

# Progress MN: Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry Apprenticeship Program

By: Todd Nelson  
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**Mission:** Promotes, facilitates and develops registered apprenticeship programs that recruit, train and retain highly skilled and diverse employees

**Based:** 443 Lafayette Road N., St. Paul

**Director:** John Aiken

**Employee count:** Eight

**Website:** [www.dli.mn.gov/Appr.asp](http://www.dli.mn.gov/Appr.asp)

With mass retirements looming and employers struggling to find qualified workers, the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry is expanding its registered apprenticeship offerings.

More than 11,400 apprentices are working in Minnesota for thousands of large and small employers as of February, said John Aiken, DLI's apprenticeship program director.

Nearly 90 percent of apprentices work in construction, Aiken said. Women, minorities and veterans, meanwhile, have low participation rates in apprenticeships.

DLI is using \$6.7 million in grants from the U.S. Department of Labor to extend apprenticeship opportunities.

"There is an appetite in Minnesota, in industry, that is looking for innovative approaches to recruit, train and retain a 21st century, top-talent workforce," Aiken said.

The largest federal grant, \$5 million over five years, supports the Minnesota Apprenticeship Initiative, which aims to help employers train 1,000 apprentices in advanced manufacturing, agriculture, health care services, information technology and transportation, Aiken said. Employers can receive up to \$5,000 for each apprentice hired to help offset program costs.

Also targeting advanced manufacturing, agriculture, health care services and information technology is DLI's Pipeline program, said Heather McGannon, DLI assistant commissioner. It supports on-the-job education and can serve as a pathway to creating an apprenticeship program.

The Minnesota APEX Initiative, which received \$1.5 million in federal money, is creating pre-apprenticeship opportunities in construction for women, minorities and veterans, Aiken said. Women, minorities and veterans represent about 7 percent, 20 percent and 6.5 percent, respectively, of apprentices although their numbers have doubled since 2010.

The Minnesota Apprenticeship Accelerator program, for which the state received a \$200,000 federal grant, helped support the Minnesota Apprenticeship Summit, a free educational and networking event in March. DLI also is using the money to develop a strategic plan to sustain the apprenticeship program's expansion, among other efforts, Aiken said.