



Understanding Obstacles that Prevent Diverse Women & Men of Color from Succeeding in the Trades

Retention Obstacle 1: Discrimination

Even after being accepted into an apprenticeship, women are still likely to encounter discrimination. When classroom instruction or on-the-job training disproportionately benefits white males, diverse apprentices become frustrated and feel like they are not valued as workers. Unequal hiring practices, job assignments, and layoff choices all contribute to low retention rates of female and diverse male apprentices. “Checkerboarding,” the effect of moving diverse apprentices with abnormally high frequency between job sites in order to meet targeted hiring goals, can reduce the skill development and advancement of diverse women and men of color in the trades.

Retention Obstacle 2: Harassment

Although strides are being made in the trades to combat it, gender- and race-based harassment remains a serious contributor to high attrition rates of diverse apprentices from the trades. Female apprentices are less likely to feel safe, welcome, or valued on job sites where harassment is tolerated.

Retention Obstacle 3: Lack of Industry Networks

Studies demonstrate that interpersonal relationships and informal networks are important for apprentices to obtain work and remain steadily employed throughout their apprenticeships. While many programs operate from an “out-of-work list” in which individuals who have been out of work the longest are the first to be contacted when new jobs become available, the industry frequently deviates from this protocol. Successful apprentices draw on personal relationships and networking to stay employed. Because of implicit cultural biases, female and diverse male apprentices are less likely to form the relationships and informal networks that result in consistent employment.

Retention Obstacle 4: Inconsistent Employment

Apprentices that are not assigned enough work to make a living for themselves will find other employment opportunities more attractive, even if those jobs have lower hourly pay. Female and diverse male apprentices are less likely to be consistently employed due to discrimination, harassment, and lack of industry networks and interpersonal relationships.