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Building the Future - Federal Agencies Team up to Draw Women to Construction Jobs

Thanks to recent legislation, like the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, more transportation construction projects are slated for roads, bridges, mass transit, water infrastructure, resilience, and broadband. Despite progress in recent years, women remain significantly underrepresented in construction, making up only 11 percent of the total workforce and just 3.9 percent of the skilled trades, according to the [National Association of Women in Construction](#). Meanwhile, the larger construction industry faces pre-pandemic levels of workforce shortages, with almost 90 percent of highway contractors struggling to fill job openings, according to a survey conducted by [Associated General Contractors of America](#).

To help State departments of transportation and contractors recruit qualified candidates, the Federal Highway Administration, through their Every Day Counts-6 Strategic Workforce Development initiative, has partnered with the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) [Good Jobs Initiative](#) and the Women's Bureau to provide resources to employers and potential candidates to attract more women to the construction industry. "A lot of our work has been focused on underserved populations, particularly in the trades and construction because these typically are higher paying positions," says Tammi Fleming, Infrastructure Investment Equity Fellow at DOL.

The cross-agency partnership promotes quality, high-wage jobs and guides employers on ways to offer competitive pay, benefits, and opportunities for advancement as women look for new opportunities to build careers.

"It's connecting the dots," says Leah Rambo, Women's Bureau Deputy Director. "There are still quite a few skilled tradeswomen who may not be getting the hours or jobs they want. They don't know where the jobs are located, or which contractors have them. We're also working with organizations that are successful at recruiting and retaining women and holding them up as examples. There is simply too much work out there to get done without hiring women."

Putting information into action

Whether it's childcare, safe working conditions, or equipment that fits women properly, employers are learning to put these, and other job features front and center to prospective employees. With the [Strategic Workforce Development Toolkit](#), organizations looking to identify, train, place, and retain candidates in transportation construction jobs can find resources and innovative strategies all in one place.

“This toolkit is another example of the intentionality of the Good Jobs Initiative,” says Rambo. “By having multiple agencies on board, we’re harnessing the full power of both the DOL and the U.S. Department of Transportation. The only way you can provide a comprehensive toolkit like this is to have individuals from each partner agency talk to each other and pull out their best practices to put in the toolkit. As a result, we’ve created a resource that helps build equity, and that means a healthier, happier, and longer tenured workforce.”

The benefits of hiring women

Expanding the number of women in construction jobs contributes to more diverse workplaces, which can bring additional benefits to the industry overall. Companies where diversity and equity are embraced and promoted can be more productive, and more equitable environments can also help increase employee retention, broaden perspectives, foster creativity and innovation, and attract top talent.¹ “Safe, happy workers get the job done quicker, with fewer hitches,” says Rambo. “Any employer is going to love that.”

“There is a legacy of women traditionally being in underpaid jobs,” says Fleming. “They’ve been overlooked when it comes to transportation construction jobs. The toolkit and the Good Jobs Initiative is going to help families; it’s going to help communities. These women are building a strong future for themselves and the next generations.”

For more information on how you can recruit, hire, place, and retain women in transportation construction, contact Chrisy Currier, FHWA Strategic Workforce Development Program Manager at christina.currier@dot.gov. For more information on the Good Jobs Initiative, contact Tammi Fleming at fleming.tammi.l@dol.gov.

¹ <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters>.