

Report: NYC union construction workforce more diverse, higher-earning than nonunion

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Published: March 13, 2017

Construction Drive

Dive Brief:

- A [report](#) by the Economic Policy Institute found that the New York City union workforce earns more and is more diverse than its nonunion counterpart, according to [Commercial Observer](#).
- The Building and Construction Trades Council of Greater New York commissioned the study, but EPI officials said its conclusions were based on Bureau of Labor Statistics and Census Bureau data and disputed any assertions that the BCTC may have influenced the results.
- Nonunion industry representatives, led by the Associated Builders and Contractors' Empire State chapter, alleged that the study weighted apprenticeship data heavily into its results and did not consider information about the general workforce and nonunion labor.

Dive Insight:

The report indicates that there are more black and white union construction workers than employed in the nonunion sector but that there are more Hispanics working for open-shop contractors. According to the EPI, however, those who have union membership make significantly more regardless of race or ethnicity.

This EPI report comes at a time when the New York City Council is considering a regulation that would [require all New York City construction workers](#) to complete apprenticeship programs before being allowed to work on buildings 10 stories or taller. The Council has also proposed other safety and reporting measures, but the apprenticeship requirement is the one that has received the greatest pushback.

In January, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio [came out in support](#) of the private industry and its resistance to the apprenticeship requirement, arguing that the new regulation wouldn't work on nonunion projects, although he said he was overall in favor of union labor and their training programs. According to the New York Department of Labor, 47% of the city's construction training programs are union-affiliated.

Companies and trade groups have reported that unions are slowly losing their grip on the New York private market. Major firms are reportedly considering allowing collective bargaining agreements to expire due to higher labor costs. Although the number of union-exclusive private projects is falling in favor of open-shop models, unions still dominate public projects. However, across the U.S., union membership grew 0.7% between 2015 and 2016, according to the BLS.

Diversity concerns are an ongoing issue in construction, as the industry has struggled to draw minorities and women into the industry. Attracting more minority workers is one way industry players believe they can address the continuing skilled labor shortage. According to the Brookings Institution, 15 million white people will have exited the U.S. workforce by 2030, but 17 million Hispanics, 4 million Asians and 3 million black people will enter.