

## SUMMARY

This case study demonstrates how a group of Detroit residents learned high-demand traditional building trades from experienced preservation craftspeople and applied new skills in real time to the restoration of a neighborhood treasure. The Living Trades Academy was a “living lab” where a group of diverse, unemployed Detroiters became skilled building tradespeople, while rehabilitating an important vacant neighborhood building and acquiring valuable business skills.

## DESCRIPTION

The Living Trades Academy© (LTA) job training program placed graduates in top-quality, high-paying construction jobs, rooted in neighborhood revitalization efforts. The Michigan Historic Preservation Network (MHPN) identified a growing shortage of contractors in Detroit (and surrounding communities) who were skilled in the traditional construction trades. The LTA created an opportunity for unemployed and underemployed Detroiters to become skilled building tradespeople, turning passion for their neighborhood into positive and impactful revitalization, one building at a time.

For ten weeks, ten participants trained full-time with expert craftspeople, learning appropriate methods for working with older buildings, material reuse, and energy efficiency. They also received intensive entrepreneurship and business training from the Build Institute, a local nonprofit that teaches entrepreneurship. MHPN received a 2019 Historic Preservation Governor’s Award for the program.

## NUTS & BOLTS

- An Advisory Committee was formed to help MHPN review the curriculum and the program, and evaluate the process.
- Partnering neighborhood organizations nominated and mentored LTA's participants.
- The “living lab” included a neighborhood home and an abandoned church.
- Ten participants worked full time for ten weeks at a \$10 hourly rate. Each graduate received a \$100 bonus.
- Participants were underemployed or unemployed Detroit residents.



LTA graduate Tiscur Taylor (left), with then-MHPN Executive Director Nancy Finegood. Photo courtesy Living Trades Academy.

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“Ultimately, I would like to have my own business and restore homes. Even if it’s something as small as plasterwork or renovation ... I want to teach women how to beautify their homes.”

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Tiscur Taylor, LTA Graduate

## NUTS & BOLTS (CONTD.)

- Training was funded by foundation grants and individual donations.
- Employers committed to hiring successful graduates.

## KEY LESSONS

- Collaboration with neighborhood organizations will encourage a diverse group of residents to apply.
- Make clear the reporting hierarchy for trainers and participants.
- Pre-and post-training tests (written and hands on) are mandatory, in order for participants to graduate.
- Participants need to be paid for their work.
- Consider transportation issues for participants.
- Consider dietary needs for participants, if providing food.
- Maintain strict cell phone usage policy.
- Address soft skills, including workplace behavior such as attendance, timeliness, and professional demeanor to set graduates up for success for future trades employment.
- Begin working on funding for the next program as soon as the current one is over.
- Allow unpaid participants to “audit” aspects of the training program, including carpentry, plaster, and masonry work.

## IMPACT/ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **Collaboration**—Fosters collaboration among local community organizations and across organizations, between project teams.
- **Community Revitalization**—Focuses on a catalytic neighborhood, with participants from the neighborhood.
- **Capacity**—Increases the number and diversity of local, skilled restoration contractors.
- **Employment**—Ensures immediate viable employment for participants.



*LTA trainers and participants. Photo courtesy MHPN.*

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“I appreciate the interest the [LTA program] has in the people learning how to do this difficult preservation work. It’s not only new buildings that we need. It’s important to keep what we have.”

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Phillis Judkins, owner of the LTA “living lab”

## LEARN MORE

[Michigan Historic Preservation Network](#)

[LTA Program Video](#)

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