



Workforce Development Solutions

Key Takeaways from AGC of America's Inaugural National Construction Industry Workforce Summit

The Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) convened its inaugural National Construction Industry Workforce Summit in St. Louis, Missouri on October 13, 2021. The event was designed to bring leaders in construction and workforce development communities together to identify effective existing solutions and craft potentially effective new solutions for the recruitment, training and retention of construction workforce.

Attendees included: people who work for construction firms and are involved in workforce development efforts; staff of AGC of America chapters who are involved in workforce development efforts; members of the construction education and training community, including high school and community college career and technical education instructors, union and open shop training personnel and others involved in preparing future construction workers.

At its broadest level, the objective of the summit was to try to unite the many diverse, and disparate construction workforce development efforts that already exist. Many of these programs are extremely innovative and effective. But all too often operate in isolation, without awareness of, or coordination with, other workforce development efforts. This summit brought together the people involved in these efforts to share what they are doing and learn from each other.

To that end, attendees spent most of their time working together in small group sessions. This included breakout sessions focusing on sharing details about successful measures. They also spent time brainstorming solutions to some of the industry's primary workforce development challenges, including attracting more diverse workers, developing and upskilling their existing workers and finding ways to retain new workers.

The summit also featured Ted Talk-style presentations from six different innovative workforce development programs. These programs were selected to represent a cross-section of what is possible in workforce development. All attendees had the opportunity to ask questions about these programs and evaluate whether creating similar local programs made sense.

AGC of America concluded the summit with two challenges to all attendees. The first was to understand, appreciate and operate with the knowledge that they are not alone; to look for opportunities to collaborate with other workforce development programs; and to unite our collective efforts. The second challenge was to take at least one idea covered during the summit and implement it back home. This document is designed to serve as a resource for Summit attendees and other members to use as they identify workforce development measures to put in place locally.

Key Takeaways

Summit attendees self-selected the workforce development aspect that was of most interest: recruitment, training or retention. To follow is a summary of those conversations, including examples of strategies already in place that are working and suggested solutions that the Summit attendees crafted on site.

Recruitment

Strategies that are working

- Implement a “Sign and Stay” bonus program for skilled trades. Several construction firms noted they have had success putting in place these types of program that offer an hiring bonus and a comparable stay bonus when the employee has stayed for a certain length of time, such as one year.
- Firms and chapters are participating in Career Days with specific high schools, particularly technical schools. These firms develop strong working relationships with the schools and spend a lot of time on campus setting up and supporting construction-specific programs that can then serve as a pipeline for new craft people into that firm.
- Other firms and chapters are using Career Fairs to bring students from multiple high schools to a single point – such as a fair ground – where they can be exposed to a wide range of craft skills, construction equipment and construction technology.
- Some states, notably Florida with its Florida Apprenticeship program offer workers’ compensation waivers for firms that hire students out of local high schools. In exchange, contractors agree to pay those high school “apprentices” the same pay rate.
- Engaging with middle and high-school aged girls and their mothers during PowerUp sessions that offer after-hours demonstration and introductions to construction careers to help make them comfortable with the idea of working in the industry.
- Using digital advertising and social media to reach high-potential industry recruits as well as targeting key influencers such as coaches, teachers and parents.
- Working with state education authorities – including the Texas Education Agency – to create a training program for construction industry outreach specialists. These specialists then work with high school students to help them explore different career paths within the industry and work in coordination with local high school guidance counselors.
- Firms and AGC chapters are using virtual reality glasses to provide OSHA10 and OSHA30 hour training with high school classrooms. Other firms are using VR headsets to safely expose high school students to different construction opportunities, including equipment operation and welding.

- Some firms and chapters have worked with workforce investment boards, like the Texas Workforce Commission, to secure funding for scholarships for childcare so their parents can earn a living in careers like construction.
- AGC chapters have created special construction academies during the summer. These academies offer multi-week, paid-work opportunities for rising junior and senior high school students. The students split their time between CTE programs and being on actual construction job sites.
- The AGC Georgia chapter hosts Trade Talks where they bring in high school guidance counselors, explain the construction career opportunities that are available, what it takes to qualify for them and how much students can earn in their careers.
- Other chapters are working with local school districts to offer intro to construction careers programs to younger students. In one state, Georgia, students are being introduced to construction careers at the second-grade level.
- Construction firms are being more strategic about who they send to do the recruiting. They are sending diverse role models into school programs and other recruiting events to speak to increasingly diverse student populations.
- One school official from Oklahoma recommended that when construction firms visit schools that they bring more hands-on activities, bring teachers out to job sites and recruit older, semi-retired contractors, to teach.
- Many construction firms and chapters also talked about the work they are doing to create single online job boards for all available local construction career opportunities. This way potential applicants have a one-stop portal for finding available career opportunities.

New Ideas from Summit Attendees

- **Promote the fact workers can pursue careers in construction and earn college degrees at the same time.** Many construction career paths offer young workers an opportunity to earn an Associate in Applied Science degree while they are learning their craft. They can then transfer those credits over when they enroll in construction management and other four-year programs. In addition, some apprenticeship programs have partnered with colleges so participants can also earn degrees.
- **Modernize the way to recruit people into this industry.** Younger generations are keyed into social and digital media – that is where they get much of their information. The construction industry needs to do its recruiting in the online community, in addition to in-person events.
- **Make educators feel like an extension of the industry.** Bring them to job sites explain the earning potential in the construction industry, and physically bring them to construction firm offices so they can experience the many different type of career opportunities that are available in construction.
- **Play to the industry’s strengths –highlight the sense of accomplishment that comes with building structures.** Talk about the teamwork aspects of construction, the fact the challenges are different each day, the sense of accomplishment from ‘I built that’, and the significant earning potential in construction.
- **Bring the construction experience to the schools.** This could include providing classes with a direct feed to construction site cameras. Providing schools with virtual reality gear so them can experience simulated construction environments. And find recent graduates from schools working in the industry to share their experiences with students.
- **Labor and management should work together to improve entrance into the industry.** Individual trades have different time requirements, application periods and expectations. No interested individual should be turned away if a specific trade doesn’t have opening in its apprenticeship programs. The trades need to create portals to track openings and improve reciprocity so individuals can begin earning and learning day one even if they ultimately prefer a different trade.
- **Consider community events to raise the profile of the industry.** Go to community festivals and fairs. Participate in neighborhood cookouts and local Boys and Girls Clubs events. In other words, expose people to the industry and show them how we are.
- **Talk about the contractors with great stories to tell.** Firms need to invest in telling their stories, including how the people who work for them are successful. Tell these stories in the languages that local workers speak and share them online and via social media.

Training & Development

Strategies that are working

- Several firms have created strong, effective partnerships to create construction-specific training programs in partnership with local community colleges. Sundt, for example, worked with Central Arizona College to create a series of trade-specific programs, all relying on the NCCER curriculum, to prepare future construction workers.
- As noted in the recruiting section, several AGC chapters have created construction academies, that offer a basic introduction to construction careers. These programs also offer basic levels of construction training so new hires have some idea of what is involved in these careers and can bring basic skills with them when they are hired.
- One firm in Western New York offers virtual workforce development. They created an app-based platform that offers basic video training on a range of construction activities, including traffic control, how to set up a trench box safely, etc. Their app is now being refined in partnership with Caterpillar. Other firms, including Whitaker Construction in Utah, are doing something similar with online platforms and video instruction.
- NCCER has 23 videos offering instruction in construction math and other topics. Some of the videos are more hands on, including ones focusing on topics like “hammer like a pro.”
- Several small and medium-size firms say they provide accelerated craft development programs. They do this by providing on-the-job training with the foreman and area managers teaching classroom training. These trainers are in turn receiving coaching from the executive team on softer skills like empathy and patience.
- The industry has worked with a number of school districts to create programs like Utah’s UBC Pathways. That program offers 10 different tracks students can take starting as early as 9th grade. The program offers a stackable credentialing system. The students in the program are provided with internships with local construction firms. Eighty-five percent of those interns stay with their companies.
- Turner Construction is bringing union and open shop partners together at some of its Nebraska construction projects to identify obstacles to training, share resources, and explore broader challenges – like transportation barriers and child-care needs.

New Ideas from Summit Attendees

- **Engage parents and other care givers in the training experience for new construction workers.** Getting them involved by inviting them to observe the training will help them understand the skills their loved ones are learning and appreciate the wisdom of the career path they are following.
- **Identify local, state and federal funding opportunities to help support training programs that are in-house or conducted in partnership** with a chapter or local institution like a high school or community college. Work in partnership with the local workforce boards to leverage state and federal funds.
- **Get involved with local Workforce Investment Boards.** These entities have access to resources that could be used to fund construction training programs. But unless construction people are at the table when funding decisions are made, these grants will likely be used for other sectors.
- **Conduct a needs analysis before creating new training programs.** Firms should first understand what skills and competencies are missing by listening to workers, conducting roundtable conversations and even conducting a staff survey. Once that is done, then the firm can put in place training that employees want and need to succeed with their careers.
- **Don't underestimate the value of soft skills training.** These skills will help your employees be better leaders and co-workers. And they will help them be more successful in their interactions with partner firms and owners.
- **Build strong, honest partnerships with local training providers.** Construction firms aren't educators and educators aren't construction firms. Both of you have unique competencies. The more that is understood and embraced, the more firms and trainers can work together to create the kind of programs that produce successful employees.

Retention

Strategies that are Working

- McCarthy Construction in Georgia has had success retaining craft workers nearing retirement age by moving them into “Field Coordinator” roles. These positions are part time, providing more balance in their lives, but allows them to stay engaged and mentor new employees. The program has a heavy focus on training newer employees with less experience. The position offers more flexibility and more vacation days.
- Several firms report they have added new training programs for foreman and field supervisors to help with retention of new, younger employees. These training programs focus on softer skills like patience and how to effectively communicate. They are also designed to help front line leaders share their vision and work plan for the project, so younger workers better understand how they are contributing.
- Mentorship programs also play an invaluable role in helping firms retain workers. Some firms provide mentors with additional pay. Most new employees leave in the first two weeks of work, but having mentors make them feel welcomed and doing simple things like showing them where the break area is and eating lunch with them really helps. Supporting new hires during that first month is crucial. Mentors need to be willing and trained to be effective.
- Finding effective childcare solutions is also key to retaining more workers. Some firms have worked with local employment agencies to secure grants to cover childcare costs. Other firms are looking at ways to offer craft workers the same flexibility they offer to accountants and estimators in the office.
- Many firms also rely on employee engagement surveys to gather feedback on the quality of their orientation program, ask employees what they want to accomplish and asking about whether new employees have friends at work. These surveys let employees know they are being listened too. But it is also important to act on, when appropriate, recommendations in these surveys so employees know they aren’t just being heard but appreciated.
- Firms that require workers to travel frequently are also working to retain those employees by offering a bonus. For example, one firm offers a 20 percent bonus for anyone traveling for more than two weeks. They also offer alternating three-day weekends for those workers to spend time back home or fly spouses and family out to them.

New Ideas from Summit Attendees

- **Inclusion drives diversity.** People feel more welcome, valued and appreciated when they know their perspectives and contributions are valued. Firms need to ask employees from disadvantaged groups what they are comfortable talking about and have intentional conversations around differences. Understanding is the first step to inclusion.
- **Maintain Full-Focus on Workplace Safety.** Workers won't stay if they don't feel safe. Ensuring that your firm is doing everything possible to promote and deliver on workplace safety is key for many reasons, but also a clear factor in supporting employee retention, especially within the craft workforce.
- **Put in place a zero-tolerance policy for unacceptable workplace behavior.** Just as most firms have a zero-tolerance policy for safety infractions, they need to put in place programs that make clear that inappropriate behavior is not allowed on the job site. As important is making sure all employees understand what inappropriate behavior is.
- **Put in place role specific incentives instead of project-based ones.** There are people working very hard on projects that end up not being successful. Meanwhile there are people who aren't working very hard on successful projects. Instead of rewarding teams based on the success of the overall project, reward people for the success they are having with their specific tasks.
- **Workers want more than high pay – they also want retirement plans like 401ks and pensions and opportunities to improve their skills and advance their careers.** Firms that offer these kinds of retirement programs and other benefits are often more successful in retaining their employees, especially if there is a minimum vesting period for the savings plan. Likewise, firms that provide opportunities for employees to learn new skills and advance their careers are more likely to retain employees, particularly those who are ambitious.
- **Put in place non-monetary compensation programs too.** Many employees want greater flexibility, more training, and opportunities to lead or mentor. Newer workers need greater flexibility as they start their families, but they also want to grow and develop their skills and want opportunities to lead teams and share their skills.
- **Conduct periodic “stay interviews” with current staff.** Similar to an exit interview, some firms are conducting “stay interviews” with every employee throughout the year to try and catch problems/unhappy employees before they find a new job and leave. They've seen good success in identifying culture problems specifically and implementing changes to increase their retention rates. These interviews are conducted with HR, so different than a performance review that would be conducted with a supervisor.

TED TALK STYLE PRESENTATIONS

We also featured six TED Talk-style presentations during the Summit. We selected the presenters for these ten-minute-long talks to represent a broad spectrum of what is possible when it comes to workforce development. Presenters shared details about successful workforce strategies that have been put in place by educators, construction firms, owners and AGC of America chapters. The intent with these TED talks was to show what dedicated individuals and organizations have accomplished with innovative workforce development.

- **Georgia K-12 Pipeline: Construction Education Foundation of Georgia**

The [Construction Education Foundation of Georgia](#) (CEFGA) works to help students align their passion with their purpose and align their purpose with their paycheck. CEFGA realized many years ago that they need to reach students earlier than high school graduation to help them explore a wider range of options available to them. Therefore, CEFGA's K12 Division started navigating the complex K-12 system to work with a variety of influencers (like teachers, parents, counselors, volunteers, coaches, industry partners) to reach youth from elementary school up to recent high school graduates to help them discover the joy of building something with their hands. CEFGA took it a step further by creating a world-class industry recognized class certification program that ensures high school students are earning nationally-recognized credentials and are prepared for construction jobs through hands-on training. Their ultimate goal is to equip students with skill sets, partnerships, and training options that help them take steps toward finding fulfilling, successful careers in construction. In fact, the K12 division has helped bring construction industry career awareness to 43,710 students, helped students earn 13,870 credentials of value, and helped place 1,523 students in construction career pathways over the past two years alone. In short, CEFGA's K12 Division believes that all students deserve a pathway to success, so they help prepare students for industry and, likewise, help prepare industry for students.

Presented by: [Zach Fields](#), Construction Education Foundation of Georgia

- **San Antonio Construction Career Academy**

The [San Antonio Construction Career Academy](#) have built within the past decade a high-performing construction program within the Northside Independent School District in San Antonio, Texas. The program is a competitive entry high school that regularly receives far more applications than available spots. More important, the Career Academy became the first public high school in the country to become a registered apprenticeship training program for construction by the U.S.

Department of Labor. Staff from the school will talk about the work involved in creating the program, how they partnered with industry to attract resources, and how they work to attract top quality students, and how they plan to build on their success in the future.

Presented by: [Krista Ackles](#), Northside Independent School District

- **ConstructReach**

[ConstructReach](#) is a construction industry workforce development initiative and consultancy that seeks to increase the visibility of the construction industry by educating students about career opportunities within construction, connecting general contractors to interns, employees, and internship / new-hire curriculum, creating content, experiences, and an app-based social network to expose a diverse population to sustainable construction careers. The ConstructReach Social Network brings together all of our stakeholders in an environment so that true community can be established.

Real, systematic change goes beyond the infrastructure of construction projects – it extends to clients, employees, communities, and beyond. Thus, ConstructReach takes on a programmatic approach to aid companies in developing DE&I initiatives to build a culture that effectively attracts, supports, develops and retains talent. This initiative was initially funded by Target and has expanded to include other owners and many general contractors.

Presented by: [Paul Robinson](#), ConstructReach

- **Construction Education Center**

The [Metropolitan Community College](#) in Omaha, Nebraska is working to reinvent construction education at the community college level to better prepare workers for successful construction careers. The college created a new program and leveraged community support to help fund the construction of a new campus and the school works with the local industry to focus instruction on employers' needs. The school provides construction education for local high school students as well.

Presented by: [Dr. Nathan Barry](#), Metropolitan Community College

- **Indiana's Horizontal Pathway**

The [Indiana Department of Transportation](#) and several local construction-focused high schools are using state grants to create a comprehensive workforce development program designed to prepare more people for careers in highway

construction. The program is extremely comprehensive and provides training for adults, returning citizens and high school students (in partnership with several high school programs). These high school programs, one near Indianapolis and one near Fort Wayne, are pretty innovative in themselves and offer examples of how to create a stand-alone program in one case, and how to integrate construction education into the mainstream curriculum in the other case. The Indiana DOT program is working to place people into union and open shop career opportunities.

Presented by: [David Dalton](#), Indiana DOT, & [Eric Fisher](#), Hamilton High School

- **Whitaker Construction Education to Workforce Pipeline**

Recruiting top talent is critical to the success of any business, especially construction, as employees are a key source of competitive advantage. With the right teams in place, companies can boost productivity across the organization, establish a culture of safety and provide the highest quality services to customers which are all needed to drive profitability. The problem is, there is a rising generation that lacks the skills and interest to pursue the trades. For the last 30 years, careers in the trades and specifically in construction, have been under attack and viewed as “less than” in schools, politics and in communities. Funding for CTE programs has decreased with schools cutting CTE programs left and right. Using a shovel or wielding a hammer isn’t seen as a career, it is seen as a punishment. A punishment for not doing well in school. How do we counteract these negative stereotypes and shift the mindset of the rising generation?

There are several tips and tricks companies can implement to partner with local high schools to attract, recruit, and retain a new generation of employee that see’s the trades a career and not a punishment and who will embrace and value a culture of hard work, teamwork and safety.

Presented by: [Jake Hinckley](#), Whitaker Construction

AGC Workforce Development Resources that are Available

- **Construction is Essential:** AGC of America operates, in partnership with members and chapters, a targeted digital advertising campaign designed to recruit people into the construction industry. This campaign, called Construction is Essential, can identify specific audience segments and send them, and their households, advertising messages about the many benefits of working in construction careers. The benefit of this campaign is that all advertising dollars are focused exclusively on reaching intended audiences, and it is highly trackable. Where AGC of America has implemented this campaign, the results have been extremely positive.

Contact Brian Turmail at 703-459-0238 or brian.turmail@agc.org for more information.

- **Template Chapter Workforce Recruiting Website:** AGC of America created a template workforce development website (recruit.agc.org) that is available to all chapters to use to support their recruiting campaigns. This site is highly, and easily, customizable, and allows chapters to offer an enhanced online experience for local candidates considering a career in construction. The site is available, free, to any AGC of America chapter.

Contact Brian Turmail at 703-459-0238 or brian.turmail@agc.org for more information.

- **Construction Training Playbook:** AGC of America has developed a resource tool for chapters and members to use to help them create new, or partner with existing, training programs focused on key construction skills. In particular, the Playbook is designed to help the industry identify ways to create registered apprenticeship training programs, particularly in open shops markets. The resource provides step-by-step instructions for how to establish a new training program. It also offers multiple suggestions for identifying and partnering with existing training programs and working with those institutions to customize their course offerings to meet the industry's needs.

Contact Jim Young at 202-210-3865 or jim.young@agc.org for more information.

Next steps:

AGC of America is urging all Summit attendees, and anyone else who is interested, to take at least one concept that was covered during the meeting and implement it locally. This document is intended as a resource to identify the broad range of strategies that are already being used successfully to develop the future construction industry workforce. It also outlines the many new strategies that Summit attendees developed during their working sessions.

After receiving this resource guide, please identify at least one strategy – existing or new – that you think will help address workforce development needs in your area. If available, use the links provided to find out more about those strategies. Contact AGC of America to be put in touch with firms and chapters that are acting on these strategies so you can learn more. And put them in place.

AGC of America will survey Summit attendees at the end of the winter to identify who is implementing new ideas based on the Summit, what ideas are being implemented, and learn more about how we can support those efforts.

We will use the results of that survey, plus the meeting survey sent out in early November, to craft next year's National Construction Industry Workforce Summit, which is tentatively scheduled to take place November 3 and 4, 2022, in Phoenix, Arizona.