



Tips for Addressing Women

“...while more women are entering the building trades, it is a trickle and not a flood.” – John Rumler

Women WANT to work in the building trades. Women want to work in the building trades for the same reason men do: living wage jobs, pride of craft, personal satisfaction, being paid to learn through apprenticeship training that provides family wage jobs, health benefits, and a pension. However, despite this desire to work in the trades, women often do not know how to access pathways into construction. This is because construction companies, contractors, apprenticeship programs, etc. do not always know how to address women in a way that welcomes them to confidently and successfully enter the world of the construction trades.

These are some tips for addressing and engaging women based on years of collecting anecdotal and academic research data and from assisting contractors and training centers with recruiting women into their jobs/programs.

- Marketing and outreach materials must include pictures of women. If you search for “construction worker” in Google Images the most predominate images are of men. This is a not-so-subtle message that the trades industry is men’s work. You can’t be what you can’t see, and women need to see images of themselves as construction workers.
- The images you use to market or conduct outreach need to show women working, not just standing and posing in their gear, but actually doing the work. If you do the same Google Images search and type in “construction women” most of the images show women in hardhats reading blueprints or standing around a jobsite with a briefcase, or worse, in “sexy” construction worker outfits. Women need be able to picture themselves using the tools and doing the work.
- Use gender neutral language in your job descriptions and recruitment materials. Directly invite women and minorities to apply.
- When speaking with women, do not perpetuate the stereotype that women aren’t strong enough to do the work. Very few trades require extreme physical strength (and even those trades have women working in them already). Strength is like any other skill – it develops with practice.
- Do not tell stories about “the one woman” you encountered on a jobsite that wasn’t a good worker. You don’t measure all male workers by one other guy that couldn’t do the job.
- Have a meaningful diversity plan that you and your colleagues can articulate. Setting goals is not enough. You need to do the research and understand the complex barriers that women and minorities face both accessing trades work and once they are in the building trades.
- Have a zero tolerance policy for harassment that all staff, from management to labor, are trained on. Have your zero tolerance policy posted in public spaces in your work area, and follow through!
- Address women who are interested in your trade or job opportunity as you would anyone else – respectfully, and without telling them about any special, different, or unfair expectations based on their gender.