

Highway Construction Workforce Partnership Strategic Workforce Development

Source: USDOT/Getty Images

Strategic Workforce Development Program Provides Female Minority Participants with Opportunities for Lasting Careers in Highway Construction

Through its Strategic Workforce Development (SWD) Program, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) works with State Transportation Agencies (STAs) to bring together partners to identify, train, place, and retain women, minorities, and disadvantaged individuals into journey-level positions in the highway construction industry. The On-the-Job Training (OJT) Program increases parity in the industry's skilled workforce, while the OJT Supportive Services Program ensures that STAs have the resources needed to assist with trainee recruitment, childcare, transportation, personal equipment purchasing, résumé-building, employment tracking and trending, and much more. Together, these programs work to develop a skilled highway construction workforce, filling critical vacancies and laying the foundation for a strong, diverse highway construction industry for years to come. The following are a few examples of how SWD efforts in Florida, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) have provided life-changing opportunities for women who continue to advance in the highway construction workforce.

Florida Graduate Carries on Family Tradition in Highway Construction



Source:
Florida Department
of Transportation

Jennifer Shepherd's career may have started in court reporting, waitressing, and working in warehouses, but highway construction has always run in her family. After Shepherd's interests were sparked by a conversation with her aunt, an off-road truck driver, she applied for a career in the industry. Shepherd took an entry-level position logging trucks but was quickly placed into the OJT Program, one of two workforce development programs sponsored by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) and supported by both FHWA and State funding. She initially trained as an off-road truck driver but has since received training to operate a bulldozer.

"I wanted to be cross-trained in as many areas as possible," says Shepherd. "I love learning new things and having diverse skills."

Since participating in the OJT Program, Shepherd has received new job titles and responsibilities, along with several pay raises. She rejects the stereotype of the construction industry as being closed or unfriendly to women. "I have endless opportunities," she says. "I feel like I'm completely supported in this field."

"There is so much to learn in highway construction. There are endless opportunities for me—and others like me—when it comes to succeeding in different training programs and areas."

JENNIFER SHEPHERD,
FDOT OJT Program Graduate

"The program helps you improve your work and continue moving forward. Plus, my company paid for the training, construction gear, and safety equipment."

SHEILA HERNANDEZ,
PRHTA SWD Program Graduate



Source:
Florida Department
of Transportation

Puerto Rico Graduate Improves Highway Construction Projects and Future Prospects

Sheila Hernandez studied marketing and worked in food service, pharmacy, and filmmaking positions before learning about the training programs sponsored by FHWA and implemented by the Puerto Rico Highways and Transportation Authority (PRHTA). Like Shepherd, Hernandez was introduced to the highway construction industry by a family member. She says she started in road construction but then moved to a splicer position, where she works with fiber optics.

During her 10-year career in the highway construction industry, Hernandez says, she has been able to buy a house and support her daughter. Today, she enjoys giving back by sharing her expertise with other minority women. “I help people learn what I do, so they can help me. The work comes out better in the end.”

OJT Program Opens Door to Highway Construction for Many in the U.S. Virgin Islands



Source:
Florida Department
of Transportation

Rasheda Williams spent 12 years working in an oil refinery, the principal employer on St. Croix. However, when the refinery closed last year and hundreds were forced to leave the island in search of employment, Williams pursued a position as a flagger on a USVI Department of Public Works (DPW) highway construction site. While she was working, she was approached about OJT learning opportunities that could help expand her career.

“I’m learning to operate the machines,” says Williams. “I’m learning the backhoe right now, but I would like to get into truck driving—and I can see that opportunity with this program.”

Williams says she would recommend the USVI DPW SWD programs to anyone, especially women and single parents who may have a hard time finding a job or moving forward in their careers. “It just gives you a chance to do something great,” says Williams.

“This program is a blessing to us in the Virgin Islands. If you complete the training, you will get a job.”

RASHEDA WILLIAMS,
USVI DPW SWD Program Participant

Links to More Information

Federal Highway Administration

https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/innovativeprograms/centers/workforce_dev
https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/civilrights/programs/contractor_compliance

Florida

<https://www.fdot.gov/equalopportunity/contractcompliance.shtm> (Program Overview)
<https://www.floridaroadjobs.com> (Statewide Workforce Development)
<http://onboard4jobs.com> (FDOT Supportive Services)

Puerto Rico

<https://act.dtop.pr.gov/civil-rights/on-the-job-training> (Overview and Contact Information)

Virgin Islands

<https://dpw.vi.gov/civil-rights> (Overview and Contact Information)



U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration

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Learn more about the FHWA SWD Program, including OJT and OJT Supportive Services, contact Chrisy Carrier at christina.currier@dot.gov or Carey Shepherd at carey.shepherd@dot.gov.