

Highway Construction Workforce Partnership

Strategic Workforce Development

Speaking Points

Investments in Building the Nation's Workforce

- The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) will increase investment in the Nation's highway program annually from \$46 billion to \$70 billion for the next five years, resulting in an even greater need for skilled workers.
- The BIL investment prioritizes the hiring of qualified professionals for highway, bridge construction, and transportation projects. Most firms expect to add to their workforce in 2023 and 2024 despite only 5 to 10 percent of construction workers in June 2023 working on BIL awards.
- The significant increase in highway investment resulting from BIL will provide a greater opportunity for States to invest in workforce development through 23 United States Code 504(e).
- The [504\(e\) funds](#) allow States to use the National Highway Performance Program, Surface Transportation Block Grant Program, Highway Safety Improvement Program, and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program funds at 100 percent Federal funding when used for transportation workforce development, training, and education programs and activities. The core program funds can be utilized to support the Highway Construction Workforce Partnership (HCWP)/Strategic Workforce Development (SWD) programs.
- The American Road & Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA) 2023 Market Outlook indicates a total spending of more than \$84 billion on transportation infrastructure projects, encompassing roadways, bridges, and related developments.

The Current State of the Workforce

- According to Ken Simonson, the Associated General Contractors of America's (AGC) chief economist, "There is plenty of work for the industry to perform, there just aren't enough people to do the work or materials to complete the projects. Addressing labor shortages and supply chain problems will ensure that the construction industry can upgrade America's infrastructure, modernize its manufacturing sector, and help deliver a more reliable and cleaner energy grid."

For more resources on building a workforce development program, visit the Strategic Workforce Development Toolkit.



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- The AGC reports that two-thirds of contractors experience project delays due to labor shortages, leading to lower-quality work, limited career advancement, and challenges in replacing the retiring workforce.
- According to the ARTBA 2023 Market Outlook, the number of job openings in the construction field is at an all-time high, indicating a demand for construction workers that is not being filled.
- Attracting and retaining a new workforce that is diverse in background and ability is necessary to grow the industry and adapt to societal expectations for the work environment, industrial culture, and competitiveness in benefits. Creating a separate ladder for “craft” workers’ development and advancement is pivotal to attracting a skilled labor workforce. Opportunities include reverse mentoring, training on days with prohibitive weather, personally curated training programs, and leadership programs.

Addressing Workforce Construction Challenges: State and Organizational Efforts

- The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, ARTBA, AGC, the U.S. Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration (ETA), and FHWA established HCWP to address the workforce challenge.
- HCWP is a program for industry and public workforce system representatives to create working groups, uniting resources from the transportation, education, and workforce sectors to identify, train, place, and retain individuals in highway construction careers. The public workforce system, overseen by ETA, encompasses 600 State and local workforce development boards and 2,500 American Job Centers nationwide, providing support for industry workforce development.
- According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, highway and bridge contractors added 19,300 more workers in April 2023 compared with April 2022. The increase in April employment outpaced job growth in the broader economy by more than 2.7 percent, general construction by more than 2.6 percent, manufacturing by more than 1.7 percent, transportation and warehousing by more than 1.7 percent, and retail trade by more than 0.3 percent.
- State departments of transportation are working together to address pay and benefit misconceptions. The Florida Department of Transportation works with its contractor partners to stress the importance of salary and benefits. Their partner, Superior Construction, recently adjusted their time-off benefits to meet workforce expectations.
- About 19 percent of young people, influenced by the misconception that physical labor careers pay inadequately, are uninterested in joining the highway construction workforce. The Texas Department of Transportation’s [ConnectU2Jobs Program](#) addresses this and provides contractor training surrounding salary discussions in partnership with the Lone Star Justice Alliance. The program empowers justice-involved young adults with high-demand career training through an innovative “earn and learn” model.

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- Contractors have begun making changes to improve the work-life balance of their workforce. Markham Contracting in Arizona, for example, prioritizes family values with flexible hours and weekends off, excluding emergencies and inclement weather, and Superior Construction in Florida introduced employee leave policies.
- The U.S. Chamber of Commerce's [Hiring Our Heroes](#) and the North America's Building Trades Unions' [Helmets to Hardhats](#) help identify and recruit military members about to be discharged. The programs have seen more than 41,000 military personnel successfully transfer into civilian careers in the construction trades since 2003.
- The Vermont Agency of Transportation's [Intern Maintenance Worker Program](#) offers a full-time opportunity for high school students to perform a variety of hands-on tasks such as repairing and maintaining equipment, preparing for and mitigating road conditions for inclement weather, patching potholes, and much more.

Tools for Transforming Highway Construction Careers

- FHWA and national partners created the [HCWP Playbook](#), offering eight "Plays" for implementing effective HCWP programs, aiming to establish rewarding careers in the highway construction industry. This replicable model, supported by the HCWP/SWD initiative and grants, seeks to institutionalize successful workforce programs and practices nationwide.
- HCWP, designated as the SWD initiative in the [Every Day Counts](#) (EDC) [EDC-6](#) Innovations, involves participation from more than 40 States at various stages of their EDC-6 and the most current [EDC-7](#) programs for the 2023 and 2024 calendar years.
- Through EDC-7, States meet virtually and in person regularly for knowledge-sharing events, sharing the best practices and challenges of building and maintaining workforce development programs.
- Visit the [HCWP Roads to Your Future](#) website for details on ongoing programs and innovative approaches to highway construction workforce development.
- The SWD Implementation Team developed the [SWD Toolkit](#), including resources such as factsheets, profiles, case studies, and marketing materials. For example, the guidance counselor factsheet aids States in educating high school students about highway construction, and the toolkit features success stories, particularly highlighting lasting career opportunities for female and minority participants in the field.
- The SWD Toolkit also offers innovative strategies to engage organizations in [identifying, training, placing](#), and retaining individuals for construction jobs supporting the development of the Nation's highway system.

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Advancements and Initiatives in Highway Construction Workforce Development

- There are 43 States participating in the SWD initiative, growing from 34 States in EDC-6. States are acknowledging the strength of partnerships within their local communities and through collaboration with the SWD network of State departments of transportation.
- Texas's ConnectU2Jobs Program prepares and trains justice-involved young adults between ages 18 and 24 for careers in the heavy highway construction industry. Two cohorts graduated in 2022, and almost all cohort participants graduated with their National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) Core Construction Level 1 Certification and NCCER Heavy Equipment Operator Level 1 Certification.
- The Arizona chapter of AGC developed an [Industry Readiness Program](#) that offers 10 weeks of on-the-job training for job seekers entering the heavy civil construction industry. In 2021, 121 trainees participated in the program, and 19 apprentices reached journeyman status.
- Idaho's HCWP established a [Heavy Equipment Operator Training Program](#) that includes certifications in heavy equipment operation, as well as hazardous waste operations and emergency response. In 2023, 100 percent of the trainees graduated from the program, and 74 percent obtained jobs in the construction industry.
- In 2022, 130 active career mentor volunteers worked with the [Vermont Works for Women Program](#). They matched 37 women with mentors, providing job search and application support, coaching, and advice about their profession and field. The program also aided 92 women in finding, changing, or advancing their careers, representing 12 out of Vermont's 14 counties.
- For more information about HCWP/SWD, contact FHWA: Chrisy Currier at Christina.Currier@dot.gov, Rhonda Motley at Rhonda.Motley@dot.gov, or Tina Hooper at Tina.M.Hooper@dot.gov.



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