



Highway Construction Workforce Partnership Strategic Workforce Development

Source: USDOT/Getty

Regional Working Groups Collaborate to Combat Shortages in Highway Construction Workforce

Alabama, Denver, Idaho, and Rhode Island

Across the nation, there is a shortage of highway construction workers, who keep the transportation industry and economy moving forward. The U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) partnered with other key national highway organizations and the Employment and Training Administration to establish the Highway Construction Workforce Partnership (HCWP). The partnership brings highway construction, education, and workforce interests together at state and local levels to identify, train, and place individuals into trade occupations to fill industry workforce gaps. The programs are managed by the partner working groups that identify workforce needs and resources. HCWPs in Alabama, Denver, Idaho, and Rhode Island have launched successful working groups.

Forming Working Groups

A critical first step in addressing the highway construction workforce shortage is coordinating working groups made up of various community leaders. From holding roundtable meetings to leveraging longtime professional relationships, forming a successful working group often means bringing industry, government, education, and business stakeholders together to take action.

Seeking support at the state level is a valuable starting point in launching a working group. In Idaho and Rhode Island, Department of Labor workforce councils with existing industry partnerships helped bring the HCWPs to life. In Alabama and Denver, Department of Transportation initiatives first connected business and highway construction industry leaders. From there, workforce councils and construction industry associations took the lead in expanding working groups as common hiring goals quickly united all partners into action.

"We created a project management portal to serve as a hub for the whole partnership. It helped to make sure everyone had access to the same information, flyers, and day-to-day knowledge."

KATRINA WERT
Denver HCWP

The Denver HCWP kicked off its successful working group by holding roundtable discussions on how to meet local hiring priorities. Initial conversations involved nearly 50 business and community representatives. In time, Denver found that smaller working groups focused on individual action items worked well in moving the partnership forward.

According to Katrina Wert, the Community College of Denver Center for Workforce Initiatives Director and Denver HCWP Coordinator, with multiple representatives involved, it is important to unite under one mission. "A group of organizations can work together to break down silos and meet hiring priorities," said Wert. "We figured out our common goals and it became about coming together to measure success."

Maintaining Effective Communication

Once a working group is established, keeping that common goal at the forefront through regular meetings and fluid communication is paramount. Like Denver, other program participants found that working together as an entire group proved to be effective, but in many cases, subcommittees organically formed to address a region's specific needs. All participants used various forms of communication, meeting at least quarterly through in-person and virtual meetings, as well as more frequent email exchanges and teleconferences.

Michael Caliendo of the FHWA Idaho Division said communication is key to making progress and keeping stakeholders engaged. “Constant, ongoing communication is critical to the success of a workforce development group,” said Caliendo. “Everyone is more than a team member. They become friends with a common interest and goals.”

Sharing Best Practices

With various perspectives addressing workforce shortages across the nation, transparency plays a major role. Andrew Cortes of Rhode Island’s HCWP said setting clear expectations and celebrating accomplishments is a great way to drive progress. “If people are not achieving more by being at the table, they will walk away,” says Cortes.

In Alabama, the HCWP formed as a result of longtime partnerships between business and industry representatives working with educational leaders. The group thrived by holding monthly meetings to evaluate the program and quickly address any hurdles they faced.

David Felton, Dean of Workforce Economic Development at Bishop State Community College in Alabama, placed specific importance on hearing what all participants bring to the group. “In education, we design programs all day long,” said Felton.

“When it comes to designing a successful program, you’ve got to be on the pulse of what industry is doing.”

DAVID FELTON
Alabama HCWP



Source: USDOT/Getty

“To successfully customize this program, we had to listen to the business and industry leaders that live in the community. They needed to be the captains of the ship.”

Felton added that keeping the working group’s common goal in focus was fundamental. “Ultimately, we are helping to change lives,” he said. “We’ll always have challenges, but listen, listen, listen. That’s the way to put programs in place that meet your needs.”

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Learn more. To get information on how you can organize a working group to address shortages in your highway construction workforce, contact Clark Martin, HCWP Program Manager, clark.martin@dot.gov.