



ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: Friday, April 3, 2026.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. Contact [Gage Harter](#) with any questions.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Fairfax County

Program Title: Project Labor Agreement

Program Category: Community Development, Economic Development, & Land Use

CONTACT INFORMATION

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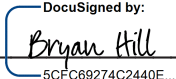
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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Bryan Hill

Title: County Executive

Signature: 

Project Labor Agreement – Accotink Pump Station Rehabilitation

fairfaxcounty.gov/publicworks/capital-projects/accotink-pump-station-rehabilitation-project

Executive Summary

In 2020, the Virginia General Assembly authorized local governments to utilize Project Labor Agreements (PLAs) on public works projects. The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors adopted a Collective Bargaining Ordinance in 2021 and appointed a Labor Relations Administrator in 2022, establishing the framework to implement labor agreements on major capital projects.

Fairfax County’s Department of Public Works and Environmental Services is pioneering local government PLAs in the Commonwealth of Virginia with the selection of the \$71 million Accotink Pump Station Rehabilitation Project to be the first-ever public PLA implemented in the Commonwealth. Finalized in 2024, the 48-month agreement establishes standardized working conditions for the general contractor and subcontractors and includes a dispute resolution process. The agreement enhances worker pay and safety, requires the use of apprentices, and adopts a ‘Helmets-to-Hardhats’ provision to provide opportunities for training and gainful employment for our veterans.

The project rehabilitates the County’s largest wastewater pump station, located on Fort Belvoir, increasing capacity from 37 to 45 million gallons per day to support future growth. The project also replaces aging infrastructure, reduces flood risk, and improves operational reliability for a sanitary sewer system serving approximately 63 square miles. As the first PLA of its kind in Virginia, the project establishes a model for other localities seeking innovative approaches to project labor stability and infrastructure delivery.

Project Labor Agreement Background

The Virginia General Assembly passed landmark legislation in 2020 that authorized local governments to utilize PLAs on public works projects to promote labor safety, equitable compensation and benefits packages, better working conditions, and employment opportunities to underserved communities, including veterans. In early 2023, DPWES selected the Accotink Pump Station Rehabilitation Project (the “Project”), a \$71M rehabilitation of Fairfax County’s largest wastewater pump station within its wastewater collection system, to be the first project in Fairfax County and in the Commonwealth of Virginia to adopt and implement a PLA. It was a year later that the PLA was fully developed and executed.

The Challenge

Virginia remains a Right-to-Work state, meaning employees cannot be required to join a union or pay dues as a condition of employment. In 2023, union membership rates in the Commonwealth did not exceed 4.3%, with about 176,000 members only. Since the passage of the 2020 PLA legislation, followed by the more recent passage of legislation to expand Collective Bargaining Rights, union membership has shown modest growth up to 5.4%, with about 204,000 members in 2025, but it remains below the national average. In the construction sector, participation by local builders and contractors remains low, with only a handful of contractors that have unionized workforces or experience with PLA. The complex and highly technical nature of the Accotink Pump Station Rehabilitation Project

added an additional layer of challenges to identify and target specialty contractors with the knowledge, skills, capacity, and willingness to participate in a PLA.

Award Criteria

An Innovative Solution

Fairfax County partnered with the Baltimore/DC-Metro Building Trades Union (the “Union”) to develop and agree on the terms of the PLA, to be jointly signed by the County, the Union, and the selected contractor (the “Contractor”). Over a period of almost 12 months, DPWES and the Union negotiated various aspects of the PLA, starting with the following broad objectives:

- Establish a framework for labor-management cooperation, recognizing the need for the timely completion of the Project without interruption or delay.
- The Project will require a substantial number of employees from construction and supporting crafts possessing skills and qualifications. The Contractor and Union will work together to furnish skilled, efficient craft workers for the Project, including focused efforts to hire employees who are residents of Fairfax County.
- Mutually establish and stabilize wages, hours, and working conditions for the craftworkers on the Project by encouraging close cooperation between the Contractor and the Union.
- Establish binding methods for the settlement of disputes such that the Contractor will not lock out any workers and the Union will not interrupt the work.

- Establish governance procedures to determine how the PLA relates to existing collective bargaining agreements.
- Establish that no employees covered by the agreement are required to join the Union as a condition of employment, and that the Contractor has the option to bring their own workers to the Project when the Union cannot provide workers on a timely basis.

Research and Outreach

In developing the PLA, DPWES conducted extensive research and outreach to external partners to facilitate and ensure successful outcomes. Discussions with contractors highlighted the importance for the selected Contractor to retain full and exclusive authority for the management of its operations, and, except as limited by the PLA, the Contractor will direct its working forces at its discretion. This prerogative includes not restricting practices that restrict production or utilizing the most efficient method of construction or the Contractor's choice of materials, which was accommodated in the PLA.

Discussions with the Union indicated that a key feature of the PLA is the commitment to worker rights and the inclusion of an expeditious and equitable resolution of worker grievances. The PLA provides for close cooperation between the Contractor and the Union, as the Union assigns a representative to this Project for the purpose of completing the construction of the Project efficiently and without interruptions. The PLA establishes dispute resolution in accordance with industry-standard grievance arbitration

provisions. This is a multi-step process that incrementally escalates the grievance resolution process from the employee and the Contractor through to Union involvement and finally via a third-party arbitrator, mutually agreed to by all parties.

Core to the PLA is also the requirement for the Contractor to seek applicants for employment first through the Union and in accordance with the Union's Collective Bargaining Agreement. To ensure Project needs are met, if the Union is not able to fulfill the requirements for the specific classification of employees requested by the Contractor within a given period, the Contractor may proceed with direct hiring of the needed employees. Regardless of whether the employees are obtained via the Union referral process or via direct hiring by the Contractor, all workers will enjoy, at a minimum, the same pay, fringe benefits, working conditions, and other protections that Union workers are entitled to.

DPWES, together with the Union and the Contractor, recognized the desire to facilitate the entry into the building and construction trades of veterans who are interested in careers in the building and construction industry. The Contractor may utilize the services of the Center for Military Recruitment, Assessment and Veterans Employment "Helmets to Hardhats" program to serve as a resource for preliminary orientation, assessment of construction aptitude, referral to apprenticeship programs or hiring halls, counseling and mentoring, support network, employment opportunities, and other needs as identified by the parties.

All parties recognized the importance of observing and applying strong and meaningful safety requirements that would enhance worker safety and protect property. The PLA adopted safety requirements, including the confirmation of the Contractor's responsibility to ensure safe working conditions and employee compliance with all applicable safety laws and regulations. The Contractor must ensure every employee has current licenses or certifications necessary to perform work in his or her craft.

Providing a Model for Others

Being the first public PLA developed and implemented in Fairfax County and the Commonwealth; it has received attention from other local governments that consider it a potential model and template. DPWES has already received and continues to receive inquiries, questions, and even commendations for the innovative and trail-blazing approach that was used in developing and implementing the PLA. Builders and contractors who have traditionally been wary of participating in a PLA are carefully watching the progress of work on the Accotink Pump Station Project under the PLA. The Project has been progressing smoothly with over 40% of construction completed to date, with no reported labor shortages, disputes, or safety incidents.

Tangible Measures and Outcomes

The implementation of the PLA is producing tangible results that demonstrate its effectiveness in improving labor wages, fringe benefits, worker protections, safety, employment and apprenticeship opportunities, financial stewardship, and efficient project delivery:

- The signatories to the PLA included DPWES, the Contractor, the Baltimore/DC-Metro Building Trades Union, and 17 local trade unions and their respective collective bargaining agreements.
- More than 300 workers and apprentices supplied by the various unions signatory to the PLA have and will serve on the Project.
- There have been no grievances or labor disputes, work stoppages or lockouts on the Project to-date.
- There have been no safety incidents or violations reported on the Project.
- Successful implementation of the Helmets-to-Hardhats program has employed dozens of veterans on the Project.
- The competitive construction bid was comparable to the pre-bid cost estimates.

ACCOTINK WASTEWATER PUMP STATION



"I want to thank county staff and the Baltimore/DC-Metro Building Trades Council for working together to achieve this historic milestone."

– Board of Supervisors Chairman Jeffrey McKay

"Virginia's first-ever local government Project Labor Agreement will help ensure that this critical infrastructure project is delivered and meets the needs of Fairfax residents for years to come. Treating workers fairly is the Fairfax way and I'm proud of the Board of Supervisors and leadership of DPWES for their commitment to this new approach."

– Braddock District Supervisor James Walkinshaw

"As a county, we are investing in our community infrastructure today to improve service and prevent emergencies tomorrow."

– Mount Vernon District Supervisor Dan Storck