



Highway Construction Workforce Partnership Strategic Workforce Development

Source: USDOT/Getty Images

Learning from the Pilot Programs – Idaho

The HCWP Pilot Survey Metrics

To increase the capacity and capability of the highway construction workforce, the Highway Construction Workforce Partnership (HCWP) has partnered with key organizations to develop and deploy highway construction training and placement programs. This initiative has increased the number of individuals trained and hired in highway construction trades and crafts. The Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) yielded useful information, including metrics and lessons learned, that will help other organizations develop and launch similar programs.

Idaho Transportation Department Office of Civil Rights

The 5-week program ran from September to October 2020 and was hosted by the Baker Technical Institute. Classes were held 8 hours per day, 5 days a week. All 20 students graduated from the program and received certifications in heavy equipment operating (HEO), hazardous waste operations and response, Occupational Safety and Health Administration 10-hour training, forklift certification, and National Center for Construction Education and Research Construction and Safety certification. Trainees earned certification through the Baker Technical Institute in the operation of eight pieces of heavy equipment including: grader, loader, dozer, large and small excavator, skid steer, forklift, and water truck. Eight trainees (40 percent) are employed and four of those eight are currently enrolled in a commercial driver's license training course. The pilot program was promoted through a 4-minute video on YouTube.

Metrics

The performance metrics included the graduates' employment status after the program and if employment was retained for 90 days, 1 year, and eventually 2 years. Holding the program in the late summer/early fall proved to be a less-than-optimal time to train people due to contractor operations slowing and the winter shutdown period. ITD Office of Civil Rights (OCR) will look to hold future programs in the late winter/early spring. While it took longer than hoped, at least 70 percent of graduates found better employment than before the program, while 30 percent were nonresponsive. ITD has shared the graduates' successes with the Idaho Workforce Development Council. A *Year Later* video is in the works in a collaboration between ITD and the Independent Welding Distribution Cooperative.

Recommendations

- Run separate sessions targeting veterans, American Indians, and women. Groups with similar cultural history tend to bond faster and have fewer team-building issues in the program's initial phases.
- Implement a method of testing the applicant's knowledge, skills, and aptitude for HEO placement using a simulator or providing seat time in a piece of equipment.
- Ensure that all applicants have a clean driving record, a valid driver's license, meet medical requirements, and pass alcohol and drug screenings.

- Provide housing for a longer program. With the grant, ITD provided housing for non-local students, but some students traveled an average of 60 miles a day.
- Work with local nonprofit groups, veteran organizations, and local food banks to provide students with additional support not allowed by program restrictions.
- Partner with the Federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (through the Department of Labor) to help provide a minimum hourly wage to students while they are not training.



Source: James Kim Photography + PC Construction

Looking Ahead

Even with the extraordinary challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, the program was successful and continues to positively impact the lives of its students and

trainees. Seventy percent of the students found better employment than before the program.

ITD's goal was 100 percent enrollment by the end of the 2021 construction season. ITD met its goal with most of the students remaining employed but some losing contact with the program. In the 2022 season, the program will run in the Spring to produce more students entering the industry during the peak working season. The program has already received interest from contractors and local partners wanting to connect for potential employment.

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