



“Explore The Trades Skills Lab, Built by Ferguson”

About the program:

Explore The Trades is focused on bridging the technical talent gap to the service trades of plumbing, heating, cooling and electrical. Ferguson is committed to strengthening the communities it serves with a focus on the skilled trades. Together, both organizations are dedicated to building the next generation of skilled tradespeople.

The focus behind this program is to bring hands-on trades education to middle and high school students and give them the opportunity to develop lifelong skills that can be turned into a career.

Explore The Trades would like to thank [Ferguson](#), as the program’s founding donor, for their continued support. Ferguson is a North American Fortune 500 company and a leading distributor of HVAC and plumbing products. This program, founded in 2021, creates new and refurbished skilled trades classrooms in middle schools and high schools throughout North America. We are pleased that this program is beginning its sixth year in building partnerships – and technicians – in our own communities.

Explore The Trades thanks [Comfort Systems USA Foundation](#) for supporting our Skills Lab program expansion into electrical. This investment is helping prepare the next generation of skilled electrical professionals through hands-on training and career awareness. As a leading provider of mechanical, electrical, and plumbing building systems and services, Comfort Systems USA operates through more than 50 operating companies across 150 cities and 206+ locations. The Comfort Systems USA Foundation, the charitable arm of Comfort Systems USA focused on workforce development, is committed to empowering underserved communities by creating pathways to rewarding careers in the skilled trades. We are grateful for their partnership and commitment to expanding skilled trades opportunities in the regions they serve.

The “Explore The Trades Skills Lab, Built by Ferguson” program will accept applications from October 1, 2026 – March 31, 2027. Recipients will be announced on May 5, 2027.

Who is eligible?

Middle and high schools (grades 6-12) located in the United States, including public, private, CTE or charter schools.

Schools that have previously received a Skills Lab award are not eligible to apply.

Schools in all 50 U.S. states are eligible to apply for plumbing and HVAC lab grants. Eligibility for electrical lab grants is limited to schools located in North Carolina, Michigan, Illinois, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, South Carolina, Wisconsin, and Utah.

Can a school apply for more than one Skills Lab category?

No. A school must select the type of Skills Lab they would like to apply for: i.e. HVAC, plumbing, or electrical and select either the New Program or Existing Program category. Schools may only submit one application.

Can a school district submit applications for multiple schools?

No. Explore The Trades aims to maximize its impact by supporting as many schools and districts as possible. Therefore, only one school per district may be selected during a given application cycle. If multiple schools within a district could benefit from the grant, those schools are encouraged to apply in future application cycles.

What is the award amount granted to each school?

Those applying for a new program equipment grant may submit an application worth up to \$25,000 of equipment, products, and consumables.

For those schools applying for an existing program equipment grant may submit a grant application worth up to \$10,000 of equipment, products, and consumables.

Does the grant support instructor salaries or provide teaching staff?

No. The Skills Lab grant covers equipment, products, and consumables only. It does not cover instructor salaries, stipends, or other staff costs, and Explore The Trades does not provide teaching staff. Schools are responsible for staffing their own classrooms and programs.

How many labs will be created?

The number of HVAC and plumbing equipment grants awarded is based on the number of applications received. There is no predetermined number of awards in either the New Program or Existing Program categories.

For electrical labs only, there will be one new program equipment grant award and one existing program equipment grant award.

How does the equipment process work?

Once recipients are selected, each school for HVAC and plumbing labs will be matched with the nearest Ferguson branch for order fulfillment.

For electrical labs only, each school will be matched with the nearest electrical supplier for order fulfillment.

Once connected, the school and the local branch will work together to finalize an order that will then be sent to Explore The Trades for final approval and payment.

What is the timeline for receiving equipment?

Schools will be paired with a Ferguson (HVAC/Plumbing) or electrical supplier branch by June 2027. It's recommended that orders are placed by July 31, 2027, to receive the goods in a timely manner. Please note that order shipments will be arranged between the school and their Ferguson contact. All Skills Labs, both new and existing, need to be operational for student use by Fall 2027.

If a school is selected for a Skills Lab grant, but can't begin the Skills Lab for the 2027-2028 school year, what happens?

If a school is selected for a Skills Lab grant but isn't able to have the lab complete by Fall 2027 due to unforeseen circumstances, they may defer their equipment grant award for one year. If the school cannot complete the lab after a deferment period, the grant award is forfeited.

How will recipient schools select the equipment and products for their Skills Lab (new programs and existing programs)?

Recipients will have the ability to design their Skills Lab and order equipment, tools, and consumables best suited for their curriculum and space needs. The selections must fit into the space and be identified on the proposed classroom floor plan. Explore The Trades does not require that any specific equipment be purchased for the lab.

Recipients may use the Ferguson (HVAC/plumbing) or electrical supplier website as a guide, but will finalize product and equipment details, pricing, and delivery with their respective Ferguson or electrical supplier branch contact.

Does the grant require pre-selected curriculum?

No. Schools may use any curriculum they choose. Explore The Trades does not require or provide a specific curriculum; schools should select whatever curriculum that best fits their program, student's needs, and state requirements.

Does Explore The Trades dictate how a school designs its lab or training space?

No. Explore The Trades does not dictate lab layout or design. Schools have the flexibility to design their Skills Lab in the way that best suits their program, students, and facility, as long as the equipment selections fit into the space identified on the proposed floor plan.

May multiple orders be placed with the grant award throughout the year?

No. Recipient schools will place one order and are encouraged to use as much of their equipment grant as possible. Equipment orders are due to Explore The Trades by July 31, 2027, to ensure materials are ready for the start of the school year.

Please note: Schools are strongly encouraged to use as much of their grant award as possible when placing their equipment order. Any remaining funds may not be saved for subsequent orders.

May funds be allocated towards items not available through Ferguson or electrical supplier?

Yes; however, this amount must not exceed 10% of the grant award. (\$2,500 is available for New Program Skills Labs, and \$1,000 is available for Existing Program Skills Labs).

If approved, purchases from retailers other than Ferguson or electrical supplier will follow a similar process. The school will work directly with the retailer to obtain a quote, which must be submitted to Explore The Trades for approval. Once approved, Explore The Trades will coordinate payment directly with the retailer.

Does the recipient school pay Ferguson or electrical supplier for the order?

No. Once the order is created, Explore The Trades will manage the payment process directly with Ferguson and/or an electrical supplier. The recipient school is not responsible for any payment within the allotted grant amount.

What happens if the recipient school goes over our grant award?

If a school goes over their grant award, then it is the responsibility of the school to cover the order balance. Explore The Trades will work with Ferguson or electrical supplier and the school for this process.

May the equipment be installed in a different space other than the recipient school?

No. The equipment and products are intended only for the recipient school and must be installed onsite.

After being selected as a recipient of the equipment, will there be follow-up reporting to complete?

Yes. The recipient should expect to provide success metrics at the end of the two sequential school years following the award. Regular reporting may include, but is not limited to, student and/or instructor surveys, number of students enrolled in the class, student success rate for completing tasks and skills, student and/or instructor testimonials about the new skills lab, in-person and/or virtual site visits.

Who should individuals contact with questions?

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