

Member Communication Experience

Why Has the Percentage of Women in Construction Hit a Record High?

With an industry-wide labor shortage and an economy resurging after a global pandemic, the construction industry is scrambling to staff jobs and complete projects. According to an Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) and Autodesk survey in mid-2022, 66% of contractors had projects that were delayed because of labor shortages.

With an increasing need for skilled labor, many are now turning to historically underrepresented populations, like women and

The statistics show a surge in women in construction since 2016. They now make up 14% of the construction labor force. Top states for women in construction include Washington D.C., Arizona, Florida, Washington, and Oregon. There has also been a rise in the number of Hispanic and African American women in the industry.

What has fueled this surge? It's a combination of an extreme need for labor and focused efforts to attract more women and minorities to the industry.

INDUSTRY SUFFERS FROM A LONG-STANDING LABOR SHORTAGE

Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) Chief Economist Anirban Basu calls the labor shortage "the most acute challenge facing the construction industry despite sluggish spending growth." In February 2022, ABC predicted that the industry would need to attract nearly 650,000 additional workers on top of the normal hiring pace for 2022 and would need 590,000 new workers in 2023.

The industry shortage of workers goes back decades, as baby boomers have reached retirement age and left in droves. The

pandemic alone led an estimated 3.2 million to retire in 2020, which is over a million more than any other year before 2016. Add the fact that younger workers aren't choosing to enter

Women in Construction (NAWIC), remembers often being the only woman in the room when she began her career over 20 years ago. And now “I’ve actually been on an all-female team, which was pretty awesome, but I couldn’t have imagined that

HOW TO ATTRACT MORE WOMEN TO THE INDUSTRY

There are many programs and campaigns that have attempted to attract younger women workers to the industry. Their tactics center around improving recruiting, removing barriers, and helping women stay on the job once they’re hired.

Focused Recruiting Efforts

The industry has been making concerted efforts to reach out to younger students and even children to show them the

beginning career education as early as kindergarten. Increasing awareness of construction jobs early will lead to more students joining apprenticeship programs and enrolling in construction related educational programs.

Organizations like NAWIC have been reaching out to kids and students for many years trying to grow interest in the industry. They sponsor contests like Block Kids and CAD/drafting to encourage students to think about the industry when it comes to picking a career. Some chapters also sponsor construction career days, allowing students the opportunity to experience

Also, higher education facilities like community colleges and universities are offering more construction and design related programs. Besides the standard courses for architects and engineers, many provide programs for CAD drafters and construction project administration. The more programs offered, the more students they will attract.

Part of the draw to the industry is the fact that construction jobs pay well. On federally funded projects, tradesmen like plumbers and electricians can earn over \$50 an hour plus

construction career when they think of high-paying jobs, but many of these jobs provide comfortable incomes for workers and their families.

And while the industry may be slow in recruiting women, it has

one of the better records for pay parity. According to NAWIC, women in the industry earn on average 99.1% of what men make for the same positions. The overall parity rate for all industries is only 81.1%.

Remove Barriers

The industry has a reputation for being male dominated and a bit rough around the edges. Some construction company cultures could even be characterized as hostile to women. Mitchell said she often felt that men believed she didn’t know her stuff, until she interacted with them and showed she did. “Once I began to show people that I understood what they

they needed or I could help them, then I began to break down those barriers. But it’s always a challenge.”

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