

Obama calls on architecture and tech firms to support Chicago presidential library with apprenticeship schemes

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[Barack Obama](#) has urged top architecture studios and tech firms like Amazon, Google and Microsoft to take on paid apprentices from Chicago's South Side at a public consultation event for the [Obama Presidential Library](#).

The former US president spoke to the audience and answered questions through a video live-stream at the event, which took place last night at the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place hotel in downtown Chicago.

He said the [Obama Presidential Library](#), which is being built in the South Side area of the city, should be used to open up opportunities for young people considering careers in the architecture, technology and construction sectors. He called on the city's top firms to host workshops at the library and offer paid apprenticeships.

"What we want to do is start partnering with all the companies downtown and saying to them why don't you partner, we've got some young people in the South Side who are interested in being architects," said Obama, responding to a question from the audience regarding paid opportunities at the library.

"Let's go to the top architectural firms downtown and say: 'You come down here and do a workshop, identify young people of talent, you give them a paid apprenticeship'."

He said the industries are lacking diversity and hoped the construction of the library would create routes for those living in the [predominantly Black and Hispanic](#) neighbourhood to enter careers in the architecture, technology and construction industries.

The library would provide a way of "leveraging" the resources of companies both in the city and further afield, he said, and tech giants including Microsoft, Google and Amazon would be approached to offer coding courses and internships.

"We may have young people, they don't want to be architects, but they want to go into the trades," said Obama. "We'll go downtown and talk to the trade

unions and we'll say: 'Open up an apprenticeship [programme] so people can start getting funnelled into electrical work and so forth'."

"Computer science and coding – you guys saw Hidden Figures [film about African-American women at NASA] – some of the folks that started the entire computer industry were women. You don't see them now," he added. "A bunch of them were African-American women, but they're under-represented in the current industry."

"Let's go to Microsoft and Google and Amazon and say: 'You got a site right now, let's open up a coding programme and then once you've helped us train these young people, give them a summer internship that's paid'."

The Obama Presidential Library is being designed by architects [Tod Williams and Billie Tsien](#) for a site in Jackson Park. The building, which is to comprise a museum and forum alongside the library itself, will link with a public plaza in the park. This area will be designed by New York-based landscape architects [Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates](#).

During the consultation event, Obama was also quizzed on the wider impact of the centre could have on the neighbourhood, with one audience member interrupting proceedings to raise fears that gentrification of the area would negatively impact the community it is intended to benefit.

Obama said he would not sign a community benefit agreement for the development, but would instead himself act as a "gatekeeper" to ensure the project follows an inclusive process.

"We are going to set up a process in which everyone has a seat at the table," he said. "Every organisation will have its input."

Jackson Park was selected as the site for the Obama Presidential Library in 2016, and is located nearby the area where both Barack and Michelle Obama grew up.

Work on the presidential library – an archive and museum commemorating Obama's term in office – is expected to complete in 2021.