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Few states utilize available federal dollars to support gender diversity in construction jobs
New report highlights Oregon's leadership as a notable exception

Washington, DC—A new report from the [Institute for Women's Policy Research](#) and [Jobs for the Future](#) highlights Oregon's efforts to improve gender diversity in the highway construction trades while noting that few other states use federal dollars to attract and prepare more women for careers in the heavy highway construction workforce.

In Oregon, the percentage of women in construction industry apprenticeships is roughly double the national average.

The report, *Untapped Resources, Untapped Labor Pool: Using Federal Highway Funds to Prepare Women for Careers in Construction*, identifies case studies in Oregon and Maryland for using federal highway funding to build sustainable pathways for women to skilled construction careers. The report is available [here](#).

"Oregon's experience shows that we can attract more women and people of color into well-paying construction careers if we commit to removing barriers to apprenticeship opportunities," said Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian. "These programs work – and can help states build a stronger, more diverse workforce in great careers that don't require mountains of student debt."

Oregon's efforts to support apprentices include funding pre-apprenticeship programs and providing assistance for transportation, work expenses such as tools or clothing, child care and mentorship services. The report highlights that since 2009, only six percent of Oregon women of color that receive these services cancel their apprenticeships, compared to 39 percent who cancel after not receiving any support. Sixteen percent of white women who received supportive services ended their apprenticeships compared to 23 percent who do not.

Nationally, women make up fewer than 3 percent of all construction workers, and represent a key labor pool that can help construction contractors meet their hiring needs as many of its skilled workers are approaching retirement.

Jobs in the highway, street, and bridge construction industry—jobs that typically provide family-supporting wages with good benefits and little college debt—are projected to grow by more than 20 percent until 2022.

“We are pleased that our partnership with BOLI is creating opportunities for a more diverse heavy highway workforce,” said Matt Garrett, director of the Oregon Department of Transportation. “When our workforce reflects the population of Oregon it makes good business sense. It’s the right thing to do.”

The report highlights how more states could be utilizing federal dollars to increase diversity while meeting the skills needs of the highway construction workforce. Both Maryland and Oregon have locked in a portion of their states’ federal highway construction funds as allocated in 23 USC Section 504(e) to increase diversity in the highway construction workforce.

“We know what is keeping many women out of construction jobs, and what is needed to help them get into and succeed in the trades,” says IWPR Study Director Ariane Hegewisch. “But turning that knowledge into action takes resources. Oregon and Maryland offer examples for creating a stable funding source to build diversity in the construction workforce.”

In 2013, the Oregon Legislature—led by state Senator Chip Shields (D-Portland)—increased funding for supportive services from \$1.5 million to \$2.1 million for the biennium.

“A reliable transportation infrastructure is dependent upon a skilled workforce to build it. However, our nation’s construction workforce is aging and employers are in need of a strong talent pipeline,” said Maria Flynn, Senior Vice President of Jobs for the Future. “Women are a key labor pool that can help the construction industry meet its hiring needs. Career pathways that provide opportunities for continued advancement are an effective way of training women— and all workers—for jobs in the construction industry.”

The [Institute for Women's Policy Research \(IWPR\)](#) is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization that conducts rigorous research and disseminates its findings to address the needs of women and their families, promote public dialogue, and strengthen communities and societies.

[Jobs for the Future](#) works with its partners to design and drive the adoption of education and career pathways leading from college readiness to career advancement for those struggling to succeed in today’s economy.

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