



Highway Construction Workforce Partnership Strategic Workforce Development

Recruiting Tomorrow's Highway Construction Workforce

Idaho, Los Angeles, and Pittsburgh

Maintaining a strong, capable highway construction workforce keeps the nation's transportation industry and economy moving forward. In an effort to identify, train, and place qualified individuals into needed roles, the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) established the Highway Construction Workforce Partnership (HCWP). By bringing together highway construction, education, and workforce interests at state and local levels, partner working groups form to identify needs and resources to fill industry workforce gaps. HCWPs in Idaho, Los Angeles, and Pittsburgh have refined recruitment to maintain a consistent flow of applicants for highway construction positions.

Identifying Target Audiences

Once an HCWP establishes a working group of community leaders, each partner's contribution to outreach and recruitment makes a difference. According to Robert Chavez, Operations Manager for the Los Angeles HCWP, some applicants may not qualify for training or drop out during the process, so having more applications than the number of available positions is important.

"Over a 24-month span, over 8,000 people expressed interest in our highway construction trades and projects."

ROBERT CHAVEZ
Los Angeles HCWP

"We like to see a 3:1 ratio for our programs," said Chavez. "To do that, you've got to get the information out there. Out of any 10 applicants you get, three may qualify and one may enroll."

To build a pool of applicants, the Idaho HCWP started with the target audiences of its partners. This allowed the group to expand program reach to tribal members and refugees who were interested in skilled trades.

"Our partners focused on recruiting minorities, women, veterans, tribal members, and refugees who were underrepresented in the workforce," said Michael Caliendo a Civil Rights Specialist with the FHWA Idaho Division. "We relied on industry stakeholders, the Idaho Department of Labor, and local media to help spread the word."

Leveraging Effective Communication

In addition, relying on partners' current outreach channels can enhance recruitment numbers. The Idaho HCWP said every outlet from social media to word-of-mouth advertising contributed to helping them reach their goal of 500–700 applicants. "We used Facebook, Twitter, the web, press releases, job fairs, and local newspapers," said Caliendo.

The Los Angeles HCWP found a grassroots approach to be effective, with partners from local faith-based organizations attending city council meetings to help spread the word about career potential in the community. "We encouraged recruits to be a part of history by working on a project in their own backyard," said Chavez, who also noted the importance of involving regional job centers. "It's a really good method for tracking applicants through the entire process."

Enhancing Outreach

The Los Angeles HCWP continues to exceed expectations when it comes to recruiting for highway construction workforce positions. Reflecting on the process at each step helps them innovate and expand outreach.

“We’re trying to develop closer relationships with our subcontractors earlier in the process,” said Chavez. “That is important in getting the word out at construction sites.”



The Idaho HCWP is also working to enhance recruiting by being more proactive and emphasizing the long-term benefits of jobs within the highway construction industry. “We plan to begin marketing the program earlier,” said Caliendo. “We’d also like to focus less on the initial monetary gain and more on the lasting career potential of heavy highway construction trades.”

HCWP partners agree that the bottom line when it comes to outreach and recruitment is communication. “We’ve done some work with other workforce development boards across California,” said Chavez. “It has been really valuable in building capacity and getting people to jobs in construction.”

Innovation Spotlight

To connect recruitment with local high school students, the Pittsburgh HCWP developed an interactive game—Future Road Builders—to help young people visualize each role on a highway construction site. They marketed the free downloadable app at career fairs and on social media.

“In one year alone, 23% of people who got into our highway apprenticeship program had accounts with Future Road Builders—that’s one quarter of those accepted who were aware of the industry because of our game.”

JASON KOSS

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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.