



Webinar: Recruiting and Retaining Our Highway Construction Workforce

Chat Pod Questions and Answers

Webinar Date: March 29, 2022, from 1:00–2:30 p.m. EST (12:00–1:30 p.m. CST)

- 1. Question:** They say more is learned from failure than success. What failed along the way that you tried?

Answer: Trying to do it all ourselves. Building capacity and knowledge by asking questions and accessing our partners' knowledge base. Bringing in our partners to talk to the potential construction workers was key.
- 2. Question:** Have you seen a decrease in recruitment due to the labor shortage issue?

Answer: Recruitment waned at the beginning of the pandemic, then increased during the Summer of 2020. A project as large as SoFi Stadium completing will also decrease recruitment. We are at about 65–80 attendees in comparison to the 100–120. Having multiple mega projects does keep the flow constant.
- 3. Question:** When the number of job seekers reached 150+, what happened to job seekers who were not picked up by contractors or unions?

Answer: Not all 150 decided to go into construction. The American Job Center of California has other career pathways to refer clients to. We have been lucky in this area as construction jobs are plentiful in Los Angeles County, specifically the South Bay Workforce Investment Board area of concentration.
- 4. Question:** Do any of these hires get laid off when the large project is completed? Do the companies retain the employees into the future?

Answer: As with most big projects, when the project is done, the contractor moves on to the next project and takes the best workers with them. We are up-front with our folks that they have to be ready to move on to the next project. What has been good practice for retention in our area is to keep the relationship connected so we can get those not retained into the next project, which is plentiful in the Los Angeles County Area. We have also linked permanent construction jobs with companies like SoCalGas and Southern California Edison.
- 5. Question:** How long do participants access support services via the program and gain independence on their own?

Answer: Participants can access support services from enrollment into the program through the occupational training program until their first check. We can consider specific issues on a case-by-case basis, if needed, to ensure job retention.
- 6. Question:** What services from the workforce investment board is the grant covering?

Answer: The grant covers the Pre-Apprenticeship Occupational Skills training (Multi-Craft Core Curriculum Training), support services for the participants, and ultimately a job.
- 7. Question:** How did you get contractors to accept re-entry citizens? What were the limits as far as what the contractor would accept in terms of a re-entry citizen's background/past offenses? Some contractors will not accept potential re-entry workers.

Answer: First, we had to get clear on the project requirements. And then also on the specific requirements for the prime and their subs. Some of the infrastructure projects often require cleaning for several years. In our launch project, there was only one part of the work that had that requirement, and most contractors were more flexible. We modeled our information to contractors from recommendations from organizations that specialize in hiring support for re-entry individuals. They helped us improve messaging, as well as highlight benefits to employers like tax credits and bonding. We always make sure to seek out at least one or two "fair chance" employers, so justice-involved applicants have choices.

- 8. Question:** Are public agency positions supported through these programs? Such as county highway departments, city street departments, etc.? Many local agency departments need this type of workforce as well.
- Answer:** Yes, thank you for this question. City public works, airport, and departments of transportation (DOT) positions are also part of our recruitment and training pathways. And the Colorado DOT (CDOT) is currently building out an improved bridge state-wide to link community college training partnerships into CDOT hiring paths, especially in maintenance paths.
- 9. Question:** Retention has been especially hard for tier 2 and tier 3. Several of the firms “steal” employees from each other, and the employee does not get properly trained.
- Answer:** We’ve seen the “steals” increase significantly, and some of the larger employers are even adding recruiting bonuses for employees that bring on new workers, which inadvertently contributes to that.
- 10. Question:** What is the cost to run such a program, and what are the funding sources?
- Answer:** The grant referenced in the presentation was from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and State DOT-California Department of Transportation. Most of our grants have a slot cost of approximately \$5,500 to \$6,500 a participant. Some of the cost was leveraged through grants like Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act and special population grants. Placements for us are per grant. Contractors have a placement rate at their project detailed in the Project Labor Agreement, if agreed on.
- 11. Question:** Do the stipends for the Alabama program come from the FHWA funding or matching or other sources?
- Answer:** In WORKNOW, we used foundation dollars to provide stipends when people are in training. The stipend varied on the length of the program and was awarded on the last day.
- 12. Question:** Would like to know how Alabama is able to secure the construction training simulators (mobile and site developed)?
- Answer:** If you have a community college or secondary partners—ask them about Perkins’s funding to buy those simulators.

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