



Highway Construction Workforce Partnership Strategic Workforce Development

Source: USDOT/Getty

Training Tomorrow's Highway Construction Leaders

Arizona, Los Angeles, National Center for Construction Education & Research, Pittsburgh Job Corps Center, Rhode Island

Building a strong, capable highway construction workforce that supports the nation's transportation industry and drives the economy forward requires a solid foundation. The U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) established the Highway Construction Workforce Partnership (HCWP) to help train qualified individuals and place them into needed roles. HCWPs in Arizona, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, and Rhode Island are teaming up with organizations like the National Center for Construction Education & Research (NCCER) and the Pittsburgh Job Corps Center to prepare tomorrow's workforce to excel in highway construction apprenticeship programs that launch lasting careers.

Developing Effective Training Programs

Across the nation, HCWPs bring together stakeholders from the community, educational institutions, and private industry to identify training programs that will fill gaps in the highway construction workforce. To address its workforce needs, Rhode Island implemented a five-week pre-apprenticeship program that begins with an orientation and assessment to help applicants understand the rigors of highway construction work before advancing through training.

"Our skilled trade employment programs combine classroom education with on-the-job training," said Andrew Cortes of Rhode Island's HCWP. "Anyone entering this field needs to know how to be on their feet eight hours a day, work well with others, and be able to follow directions."

While offering that real-world experience, Rhode Island understands the support students may need to complete the program. When the number of women in the training program dropped, Rhode Island used federal funding to develop support services for them. "We have a full-time case manager to identify barriers to employment," said Cortes. "Ninety percent of women who go through our program now are retained after placement."

"There were a lot of people who got jobs because of the program—and some continued training. The placements are still rising."

ROBERT CHAVEZ
Los Angeles HCWP

Finding Qualified Participants

Collaborating with FHWA, industry contractors, workforce development boards, and other community-based organizations, the Arizona HCWP developed a nine-week training program to help participants understand the highway construction industry, followed by a 6–8-month apprenticeship to hone their skills. Arizona's Department of Labor and Department of Transportation worked together to support motivated job seekers with employment barriers due to lack of education, financial instability, or other challenges.

"We put a lot of energy into training people who want to commit to the work," said Corey Foster, a workforce development specialist for the Arizona Chapter, Associated General Contractors. "We're meeting the expectations of our applicants, contractors, and job centers. There's so much care that goes into it."

Ensuring Continued Success

To adapt to changing workforce needs, HCWPs can expand their training programs to focus on specialized skills within the highway construction industry. The Pittsburgh Job Corps Center is dedicated to supplying western Pennsylvania with a qualified workforce, which means continuing to develop new programs based on current industry needs. According to James Albright, Education and Training Director, offering additional skills training improves its program and builds a diversified workforce.

“We’re now placing heavy equipment operators, mechanics, and cement masons,” said Albright. “We’re giving participants the skills to work with different team members, but still be part of one project. The enhancement is just fantastic.”

Los Angeles is seeing similar success as program participants transition from one highway construction role to another. “Several individuals have moved on to journeyman-level positions and one became an instructor,” said Robert Chavez of the Los Angeles HCWP. “We’ve made a huge dent in the workforce needed.”



Source: USDOT/Getty

Curriculum Highlight

NCCER offers a proven highway construction training program that can be tailored to any location’s hiring needs. The curriculum covers core topics like safety and tools in the first year, then branches into specific highway construction crafts, including excavation, paving, reinforcing concrete, and more during year two. The flexible content offers stackable credentials individuals can earn to verify their training to employers nationwide.

“We can take someone who knows nothing about construction and give them the knowledge they need to manage a highway construction project.”

PATTY BIRD

Workforce Development Senior Manager, NCCER

Contacts

Michael Chong

Rhode Island -
Federal Highway Administration
michael.a.chong@dot.gov
860-494-7572
highways.dot.gov

Robert Chavez

Los Angeles South Bay
Workforce Investment Board
rchavez@sbwib.org
310-680-3700
sbwib.org

Corey Foster

Arizona -
Chapter Associated General Contractors
(AZAGC)
cfoster@azagc.org
602-252-3926
azagc.org

Patty Bird

NCCER
pbird@nccer.org
888-622-3720 x6912
nccer.org

James Albright

Pittsburgh Job Corps Center
albright.james@jobcorps.org
412-441-8700
pittsburgh.jobcorps.gov

Bob Gottschalk

Pittsburgh Job Corps Center
gottschalk.bob@jobcorps.org
412-441-0025
pittsburgh.jobcorps.gov



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Learn more. To get information on how you can implement successful highway construction training programs to address workforce shortages in your region, contact Clark Martin, HCWP program manager, at clark.martin@dot.gov.