

Minneapolis makes progress but still lacks diversity in labor

Minneapolis again falls short on its own construction project goals.

By [Andy Mannix](#) Star Tribune MAY 2, 2018 — 11:14PM

While Minneapolis has made strides in diversifying its outside contractors, white men continue to benefit disproportionately from public contracts with the city.

In 2017, the city fell short of its diversity goals for workers on public construction projects and for its use of women- and minority-owned businesses, according to data presented to a City Council committee this week.

Over the past four years, minorities accounted for about 21 percent of work hours on public construction projects, missing the goal of 32 percent. Women worked 5 percent of those hours, below the 6 percent goal, according to data collected by the Minneapolis Department of Civil Rights.

However, minority participation hit a four-year high last year of 24 percent, according to the data.

“I think that does show that we’re trending in the right direction,” said Sean Skibbie, director of contract compliance for Minneapolis.

The share of women in the labor force has been relatively stagnant over that time and dropped slightly to 4 percent last year.

The targets are getting more ambitious. In October, the city adopted a 20 percent goal for women, meaning Minneapolis now aims for female and minority workers to collectively work 52 percent total hours of city construction projects annually.

To enforce these goals, the civil rights department requires potential contractors to submit diversity plans before the contract is awarded, and then checks in monthly to make sure the goals are met, Skibbie said. If the contracted company is not following through, the city works with them to figure out why, and if the problem persists, it can impose a monetary penalty, though Skibbie said that has been rare in his time.

Minnesota Department of Human Rights Commissioner Kevin Lindsey agreed there’s been progress on a problem that has long been ignored in Minnesota. He said his department set the goals in order to create momentum toward more inclusion, and they are just one tool the state uses to diversify the workforce.

Meaningful change also comes from the government working with employers and schools to create ways for a wider diversity of young people to get into the trades, he said.

“We all as employers need to be more intentional on creating career pathways,” Lindsey said. “And if we’re not doing that, shame on us.”

The city also did not meet its goals to give 13 percent of its contracts to women-owned businesses and 12 percent to minority-owned businesses last year, according to the data. The contracts going specifically to women-owned businesses dropped from 12 percent in 2014 to 5 percent last year.

“That is a very discouraging chart,” said City Council Member Cam Gordon in a committee meeting Monday. “Can you please reverse that?”

The data may be misleading, Skibbie said. Not all projects are assigned diversity goals, and since he took over as contract compliance director in 2016, he’s been more deliberate in assigning them to more contracts. Two years ago, the city required these diversity goals in a total of 64 contracts; last year, it went up to 100 contracts. So while the percentage may be lower, the number of contracts that must abide diversity goals went up.

“We know that the work isn’t done,” he said. “We’re continuing to work on it. We’re not giving up.”