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Explore the data and report: <https://brook.gs/2HCBFdi>

Water infrastructure jobs pay up to 50 percent more to hundreds of thousands of workers, says new Brookings report

Washington, D.C. — Building off previous workforce research, the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program has released a first-of-its-kind analysis of jobs involved in the construction, operation, and maintenance of the country's water infrastructure. Nearly 1.7 million workers fill jobs in utilities, construction firms, and numerous other employers across the water sector, while facing lower educational barriers to entry and earning more competitive pay.

The report, "[Renewing the water workforce: Improving water infrastructure and creating a pipeline to opportunity](#)," emphasizes the vast scope of the U.S. water workforce, which employs workers across 212 different occupations.

At a time when many Americans are struggling to access stable economic footing and many of the country's infrastructure assets are at the end of their useful life, infrastructure jobs offer considerable promise in tackling the widening inequalities that persist in the U.S. economy. The water sector is emblematic of this opportunity, especially given the strategic location of many water utilities as anchor institutions in the country's most disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Notably, the report finds that jobs in the water sector pay well—not only on average, but also up to 50 percent more to workers at the lower end of the income scale. Many of these positions do not demand as much formal education either; 53 percent of water workers have a high school diploma or less, compared to 32.5 percent of all workers nationally. Finally, like other workers in the skilled trades, water workers boast high levels of on-the-job training and develop transferable skill sets, offering long-term career pathways in an age when technologies and other labor market shifts are upending other economic sectors.

The research shows there is a clear opportunity for these infrastructure jobs to draw from a younger, more diverse workforce. Thousands of water workers, including water treatment operators, are almost four years older than the national median age (42.2 years old) across all occupations; women make up only 14.9 percent of the water workforce, compared to 46.8 percent of all workers nationally; and black and Asian workers only represent 11.5 percent of the water workforce, compared to 18 percent of all workers nationally.

“Renewing the country’s infrastructure requires a sizable workforce, and improving water infrastructure offer enormous environmental and economic returns for residents in every community,” said Joseph Kane, a senior research associate and associate fellow at the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program and lead author of the report. “However, there are still several gaps to address in order to hire, train, and retain a skilled and diverse water workforce in years to come.”

In addition to measuring the sizable economic impact of infrastructure jobs, the report also offers a new policy playbook that local, state, and national leaders should use in future water workforce development efforts. This playbook calls for several actions:

1. Utilities and other water employers need to empower staff, adjust existing procedures, and pilot new efforts in support of the water workforce.
2. A broad range of employers and community partners need to hold consistent dialogues, pool resources, and develop platforms focused on water workers.
3. National and state leaders need to provide clearer technical guidance, more robust programmatic support, and targeted investments in water workforce development.

“The timing of this research could not be more important,” said Adie Tomer, fellow at the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program and co-author. “With Congress considering new workforce strategies and metropolitan areas of all sizes debating new hiring and recruitment practices, the country can get more people in good paying jobs that help protect our health and environment for generations to come.”

Read the report: <https://brook.gs/2HCBFdj>

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