



WDCO Webinar—Women in Construction

Date: March 21, 2023, 1:30–3:00 p.m. ET (12:30–2:00 p.m. CT)

Q&A Session—Chat Messages

Questions for Federal Highway Administration—Chrisy Currier

1. Question: Is there a mail or a listserv community of practice site where we can meet and share upcoming proposals, any tips, evaluation data, and stories?
 - a. Answer: It's a good question. We looked into it recently, setting up a community of practice. Our hands are tied with setting up things like that, so we have not been able to progress very far. We are planning to set up some brown bags every few months that we're going to open up for people. We may have a presentation—just somebody to say, "Hey, I'm Lori; I'm from Vermont—then open it up for people to talk and just to share their stories, because we recently attended an Every Day Counts (EDC) Summit, and we actually got a lot more out of the unprepared session than we did at the one that was just a breakout session, and people just showed up, and started asking questions. All of us that were on the call have newsletters that go out via GovDelivery; check our website. There are different structured events like this, but then there are also the more casual events. Check out our resources and SWD toolkit (https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/innovativeprograms/centers/workforce_dev/hcwp/toolkit/). We're hoping to have a few more of these opportunities to chat with each other. A lot of you may have come to this webinar from the newsletter announcement, but a lot of you may be new, so there's a lot of grant information that's published there. Other Strategic Workforce Development Toolkit materials I've posted are there as well, webinars like this are awesome, definitely feel free to join. And we typically do have peer exchanges as well in the Strategic Workforce Development States. We'll sometimes recap those too in the newsletter and share any information learned. It's a really great resource.

2. Question: How can we find out if our State is committed to implementing the Strategic Workforce Development Program, and who should we contact?
 - a. Answer: I dropped a link and will drop it again to the page for Strategic Workforce Development (https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/innovativeprograms/centers/workforce_dev/hcwp/the_workforce_problem/default.aspx). We actually have a map there that you can click on (https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/innovativeprograms/centers/workforce_dev/hcwp/). There's also an Excel document where you can search and see your States. There are 32 States that elected to participate in Every Day Counts-6. Now we are launching EDC-7 and the States that are going through a caucus right now, which they're determining which Everyday Counts initiatives they want to move forward with. We anticipate we'll get more than the 32 States that we had last time, but again, not all States are going to sign up for this. If they do, it just means that they have the opportunity to come to peer exchanges and things like that. But even if they don't,



some of them have some amazing programs out there that we are trying to highlight through our newsletters and articles.

Questions for Women's Bureau—Leah Rambo

1. Question: How does one participate in the policy sector of this work to help move the needle regarding wage equity and gender equity in the trade industry?
 - a. Answer: Join the National Taskforce on Tradeswomen's Issues (<https://tradeswomentaskforce.org/>). Join their mailing lists; join their committees. There is a ton of awesome information within that group. Reach out to the Women's Bureau (<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/wb>). We have our national office, but we also have our regional offices, which work very closely on the ground with different partners, and we're always looking for people to support the work that we do, partner with us on webinars, and help get the word out. I think one of the things you can do is just really start engaging all of your local organizations. We don't want people to reinvent the wheel, and there are networks. Join the tradeswomen's task force. There are great networks across the United States, and just start working on these issues. You can always reach out to the Women's Bureau. We will connect you with the organizations and people to help support what you're trying to do.

2. Question: What are some examples of changing work culture, rather than building workplace aids like transport and childcare—not necessarily stable or long-lasting, are fully effective at meeting the needs of new and expecting workers as noted in the last story that Ronnie shared. What are some examples of changing work culture that you all may have?
 - a. Answer: I can give an example. With sheet metal, air, rail, and transportation workers. After attending the Women Build Nations Conference, which is a conference each year, they came back and formed an International Women's Committee. That was the first thing they did. The next thing that they did was change the language in their constitution to make it gender-neutral and to also make sure that bullying, hazing, and harassment were chargeable offenses. Next, they set up a recruitment and retention council, and they did a collaboration between the union, the training arm, and the contractors' association, and a program called "Be for All," which highlighted excellence for everyone. There was systematic training that would do all the leadership on the international level, leadership on the local level when they took their international classes, and leadership for everyone involved in training required to take diversity, equity, and inclusion training. It's an ongoing process, but it was specifically within the design to change the culture in the industry, to be more respectful, to be more inclusive, and to be more aware. There are people who are completely unaware of behavior that is inappropriate because it has just gone unchecked in some cases for so long. It's really a combination from the top down, from the internationals down, as well as efforts for individual locals that are training their staff, their employees, their instructors, their workers, and even I've seen the levels where it's now, the employers that may be associated with different associations, or training their members. It's a broad awareness, and it's a discussion that sometimes may be a little uncomfortable, but it's starting to move the needle on the culture that needs to make it more respectful and safer for workers.



Questions for Vermont Agency of Transportation and Vermont Works for Women—Lori Valburn and Rhoni Basden

1. Question: How do you get the State Department of Transportation at the table?
 - a. Answer: I did share a link in the chat (<https://vtrans.vermont.gov/civil-rights/doing-business/dbe-center/links>) to our website, and to a map where we currently have the DOT—the state of our Strategic Workforce Development. There are some States that already have amazing programs with workforce development, trying to have trainees get into an apprenticeship program that might not be on the map. It just means that they're doing it a little separately from us, but they still are fantastic, so you can reach out. What we're finding is, it's typically through the Civil Rights Office. If you want to be able to find jobs and get in the training programs, they're the ones that run a lot of the training programs. And then there's HR. I think that in general, most State DOTs are going to be very supportive. We're highly incentivized right now to want to encourage a very diverse workforce. We all have a workforce challenge, and we all have an influx of funding coming in and a very long list of infrastructure projects. We need everybody at the table. The harder part is to be able to secure funding, and I strongly encourage organizations like Chicago Women in Trades (<https://cwit.org/>), like Vermont Works for Women (<https://vtworksforwomen.org/>)—all of those organizations—to be building strong networks with all of your partners, your State, your contractor organizations, and your educational organizations. We need to come together and ensure that everybody is working together to get it done. Continue to reach out to many different resources within the agency, find champions that are willing to talk about programs or partnerships, or collaborations, and lay out both the immediate goals and the long-term goals. This can really not only impact what's necessary now but can really build for a future that is going to be an even bigger need here in Vermont. If you don't get any traction there, try somebody else. Try an engineer. Just call up the district engineer and say, "Hey, I want to get involved. I want to find out about jobs and how to help my projects and put in bids and things like that." You can't do it alone, Federal Highway has not done this by itself. DOT can't do it by itself. It takes everybody to get this project built.
2. Question: Oregon created the Safe from Hate Pledge, and then iron workers created Be That One GUY. There are different platforms out there and programs. [What other solutions are there?]
 - a. Answer: I echo everything Leah shared. It also starts with having voices at the table that can speak to barriers and speak to experience and actually articulate. What are solutions—and I agree, a lot of the gendered stereotypes or barriers were challenges that occur. Some are intentional, and some are very unintentional, just a lack of awareness about what that experience feels like, what it looks like for a participant or an individual, and creating a diverse workforce means we need diverse leadership as well, and so really encouraging employee resource groups that can work toward that setting requirements, not just hopes for a company, but actually holding people accountable to those requirements and standards. If you send out an application and you want fifty percent of the applications to be filled out by women, you don't start interviewing until you have fifty percent of the applications for women. Holding



companies, industries, contractors, and individuals accountable, but also forcing those conversations to happen in real and tangible ways.

3. Question: As the industry continues to transform and become more digital, how can we make sure that women aren't left behind?
 - a. Answer: I would argue in the same way that we're encouraging women to not be left behind in construction. We need more equitable pathways. We need more representation. We need more access, starting in education programs and outreach all the way up to the long term, and also providing affinity spaces where women can be trained in supportive environments that meet their needs, whether it's child care, or transportation, or community needs but work schedules as well.
4. Question: How do you get leadership buy-in from your program?
 - a. Answer: Yeah, I would say they have to understand that it's a necessity. We're not going to have the labor or the workforce unless we all invest in it equally, and in order for that to not only just be an initial job offer, but a long-term meeting those job needs and those agency needs. As far as a specific program, Vermont has rolled it out in collaboration with not only other gendered-specific organizations, but just other organizations around male champions, really making sure that men understand perspective and voice, and are listening so that they can go out and also speak in circles that maybe women are not currently represented in. We have a contractor workforce that's eager to bid on and be awarded projects that are Federally funded, and with that comes this obligation. It's a mandate that the workforce that they're hiring, and the workplaces are going to be not just free from harassment and discrimination, but also diverse and inclusive, and for that reason, there is a strong incentive right now. I know that Monica pasted it into the chat. We have hired and maintained a diverse workforce publication. We have an EEO toolkit. We try to remind our contractors early and often that they have a responsibility to be out there recruiting a diverse workforce, getting them trained, treating them fairly, and making sure they get to take advantage of promotional opportunities. I think that the buy-in is partly from a business-needs perspective, and it's partly from a reality that right now, due to workforce challenges and unemployment rates being so low, our contractors are highly motivated, and it's a perfect opportunity for us to ensure that women are given an opportunity.

Chicago Women in Trades—Lark Jackson

1. [Repeat] Question: Oregon created the Safe From Hate Pledge, and then iron workers created Be That One GUY. So, there are different platforms out there and programs. [What other solutions are there?]
 - a. First of all, I agree with Leah, Anita, and Rhoni. As a technical assistance provider, I think it's important for leadership to take ownership of the training, so not only do we provide the training directly, but we also train the trainer because we want to make sure that the training is sustainable and that leadership feels equipped to show that they're really invested in it. And what better way to do that than to actually facilitate those pieces of training for other folks in leadership or membership. Yeah, I think



that's super important to just make sure that sustainability is always a part of the conversation.

Resources to include in this document:

[Home - Vermont Works for Women \(vtworksforwomen.org\)](http://vtworksforwomen.org)

[Women Road Builders Association](#)

[Tools and Tiaras | TOOLS & TIARAS INC](#)

[National Center for Women's Equity in Apprenticeship and Employment \(womensequitycenter.org\)](http://womensequitycenter.org)

[Oregon Tradeswomen](#)

[National Association of Women in Construction \(NAWIC\)](#)

[WINTER 2020 \(winterwomen.org\)](http://winterwomen.org)

[AWC | The Association of Women Contractors \(awcmn.org\)](http://awcmn.org)

[Nontraditional Employment for Women \(new-nyc.org\)](http://new-nyc.org)

[Pride home page \(prideandapaycheck.com\)](http://prideandapaycheck.com)

[Women's Trades Training | Hope Renovations](#)

[Women Leaders in Transportation Design & Construction Council - The American Road & Transportation Builders Association \(ARTBA\)](#)