

Worksystems and regional partners address the need for diversity in construction workforce

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As the ongoing economic recovery has led to business growth and infrastructure investments, the construction sector has boomed, making it a high-growth industry in the Portland Metro Area. However, the career opportunities generated by this growth are not equitably accessible to everyone in the community. Construction has historically been a male-dominated and racially homogenous industry, and this continues to be the case. At the same time, construction businesses report a severe shortage in skilled talent – a claim that is supported by labor market data.

Diversifying the construction workforce will not only help create a stronger supply of needed workers for the industry, it will also directly address issues of poverty and economic mobility within communities of color and working families in the region.

To help better understand the major barriers to increasing diversity in the trades, Worksystems performed an in-depth year-long Regional Construction Workforce Market Study, commissioned by Metro and the City of Portland.

The research study included collecting and analyzing existing available construction workforce supply data, forecasting the local five-year workforce demand, conducting extensive interviews with public agencies, contractors, apprenticeship programs, and pre-apprenticeship programs, and holding focus groups with diverse construction workers and foremen in the region.

The research sought to uncover the major barriers to achieving equity and increasing diversity in the construction workforce for the Portland metro area. A set of recommendations for success are outlined and described in the report. For a complete and detailed set of all data, please visit: <https://www.oregonmetro.gov/construction-career-pathways-project>.

The study's findings fall into three overarching recommendation areas:

- Increase recruitment of women and people of color, primarily through improving word of mouth success and better marketing of these careers to a broader audience.
- Increase retention of existing diverse workers by creating more robust and ongoing support and better addressing the worksite culture in construction.
- Develop more robust equity policies and practices that lead to better outcomes on public capital projects and for the industry as a whole.

These recommendations need to be considered at a regional level. Workers in the industry typically work at different jobsites, work alongside different trades, and can work for multiple contractors throughout their careers. This means that the barriers to create a more diverse workforce impact everyone working in the region across all trades, jobsites, and agencies.

Having a regional approach can better address the issues as they occur and result in more substantial impact. Strategies need to be implemented in concert with each other, as they are interlinked and will not be as successful if implemented separately.

Advancing workforce diversity and equity in construction will take focus, investment, and concerted collaboration. No one party can do it alone. Everyone in the industry; public agencies, contractors, training providers, apprenticeship programs, and the workers on the jobsites, all have a role to play in the success of achieving workforce equity and diversity for the Portland metro region.

Learn more about the Construction Career Pathways Project.

Worksystems is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that pursues and invests resources to improve the quality of the workforce in the city of Portland, Multnomah and Washington counties. It designs and coordinates workforce development programs and services delivered through a network of local partners to help people get the skills, training and education they need to go to work or advance in their careers.