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NEXT STEPS FOR THE NUCLEAR WORKFORCE

A PATHWAY TO TRADES SERIES

October 20, 2026



Key Takeaways

The Next Steps for the Nuclear Workforce event brought together leaders from all levels of government, education, industry, organized labor and economic development to discuss strengthening career pathways and expanding workforce training. They also discussed removing barriers that could prevent Tennesseans from participating in the industry's growth.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE EVENT INCLUDED:



- DEPUTY SECRETARY OF ENERGY JAMES P. DANLY GAVE THE KEYNOTE ADDRESS. He emphasized that the U.S. Department of Energy is committed to growing the U.S. nuclear capacity and intends to broaden its workforce development priorities to support this. This will include more focus on skilled trades workers, supporting apprenticeships, and building partnerships with a broader range of educational and training institutions, describing a shift toward opening opportunities to "the trades and skills of all types."
- U.S. REPRESENTATIVE CHUCK FLEISCHMANN emphasized that Oak Ridge's success has always depended on the people whose expertise makes complex projects possible, including skilled trades workers who will play an essential role in building and operating new facilities as nuclear companies continue to move to and expand across the region.
- A PANEL DISCUSSION featuring leaders from all levels of education, industry, organized labor and economic development discussed a number of issues, including the labor demand forecast and how educational and training institutions can respond, apprenticeship programs, technical education and employer partnerships, and removing barriers to careers in the skilled trades.



Clearly, Tennessee's nuclear future and workforce development depends on collaboration. Long-term success will require coordinated collaboration among all stakeholders.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE NUCLEAR WORKFORCE EVENT INCLUDED:

- TENNESSEE'S NUCLEAR EXPANSION WILL CREATE SIGNIFICANT WORKFORCE DEMAND. ORAU's *East Tennessee Nuclear Workforce Demand Assessment* projects employment among participating regional companies will increase from approximately 17,000 to 21,000 workers by 2032, with demand extending into the following years.
- SKILLED TRADES ARE ESSENTIAL TO NUCLEAR GROWTH. Electricians, welders, pipefitters, chemical operators and other technical professionals will be just as critical to expansion as engineers and scientists.
- WORKFORCE INVESTMENTS MUST BE GUIDED BY REGIONAL DATA. The assessment identifies specific occupations and hiring timelines that can help employers, educators and policymakers prioritize resources.
- APPRENTICESHIPS, COMMUNITY COLLEGES, TRADE SCHOOLS (TCATS, ETC.) OFFER SCALABLE SOLUTIONS. Work-based learning, flexible training programs and stronger school-to-career pathways can help expand the qualified workforce.
- WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT MUST ADDRESS BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT. Childcare, transportation, and housing determine whether workers can receive appropriate training, enter and remain in high-demand careers. Losses from these barriers drain billions of dollars from economic development.
- EARLY CAREER AWARENESS PRODUCES MEASURABLE RESULTS. Roane County's apprenticeship readiness initiative demonstrates how partnerships can introduce students to opportunities and create direct pathways into employment, and using them as a model to scale will strengthen that pipeline.
- COLLABORATION REMAINS EAST TENNESSEE'S GREATEST STRENGTH. All levels of government and education, industry, organized labor and community organizations must work together to turn projected economic growth into sustainable careers. Identifying areas of collaboration, forging connections, and finding solutions is the underlying goal of the Pathway to Trades series of events.

Next Steps for the Nuclear Workforce the second in a series of Pathway to Trades events. The next event in the series is planned for Spring 2027.

