To maintain its contributions to the economy and the health, safety, welfare and resilience of the nation’s citizens, the U.S. building industry requires the availability of a skilled workforce. However, experienced workers are retiring, leaving or have left the industry without a sufficient number of young people in the pipeline to replace them. Reversing this trend requires a coordinated and collaborative effort among government, educators and industry.
Consultative Recommendations Council on:
Developing and Maintaining a High-Performance Workforce

The Institute’s Consultative Council offers these findings regarding the availability of a strong, qualified building-related workforce:

- Society emphasizes attaining a college degree, often with little regard for whether the student is suited for a four-year college and could incur the burden of long-term student loan debt.
- Vocational and technical schools should serve as a fertile training ground to bring new blood into the construction industry before professionals who could mentor them retire. This includes all students with the aptitude and desire, not just mediocre students or those with a family history in construction.
- Jobs in construction and building safety increasingly rely on technology and the core curriculum such as math, science and composition; they are not just “hard labor.” These are well-paying, in-demand careers and jobs that cannot be sent offshore—the U.S. building industry requires workers be in the United States to undertake them.
- New tools within the industry, including building information modeling; virtual and augmented reality; and the use of drones, offer exciting opportunities requiring specialized knowledge. These important jobs contribute to communities and the nation.
- Specific attention should focus on letting young women know about the career opportunities in construction, design, operations, safety and assessments, and how their abilities can contribute to the economy.
- The current and future workforce must have the knowledge and training necessary to effectively utilize the tools, technologies and practices that support increasingly higher levels of performance.

To help expand the definition of success and provide for the workforce needed to assure a high-performance built environment, the Council recommends the federal government:

- Promote industry credentials/certifications as a viable use of federal money, such as through the Federal Perkins Loan Program (formerly known as National Defense Student Loans), National Direct Student Loan Program and Perkins Loan Program, which provide low-interest loans to help needy students finance the costs of post-secondary education, and allow use of such funds to support maintenance of those credentials through continuing education courses.
- Provide returning veterans with information, support and training to enter rewarding careers within the building industry as they transition into civilian life.
- Support programs and training that encourage women to enter the construction sector.
- Promote technical and trade programs in K-12 and technical schools, emphasizing a good career awaits, not a societal judgment. This is applicable to ALL students, all genders, all races, all economic backgrounds, to break down preconceived notions of who can choose to go into technical building careers.
- Require the certification and ongoing education and training of building-level federal employees and contractors who work in federal facilities by accelerating the implementation of the Federal Buildings Personnel Training Act across federal agencies and development of criteria for contractors.
- Support research aimed at quantifying the benefit of a trained building workforce in order to facilitate more wide-spread certification and ongoing training, and to allow capture of the benefits in legislation and budgetary actions.
- Create opportunities for building industry professionals to apply their skills in underserved communities in exchange for reductions in student debt.
- Encourage states to develop regional and, whenever possible, national reciprocity programs for certified trade professionals. Careers that allow for geographic mobility are more attractive to students and young people investigating career options.