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## **Embracing New Strategies to Build the Future Workforce**

**The 2024 National Construction Industry HR  
& Workforce Conference After-Action Report**

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## Introduction

There was a consistent theme among the many speakers, presentations and facilitated conversations that took place during the **2024 National Construction Industry HR & Workforce Conference**. That theme was the need for the construction industry to embrace new strategies and technologies to build the future workforce.

Conference attendees learned how the industry is crafting new approaches to recruit workers, retain existing ones and train them to become stronger, more effective employees and leaders. Fortunately, many of the new approaches outlined during the conference are designed to leverage firms' existing resources and personnel. In other words, it is possible to act on the many workforce solutions detailed in this report while relying on your existing people and your existing resources.

The outcomes of the **National Construction Industry HR & Workforce Conference** are compiled in this debrief report by AGC of America and Arcoro. Detailed within the report are successful workforce solutions that are proven successful by firms across the country.

To make this report more user-friendly, we organized these solutions into the categories of **recruiting**, **retention** and **workforce training**. However, it is important to note that several of the approaches detailed in this report address two or more of those areas.

We include a summary of the various programs in this report that provides a broad overview of the workforce approach. We have also included contact information for the people behind these solutions.



Utilize this report as a catalogue of workforce solutions from your fellow AGC of America members to help your firm and the industry overcome one of construction's most pressing challenges: workforce shortages. The more members that act on the strategies outlined in this report, the more the entire industry will benefit.

## ARCORO

Arcoro was a sponsor of the **2024 National Construction Industry HR & Workforce Conference** and supported AGC in the production of this report and associated content.



## Recruiting Strategies

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### ::: **Building Successful Pre-Apprenticeship Programs**

*Partnering with local Workforce Investment Boards is easy and can provide grant funding for training and equipment without financially burdening local chapters*

[AGC Maine](#) chapter is addressing construction workforce shortages with an innovative new, publicly funded, pre-apprenticeship program, the [Maine Construction Academy](#). The Academy is a 20-day program for youth (16- to 20-year-olds) and adults that offers a 50/50 mix of classroom and hands-on training. During the program, participants earn their OSHA 10, learn basic first aid and CPR skills, study financial literacy and are exposed to essential employment soft skills. Participants learn from the NCCER Core Curriculum.

The pre-apprenticeship program is funded via a series of grants the chapter secured from its local Workforce Investment Board. Those grant funds pay for the training program and personal protective equipment for each program participant. The grant money also pays for barrier assessments for the participants – which identify additional support each student will need to be successful in the construction industry. To date, approximately 90 percent of program participants have been hired by member firms or accepted into a registered apprenticeship program.

For more information about the Maine Construction Academy and/or working with local Workforce Investment Boards, please contact [Kelly Flagg](#).

### ::: **Creating Construction Summer Camps to Entice and Prepare Future Workers**

*Contractor-supported summer camps for youth can be more achievable than a more formal program*

The [Rosendin Foundation](#) offers a series of construction-focused summer camps called Camp Build. These camps provide a free opportunity for middle school students (grades 6-8) to learn about construction in a hands-on way. The program also provides them with the foundation, and the tools needed, to continue to pursue careers in the construction industry. Students can participate in the summer camps for up to two years.

During the camps, students learn about field operations, embrace the AGC [Culture of Care](#), learn about different construction tools, explore BIM and virtual reality for construction and learn about the financial benefits of a career in construction. Students are also taught some of the key math skills needed to work in construction. Rosendin recruits volunteer instructors from within its firm and among its trade partners to work with the students, and hosts camps in geographies with Rosendin offices.

For more information about Camp Build, contact [Jolsna Thomas](#).

## ::: **Finding Ways to Market the Trades to a New and Younger Workforce**

*You don't have to hire an influencer for your firm, you already have them on staff*

Brian Town at [Michigan Creative](#) has been working with the [AGC of Michigan](#) and member firms to find new and more attractive ways to recruit members of Generation Z into the construction trades. His approach relies heavily on an understanding that Gen Z isn't watching TV, looking at Facebook, viewing billboards or listening to podcasts. Instead, he is creating short authentic videos, often filmed by trades people, and posting them as YouTube Shorts, Instagram and Facebook Reels, Tik Tok, Digital Radio, and streamed sports broadcasts.

He emphasizes that a contractor's best marketing talent already works for them – their young craft professionals. Creating content that features these younger workers showing how interesting their careers are is key to reaching and inspiring younger workers to pursue careers in construction. He also urges contractors to make their recruitment and hiring process fast, transparent and interactive. According to Brian, "Gen Z is amazing, we just need to talk to them in a way that inspires them."

For more information, contact [Brian Town](#).

## ::: **Recruiting and Training a Non-Traditional Workforce**

*Partnering with public agencies to identify the skills necessary to enter the industry can help attract non-traditional workers*

During this facilitated discussion at the HR & Workforce Conference, participants shared their various approaches to recruiting non-traditional workers, including women, criminal-justice-involved individuals, refugees, the disabled, and members of the LGBTQ community.

Participants shared many suggestions for reaching these non-traditional workers. These include building strong connections with public agencies like the Department of Veterans Affairs, corrections offices, and local economic development agencies. Contractors are identifying barriers to employment, such as a lack of digital skills or job readiness, and taking steps to address those shortages. The participants recommended finding workers that can communicate and relate with non-traditional workers and partnering with groups like [SkillBridge](#) and [Helmets to Hardhats](#) to strengthen their pipeline into non-traditional work communities.

For more information, contact the two session facilitators, [Laura Cataldo](#) and [Carrie Gardenhire](#).

## ::: **Activate Your Employer Brand to Support Recruiting**

*Support recruiting efforts by enhancing brand*

Rachel Kennedy with [Southern Lighthouse](#) shared how she is working with construction firms across the country to support their recruiting efforts by enhancing their brand. Her main message to attendees at the conference is that their employer brand isn't just a marketing tool, it is a story that attracts talent. Everything a firm does shapes that brand. Every firm, as a result, has the power to position their firm as an employer of choice.

For more information, contact [Rachel Kennedy](#).

## ::: **Developing a Talent Pipeline**

### *Targeting middle-school-aged kids is critical*

This presentation focused on how members of the AGC of Greater Milwaukee chapter have teamed up with the [Waukesha County Technical College](#), the [Waukesha County Business Alliance](#) and the Building Trades to get kids interested in careers in construction. The group is providing students with an experience they will not, or cannot, get in a classroom. The presenters stressed the need to reach kids well before their junior or senior years in high school by creating opportunities for middle school students. The presenters noted the success many firms have had by providing hands-on experiences and providing tours of their facilities and project sites.

In addition to partnering with local education institutions and the business alliance, firms are also creating innovative partnerships with groups like the Girl Scouts to create programs designed to attract more young women into the construction industry.

For more information contact [Mark Kessenich](#).

## ::: **Recruiting High School Students**

### *Programs for high-school-aged students must be more detailed-oriented with real life work experiences*

The second facilitated discussion session focused on ways the industry can do a better job recruiting high school students into careers in construction. Attendees shared recruiting success by hosting two-day career events targeted at students in local career and technical education programs. During those sessions, students are exposed to construction equipment and get to learn about the various career pathways available to them.

Firms are also establishing referral programs where employees recommend certain workers, and the company pays the tuition for the training those prospects need. Having younger workers get involved in recruitment, from events to a social media presence, also yielded positive results.

Some firms are getting involved in construction-focused academies within schools where they are helping teach the skills needed for various trade positions. Others are teaming up with their trade partners to host week-long programs to show off the various trades, ending with students signing-on to their preferred trade.

Contractors talked about the value of paying for tools for high school construction programs and interested students. They stressed the need to produce information about the various career pathways available within their firm and to show what employees need to do to progress. Some are creating project tour videos and sharing them on popular social media channels or featuring day-in-the-life videos of 1-year, 5-year and 10-year employees.

For more information, contact the session facilitator, [Matthew Clark](#).

## ::: **Turning Hiring Mandates into Opportunities**

*Rigid public owner hiring goals can be overcome with proper coordination and communication*

Officials with the [City and County of Denver](#) and [Hensel Phelps](#) shared details of how they were able to turn a local apprenticeship hiring mandate into an opportunity to successfully recruit local residents into high-paying construction career positions. During a [convention center expansion project](#), Hensel Phelps was required to hire city residents and employ a set percentage of apprentices. The firm accepted the challenge of the goals and used it to craft strategies to recruit from within urban populations.

Among the tactics Hensel Phelps used were working with its trade partners to get them ready to hire and train residents with limited construction or work skills. The firm hosted multiple career fairs, at different times of the day, during the lifetime of the project. They advertised on multiple platforms and built relationships with local educators and community service groups.

Hensel Phelps also assigned dedicated personnel to track the status of these new hires and to work with them when issues came up that might prevent them from being successful at work. They closely monitored the data on local resident participation and apprenticeship hires and shared their performance widely, so everyone was aware of how much had been accomplished.

While not easy, the effort was successful and is helping inform Hensel Phelps' future recruiting efforts.

For more information contact [Lisa Seaman](#).



## Retention Strategies

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### ::: **Better Supporting and Nurturing Workers through Sponsorship**

*Sponsorship is more important than mentorship*

[Ambition Theory](#) founder and CEO Andrea Janzen teamed up with [Adolfson & Peterson](#) to present on how to use sponsorships, instead of mentorships, to better support and nurture workers.

Sponsorships are grounded in providing exposure and opportunities to workers so they can develop and grow their skills and confidence. The Adolfson & Peterson team stressed the need to let people figure out their path to success and have the support they need to be successful.

Instead of telling them how to handle a challenge, the idea is to give them the tools, training and resources they need to figure out the solutions that work best for them. This requires setting a new tone within a firm from the top down

As a result of Adolfson & Peterson's commitment to sponsorships, they have been better able to retain and nurture key field talent.

For more information contact [Andrea Janzen](#) and [Katie Hegarty](#).

### ::: **Creating a More Welcoming and Inclusive Work Environment**

*Starting with manageable inclusivity initiatives is more likely to lead more sustainable efforts*

Janelle Pogodzinski, chief human capital officer with [J.F. Brennan Company](#), and Jorge Quezada, vice president of people & culture with [Granite Construction](#), explored ways firms can make their work environments more welcoming and inclusive. Jorge outlined how Granite has created an Engagement Portfolio where people can post questions, find inclusive learning programs, participate in quarterly Community Hour discussions, and sign up for the inclusion-focused Ambassador program.

Janelle urged firms to start small, focus on mastering a few initiatives, and build towards becoming more inclusive. She noted that it takes time to create more inclusive work environments and that education in inclusivity strategies is crucial. They both noted that AGC of America's [Culture of Care](#) program offers many resources to help firms become more diverse and inclusive.

The overall message from both presenters was that finding ways to make their firms more inclusive has played a key role in enabling them to retain more of their workforce, particularly workers from nontraditional (for the construction industry) backgrounds.

For more information, contact [Janelle Pogodzinski](#) or [Jorge Quezada](#).

## ::: **Getting Compensation Right**

*Managing compensation for experienced and long-tenured employees is as important as setting competitive pay for new hires*

Jeff Robinson, president of [PAS Inc.](#), presented on how compensation awareness is essential in maintaining a strong craft professional workforce. Being able to attract an adequate and continuous supply of qualified talent is fundamental for contractors. Robinson noted that while competitive pay is just one element needed to attract new workers, it is a powerful tool that doesn't end with getting new hires through the door.

The presenter noted that as employees grow and mature within their careers, so too must their pay. He cautioned that many firms have been focusing on boosting pay for new and relatively inexperienced workers at a rate faster than for more experienced workers. As a result, the differential that recognizes experience, knowledge and skill has been wiped out, putting the retention of firms' best employees at risk. He urged firms to continue investing in their seasoned talent even as they work hard to recruit new people into the industry.

For more information contact [Jeff Robinson](#).

## ::: **Enhancing Your Hispanic and Latino Workers**

*For firms with large Hispanic populations, it is important to recognize the contributions they make*

Dr. Patty Delgado, co-founder and executive director of [El Puente Institute](#), and consultant Dr. Alejandra Mielke led a session focused on ways to embrace Hispanic and Latino workers to boost capacity. They stressed that the median age of Latinos is 29 and they constitute 25 percent of Generation Z. Many of them are bicultural, flexible, innovative, have a strong work ethic, and bring an insider perspective to the Latino market.

They urged firms to start by assessing their current Latino and Hispanic representation levels and recruitment practices. They also urged firms to undertake pay audits to make sure they are paying their Latino and Hispanic workers equitably. They also suggest firms implement bilingual engagement surveys and hold listening sessions in English and Spanish to better understand the needs of their Latino and Hispanic workers.

They suggest educating the broader team on Latino culture and supporting professional growth beyond technical skills. This includes providing leadership development and mentorship opportunities for Hispanic and Latino workers. Their bottom line is that firms must be intentional in supporting and nurturing Latino and Hispanic workers so they can grow and thrive within your firm.

For more information contact [Dr. Patty Delgado](#) or [Dr. Alejandra Mielke](#).



## ::: Addressing Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

*Firm-wide education on the role of mental health is important, from owners to foremen*

This session featured a panel of leaders from the [Wisconsin Construction Wellness Community](#) discussing the urgent need to prioritize mental health and suicide prevention in the construction industry. The panelists outlined the work they have done to foster a supportive network through targeted mental health training, education and resource campaigns. They also detailed how they are organizing contractors in the Greater Milwaukee area to lead efforts to protect their employees and worksites.

The panelists talked about the reality that the industry, particularly post COVID-19, is suffering from a mental health crisis that is leading to too many overdoses and suicides, among other problems. This crisis prompted a group of local contractors to come together to create a suicide prevention campaign as part of a new, multi-employer 501c3. The group hosts job site stand-downs on mental health. They also provide jobsite signage with QR code posters that link to EAP sites.

They suggested that firms regularly check in with people and ask them how they are doing. Firms need to train foremen, PMs and owners on how to identify signs of depression. They emphasized the value of QPR training – question, persuade and refer—which is offered by [NAMI](#).

For more information contact [Mark Kessenich](#).



## Training Strategies

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### ::: **Training Field People to Be Better Leaders**

*Great construction leaders spend as much time developing their team's leadership craft as their technical craft*

Tina Nazier, national leader for construction and real estate strategy with [Wipfli](#), and Justin Gabrielson, Midwest region president for [Ames Construction](#), led a session focused on ways to better train and prepare field leaders. They emphasized that strong leaders who can inspire their people play a critical role in attracting, retaining, and developing the construction workforce. That is because understanding people and leading them as individuals is key to engaging and retaining the workforce.

They urged firms to focus on teaching skills of leadership, such as emotional intelligence, communications, self-awareness and inspiration, if they want their field leaders to be successful in their roles. The bottom line is that great construction leaders spend as much time developing their team's leadership craft as their technical craft. Having a strong internal leadership development program helps develop a cohesive, consistent leadership expectation and approach at your firm.

For more information contact [Tina Nazier](#).

### ::: **Investing in Your People with Training and Employee Development Programs**

*Training programs for all employees, not just field leaders, is important*

The [Ames Construction](#) team also presented on the need to invest in training programs for all employees, not just field leaders. Ames' Abigail Boll, project manager & intern director, and Megan Holland, regional EEO officer, outlined how their firm has effectively implemented an employee training and mentorship program and discussed the widespread benefits of investing in people at every step of their career.

They talked about how Ames created a broad range of training programs to address what had been a 68 percent turnover rate among their craft professionals. To counter that, the firm has created several key development programs, including foreman-in-training, supervisor-in-training and mechanic-in-training programs. They also have a robust internship program, an [AMES Academy](#), and Ames Leadership program. They also work with and support their union apprenticeship training programs.

They cautioned that these training investments take time, and that success won't be immediate. And they urged firms to be willing to change and evolve their training programs after they are established. But their broader message was that the more you train your people, the more your firm can grow, and accomplish bigger things.

For more information contact [Abigail Boll](#).

## ::: Reimagining Your Construction Training

*Technical skill, management skill and essential skill training are all important*

Amy Powell, founder and CEO of [Well Works](#) and Beth Haselhorst, president of [Media-Vox](#) led a session focusing on the six most frequent construction training hurdles that prevent firms from maximizing their training efforts.

Those hurdles are:

- Haphazard development and delivery of training
- Having the wrong facilitator or instructor
- Miscalculating the audience
- Using a one-size-fits-all approach
- Having detached and overloaded content
- And a lack of self-awareness and resources

They recommended that training should fall into one of three main skill buckets: technical skills (such as installing a pipe), management skills (such as how to schedule, make orders, etc.), and essential skills (overseeing personnel). They urged firms to use workshops to identify training needs, determine the purpose behind those needs, and pinpoint who requires the training.

Ultimately, they noted that belief in training is crucial and that if a firm's leadership doesn't support it, neither will the participants.

For more information contact [Amy Powell](#) or [Beth Haselhorst](#).

## Closing Thoughts

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The insights and solutions presented during the **2024 National Construction Industry HR & Workforce Conference** underscore the importance of innovation and collaboration in addressing the construction industry's workforce challenges. By leveraging existing resources and personnel, firms have the tools to implement proven strategies that can attract new talent, retain skilled workers, and cultivate future leaders. These actionable solutions demonstrate that overcoming workforce shortages is not only achievable but also within reach for firms willing to adapt and engage with the ideas shared by their peers.

We encourage you to view this report as both a resource and a roadmap for tackling workforce issues. By implementing the strategies outlined here and connecting with the experts behind these strategies, your firm can play a pivotal role in strengthening the construction workforce. The collective action of AGC of America members will help ensure a more sustainable and thriving future for the industry. Together, we can turn workforce challenges into opportunities for growth and innovation.

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