

2020 Evaluation of the Highway Construction Workforce Development Program

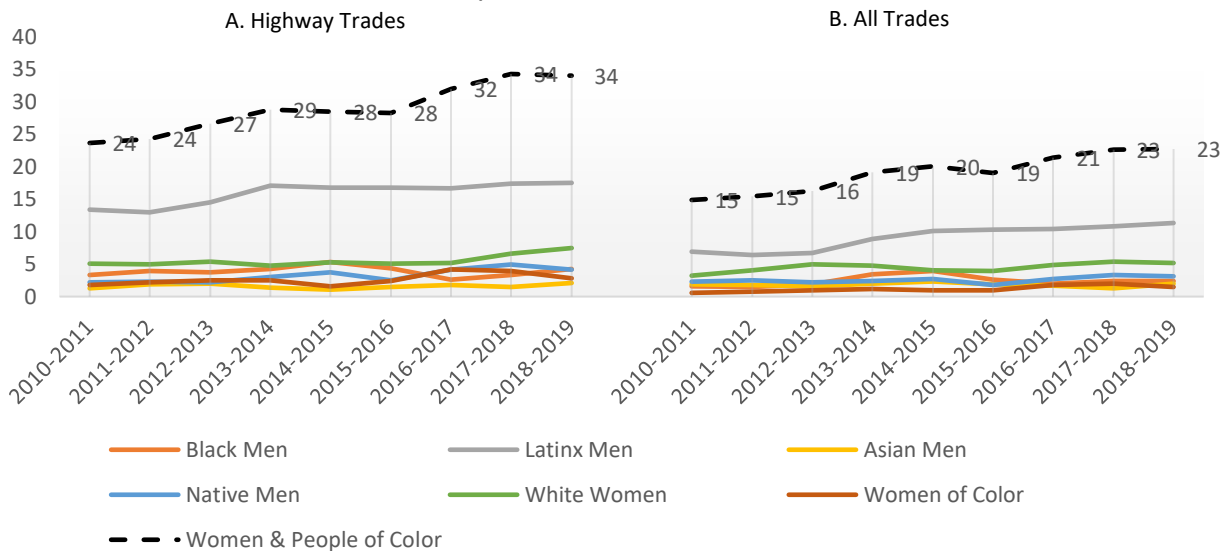
Executive summary

Maura Kelly and Lindsey Wilkinson
 Department of Sociology, Portland State University
 October 2020

The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) have partnered in a statewide effort—the Highway Construction Workforce Development Program—to recruit, train, and employ a diverse workforce for highway construction jobs throughout the state. This program, begun in 2010, supports a variety of initiatives designed to improve the recruitment and retention of women and people of color in Oregon’s highway construction trades. The programs evaluated in this report include the following: pre-apprenticeship programs, supportive services providing financial assistance (i.e., fuel assistance; support for overnight travel; childcare; work clothes, tools, and protective equipment; hardship funds) and supportive services providing non-financial assistance (i.e., budget class, social support). This report provides findings based on data from the Oregon Apprenticeship System (OAS) and interviews with 26 individuals who either completed or terminated an apprenticeship in 2018-2019. Overall, this evaluation finds that the Highway Construction Workforce Development Program is improving the recruitment and retention of a diverse construction workforce.

Finding 1: The Oregon highway construction workforce is continuing to become more diverse, with increased integration of women and people of color in apprenticeships (see Figure ES1).

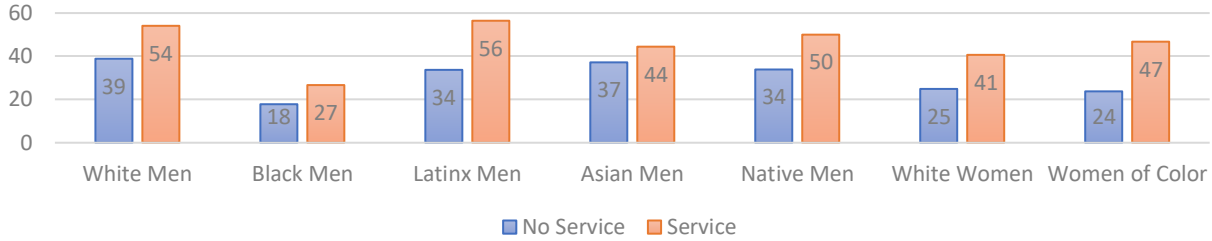
Figure ES1. Percentage of Apprentices Completing Who are Women or People of Color, 2010-2019



Finding 2: The Highway Construction Workforce Development Program improves completion rates for apprentices in eligible trades who receive services (see Figure ES5). Among apprentices

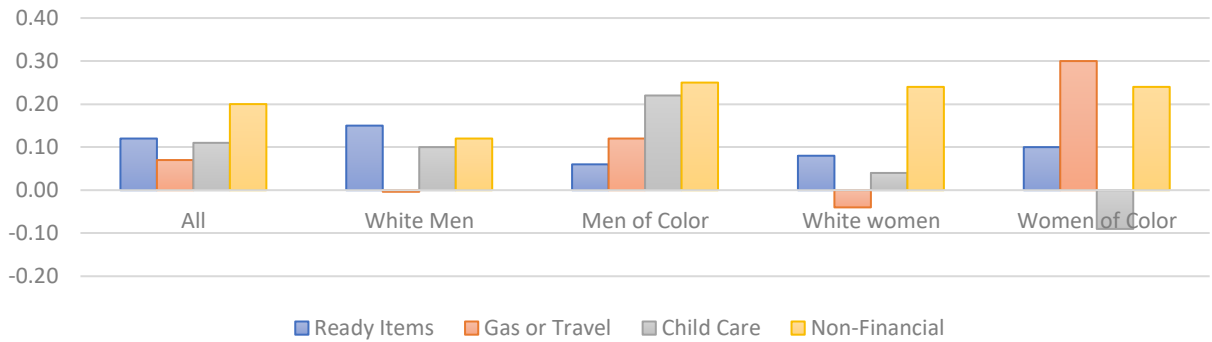
in the 2018-19 cohorts, on average, those receiving services were 11% more likely to complete their apprenticeship than those who did not receive services (not shown).

Figure ES2. Percent of Apprentices in Highway Trades Completing by Service Receipt and Race/Ethnicity and Gender, 2008-2019 Cohorts



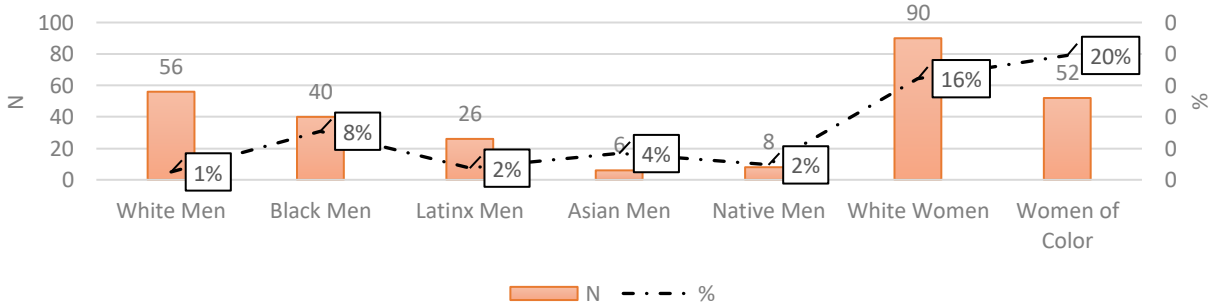
Finding 3: Among all apprentices in the 2008-2019 cohorts, those receiving non-financial services are 20% more likely to complete rather than cancel, relative to those not receiving services. Those receiving ready items are 12% more likely, those receiving gas/travel support are 7% more likely, and those receiving child care support are 11% more likely to complete (See Figure ES3). Financial services are more effective when paired with non-financial services (not shown).

Figure ES3. Estimated Adjusted Marginal Effects of Receiving Services on Completion by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, 2008-19 Cohorts



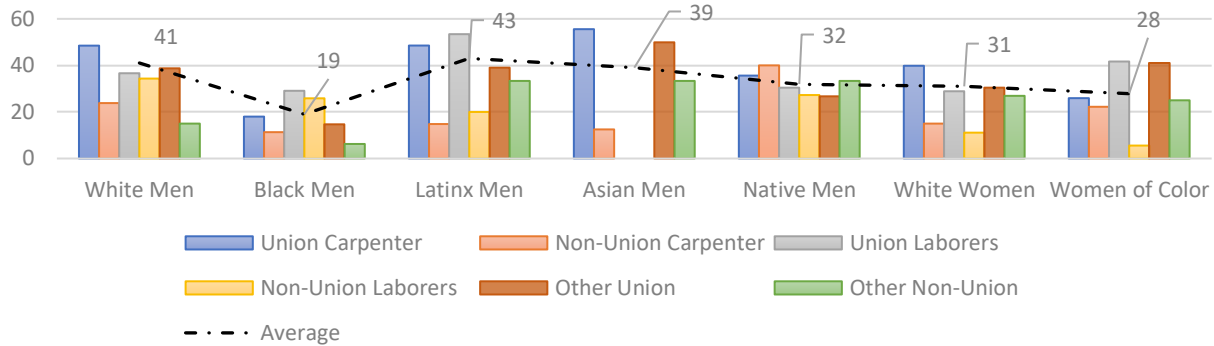
Finding 4: Pre-apprenticeship programs have contributed to the increasing numbers of women and people of color in the highway construction trades (see Figure ES4). Completing a pre-apprenticeship has a positive effect on completion among women (not shown).

Figure ES4. Percent and Number of Apprentices in Highway Construction Trades Completing a Pre-Apprenticeship by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, 2008-19 Cohorts



Finding 5: Women and some racial/ethnic minority apprentices are less likely than white men to complete their apprenticeship on time (see Figure ES5), but progress continues to be made in increasing the completion rates of women and people of color.

Figure ES5. Percent of Apprentices in Highway Trades Completing On Time by Race/Ethnicity and Gender and Trade, 2005-2013 Cohorts



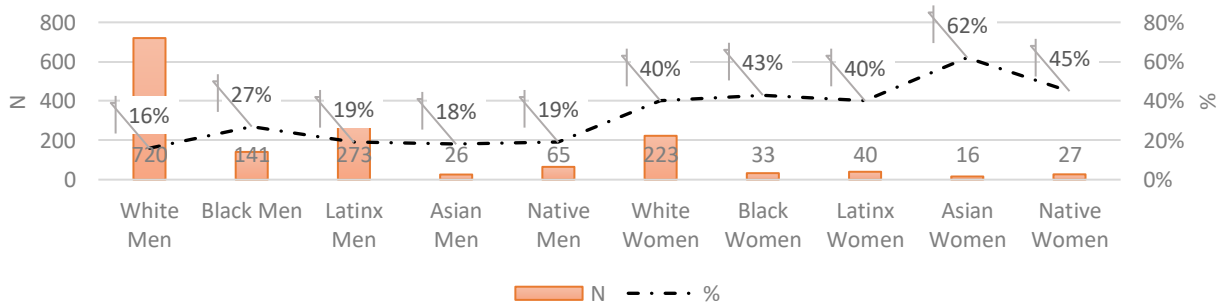
Finding 6: Findings from interviews with apprentices who received services from the Highway Workforce Development Program illustrated some of the common reasons why apprentices leave the trades (see Box ES1)

Box ES1. Apprentice challenges that led to leaving the trades

- Financial challenges
- Lack of consistent work
- Harassment and discrimination
- Lack of mentorship and on-the-job training, difficulty learning the skills of the trade
- Long hours away from home and cost of travel
- Difficulty of the work

Finding 7: The Highway Construction Workforce Development Program reaches a diverse group of apprentices, although the majority of participants are white men (see ES6).

Figure ES6. Percent and Number of Apprentices in Highway Construction Trades Receiving Services by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, 2008-2019 Cohorts



Recommendations: Overall, pre-apprenticeship and supportive services funded by the Highway Construction Workforce Development Program are increasing the recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce and these efforts should be continued. Many apprentices would benefit from “wrap-around” services in which a single point of contact could connect apprentices with financial and non-financial support available through the Highway Construction Workforce Development Program as well as additional support available within the trades and in broader communities. As non-financial services have the largest impact on completion, we recommend more funding should be directed towards this type of service. Interview data indicated unmet needs that could potentially be addressed through non-financial supportive services (see Box ES2). Interview data also identified issues that are better addressed at a structural level (see Box ES3).

Box ES2. Non-financial support needed to improve retention

- How to stay consistently employed
- How to budget, apply for unemployment, and access other financial supports within and outside the trades.
- How to respond to harassment and discrimination and/or advice about how to communicate with employers and/or apprenticeship programs about the challenges of their current job assignment
- How to access mentorship and on-the-job training and/or advice about how to communicate with their employers and/or apprenticeship programs about the challenges of their current job assignment and ask for a rotation if needed
- How to communicate with their employers and/or apprenticeship programs about the challenges of working out of town and ask for a rotation

Box 3. Structural changes to improve retention

- Revise current processes for assigning work to ensure equal access to on-the-job hours for women and people of color.
- Promote respectful workplaces through employer policies and worker training.
- Create a system for reporting harassment and discrimination across job sites.
- Promote teaching and mentorship through employer policies and worker training.
- Provide opportunities for apprentices to rotate out of jobs where they are not learning the skills of the trade.
- Provide opportunities for apprentices to rotate out of jobs that require long hours, are far from home, not ideal schedules, or are otherwise not a good fit.
- Require employers to pay for apprentices’ travel expenses for out of town work.

Full 2020 report available at: <http://maura-kelly.com/>

