residential building site and will continue through the final construction. Hands-on activities include the operation of grading simulators and a field trip.
- The New Haven program served two groups of students two days a week for six weeks. There was a mix of boys and girls participating from a diversity of backgrounds and ethnicities. Kindergarten through second grade used the book "The House That She Built" and an existing curriculum. For third through eighth grade, NAHB's student chapters curriculum was used to direct classroom work on the first day, and the second day began a series of visits from various construction experts. For the culmination event, four builders came in to work with the kids as they constructed a cardboard house using Elmer's connectors.
- The Madison pilot included spring, summer and fall programs. The spring career exploration program introduced students to career options by designating one as the architect, designer, general contractor, roofer, framer, interior designer, etc. Professionals came in representing each of those roles and gave presentations. Students were placed into six groups and given two days to build their cardboard home.

They then gave a presentation on their roles, their design, how they worked together, and what they learned. During the summer, a program with middle schoolers called Building Trades Career Exploration took place over five weeks, three days a week. Every day there was a visit to a residential-building site, each at different stages of construction. Over the fall, the partnership conducted soft-skills training for middle and high school students, focusing on employability skills like completing an application, conducting a job search and participating in mock interviews.

Consolidated Observations, Lessons Learned, and Recommendations

Planning

- A "warm introduction" is key.
- Planning and communication efforts benefit from an up-front understanding of each other's organization, mission and membership.
- Thoroughly plan for the space, time, schedule, and staff with the Boys and Girls Club representative.
- Delegate responsibility to those who know the club's day-to-day operations and already have relationships with the students.
- Role clarity and being mutually supportive are critical in this kind of partnership.
- It can be challenging for the Boys & Girls Club to maintain a larger, more consistent turnout of kids for each session, especially for summer programs.
- There is also a change in participants when a program overlaps summer and goes into the school year.
- It's less about trying to create a shop class and more about creating experience in construction that introduces kids to available job opportunities and the demand for those jobs.
- Quality over quantity is important. Whether for three kids or 20 or more, create a quality program and environment they will enjoy.
- Not everything has to be hands-on but create an impactful environment that doesn't feel like another day at school.
- Go back and review past plans within the context of experience gained and use that perspective to "rewrite the script" for the next program.

Volunteers

- In some cases, recruiting volunteers was not a problem. In others, recruiting volunteers was seen as an area with room for growth.
- Get more volunteers and new faces involved. The kids love seeing and hearing from new faces, but it is also valuable to bring in some of the same people regularly to establish rapport and build relationships.
- It takes a lot of time and effort for the volunteer companies and individuals to plan and conduct the sessions. Recognize they usually spend their days on a tight, demanding schedule.
- Publicize the pilots and encourage future opportunities to volunteer in newsletters and on social media. Ask those who volunteered in the initial pilot to recruit another member to participate.
- Existing relationships between HBAs and their members are fundamental to gaining support and participation.
- Communicate with your association members. Talk about the shortage of skilled labor and the lack of diversity in the community. Talk about the opportunities and the possibilities.
- HBA members enjoyed the experience. Many felt they walked away with more of a gift than the volunteer time and support they were giving.

Student Considerations

- It is important to be intentional about observing each of the student's learning styles.
- Incorporating a hands-on element into every session is key to keeping the kids engaged.
- Being able to see how something is done on a small scale and then seeing how it is applied and relates to what is done out in the field is eye opening for students.
- The kids will surprise you. They listen and soak in the information, and they ask good questions. They enjoyed the experience.
- Students often relate well to younger volunteers who look more like them.
- When done effectively, programs should make the students think, "Maybe there is a future for me here. Maybe I could even own a construction business one day. Maybe I too could build and own a home like these."
- Start young. Many programs begin with juniors and seniors in high school. If you wait until then to interest young people in skilled trades and the construction industry, you may find a lack of interest.

Looking Ahead

- One measure of success will be how many more HBA members express interest in participating in the future. Will it be embraced by more members and have the potential to be sustained?
- While these partnership programs aim to address the labor shortage in the skilled trades, these efforts should also promote and encourage greater diversity in all parts of the industry.
- Presently there are no standard measures of success for the program. But if it feels right; it is happening organically, members are excited about it, and other BGCs are asking about it.
- Other clubs have reached out about participating, but there are concerns about whether local home builders' associations have the capacity.
- Spend more time gaining a working knowledge of each other's organizations.
- Consider a survey for the students to learn about their interest levels, both at the beginning of the program and at the end.
- We need to look at some funding opportunities including grants if we hope to expand the program to other sites.
- There is a potential opportunity for both organizations to partner on things like government advocacy.
- Boys & Girls Clubs of America has a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) program. It has valuable documentation that helps set goals, develop programs, and incorporate continuous quality improvement.
- The partnership formed by NAHB and BGCA creates legitimacy and can be used to gain support and even donations.
- This is a long-term proposition before we see a large influx of young people into the construction industry. We need to see workforce development as a core pillar and part of a strategic plan.
- In each community, consider forming an advisory committee and a workforce development committee to provide feedback, helpful suggestions, and focus.