



AGC

**THE CONSTRUCTION
ASSOCIATION**

**Navigating Transition and Uncertainty:
*Building Resilient Workforce Strategies
for a Changing Era***

**The 2025 AGC National Construction Workforce
& HR Conference After-Action Report**

Published February 2026

Introduction

The construction industry must develop resilient workforce strategies that can adapt to rapid regulatory, technological, and demographic shifts while maintaining focus on core workforce development fundamentals. That is the theme that emerged from the many presentations, facilitated discussions, and expert panels at the 2025 AGC National Construction Workforce & HR Conference held in Fort Worth, Texas in October.

From sweeping changes in DEI enforcement and immigration policy to the accelerating integration of artificial intelligence in HR functions, construction employers faced unprecedented uncertainty about compliance requirements, workforce availability, and operational practices. Yet amid these challenges, conference attendees found reason for optimism: the fundamental strategies for attracting, developing, and retaining talent remain sound.

This after-action report, compiled by AGC of America, synthesizes the workforce solutions, compliance strategies, and innovative approaches shared during the conference. The outcomes are organized into four key categories that reflect the nature of the challenges facing the industry: **Foundational Workforce Development, Retention and Culture Building, Leveraging Technology and Innovation and Navigating Regulatory Transition**. Many of the approaches detailed in this report address multiple categories simultaneously, reflecting the integrated nature of workforce development.

We have included contact information for the people and organizations behind these solutions, drawn from LinkedIn and conference materials, to facilitate direct connection and knowledge sharing among AGC members.

We urge contractors to consider implementing one or more of the strategies outlined in this report. Doing so will help contractors turn uncertainty into opportunity and build workforce capabilities that will carry their firms through whatever challenges lie ahead.

ARCORO

Arcoro was a Platinum Sponsor of the **2025 AGC National Construction Workforce & HR Conference** and supported AGC in the production of this report and associated content.



: FOUNDATIONAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

::: Building Youth Engagement Programs

AGC of Wyoming’s comprehensive approach to workforce development—spanning kindergarten through university—demonstrates the power of long-term commitment and strategic partnerships

The AGC of Wyoming Workforce Division emphasized playing “the long game” with sustained investment across multiple educational levels.

Wyoming’s approach began with identifying key members passionate about workforce development, developing a wish list of outcomes, and hiring a workforce director with an education background who could leverage existing school connections. The critical insight: “bribe” schools and educators by identifying and meeting their needs rather than leading with industry needs. This means providing tools, materials, classroom resources, facility tours, and networking opportunities while treating educators like “rockstars.”

The chapter segmented efforts across age groups: K-3rd grade (construction-themed reading and play), 4th-6th grade (exploration activities), junior high (interactive demonstrations), high school (CTE classroom visits, tool donations, student chapters), community colleges (course creation in GPS/surveying, CDL, heavy civil certificates), and university (AGC student chapter, mentorship). They also address underemployed adults as a distinct segment.

The chapter also partners with groups like SkillsUSA, CTE Teacher Association, School Counselors Association, State Department of Education, and equipment suppliers like Milwaukee Tool. Via these partnerships, the chapter is able to sponsor counselor conventions, organizes bus tours for school administrators, and created the “Pick Up Man Program” to improve construction’s image.

Fundraising through AGC member events (fishing, shooting, hunting), glow golf tournaments, dinner galas, donations, and grants allows the chapter to “blow the budget each year,” demonstrating commitment while maintaining member engagement. The power of the chapter’s model lies in its comprehensiveness—reaching students repeatedly from elementary school through college, always branded as AGC rather than individual companies, building industry awareness that converts to career interest over time.

For more information, contact:

- **Dan Benford**, AGC of Wyoming | [LinkedIn](#)
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::: **Leveraging Assessments for Career Development and Safety**

Burns & McDonnell's assessment-driven approach validates that "we assess to invest," using knowledge and hands-on testing to create targeted training plans and safer worksites

Chad Whetro and William Fuller of Burns & McDonnell presented a framework for using employee assessments as growth tools rather than gatekeeping mechanisms. Their philosophy: assessments validate skills and knowledge to inform personalized development plans that align individual aspirations with organizational goals.

The company conducts both knowledge assessments (testing understanding of safety protocols, technical specifications, and procedures) and hands-on assessments (observing actual task performance). Critically, if knowledge assessments don't match skill demonstrations, employees are brought in at their demonstrated skill level—"truth over feelings" to protect both the worker and colleagues.

Assessments support individual growth by building confidence and motivation through transparent skill validation, organizational alignment by revealing strengths and gaps across the workforce, and personalized development plans mixing formal training with on-the-job learning. The company emphasizes that assessments become acceptable when positioned as tools for growth and leveraging the organization's most skilled employees as assessors and mentors.

Burns & McDonnell operates three complementary training programs: the Short Service Worker Program (for those new to industry or company, featuring 1-on-1 mentorship with safety training using "know-show-do" methodology), DOL-registered Apprenticeship Programs (providing craft training and national certification), and systematic On-the-Job Training (using 1:1 ratios, mobile apps for documentation, and proper record retention).

The formula is straightforward: Assessments + Targeted Training + OJT = Success. But success requires commitment from leadership. As their presentation emphasized, "If you're not willing to learn, no one can help you. If you're determined to learn, no one can stop you." The same principle applies to organizations: belief in training is crucial, and if leadership doesn't support it, neither will participants.

For more information, contact:

- **Chad Whetro**, Director of Workforce Development, Burns & McDonnell | [LinkedIn](#)
- **William Fuller III**, Technical Training Specialist, Burns & McDonnell | [LinkedIn](#)

∴ **Creating Pathways for At-Risk Youth and Disconnected Workers**

Building Pathways' wraparound support model achieves 89 percent success rate by addressing barriers to employment while providing hands-on construction training and sustained coaching

Shanna Saldaña, Chris Hicks, and Troy Snoddy presented Building Pathways' approach to introducing disconnected young adults (ages 16–24) to construction careers. Based in Fort Worth, the nonprofit serves individuals facing systemic barriers including poverty, housing instability, and involvement with justice or foster care systems.

The mission is clear: “Transform lives and communities by creating opportunities that educate, empower, and equip individuals for long, successful careers in the construction industry.” The program follows a 12-month timeline: 0–3 months building trust and accountability while understanding each individual's background, 3–6 months evaluating interests and aligning with appropriate trades, 6–12 months creating entry plans for training and employment, and post-12 months providing ongoing support as graduates establish themselves.

Safety comes first—all students (or clients, as Building Pathways calls them) receive OSHA 10 certification before stepping on jobsites. Peer groups focused on financial literacy, professional development, and personal growth are mandatory for stipend eligibility. Clients earn wages from contractors while Building Pathways provides a \$2/hour stipend plus transportation support to remove a major employment barrier.

The “secret sauce” includes two components: Pathways Coaches who provide wraparound services (life skills, mental health connections, housing assistance, transportation support) and teach clients to invest in themselves and others; and Supportive Partners including trade partners, unions, and industry organizations offering training, certifications, sponsorships, and networking.

Chris Hicks, a Building Pathways graduate, exemplifies the model's impact. As a coach, he visits jobsites unannounced, supports clients facing challenges, and teaches that construction careers are built “one day, one bite at a time.” Troy Snoddy, a superintendent with Post L Construction, provides on-site mentorship and hands-on exposure to mechanical and plumbing work.

The 89 percent success rate—clients still in construction careers three years later—validates the approach of combining skills training, barrier removal, emotional support, and sustained coaching beyond job placement.

For more information, contact:

- **Shanna Saldaña**, VP of Operations, Building Pathways | [LinkedIn](#)
- **Chris Hicks**, Pathways Coach, Building Pathways
- **Troy Snoddy**, Superintendent, Post L Construction

::: **Developing Construction Field Leaders**

AGC's structured leadership education pathway addresses the industry's critical shortage of effective field leaders by teaching the "soft skills" that complement technical expertise

Dan Beatty, Paul Flentge, and Warren Kiesel presented AGC's comprehensive approach to field leadership development, addressing a fundamental industry challenge: 94 percent of construction firms report difficulty finding qualified workers, and over half of new hires don't last—largely due to poor leadership rather than inadequate pay.

The core insight: "The best carpenter can't just be put into a leadership role. You have to teach people how to talk to other people and soft skills." Technical proficiency doesn't automatically translate to leadership capability. In fact, 75 percent of employees quit because of bad bosses, not the job itself, and 82 percent of team members feel misunderstood and unvalued.

Effective leadership development starts with self-awareness—the "Know Yourself to Lead Yourself" principle. Leaders must understand their own habits, stress reactions, and communication patterns before they can effectively lead others. The session emphasized creating a "liberating culture" with high challenge and high support, where people are pushed to grow but know their leaders have their backs.

AGC offers a structured Field Leadership Education Path:

- 1. Construction Supervision Fundamentals (CSF)** – For craftworkers moving into leadership
- 2. Supervisory Training Program (STP)** – Six courses covering Leadership, Communication, Planning & Scheduling, Contracts, Productivity, and Managing Risk
- 3. Lean Construction Education (CM-Lean Credential)** – Focused on collaboration, efficiency, and high-performance project management
- 4. AGC EDGE Virtual Education** – Interactive online classes with breakout sessions, simulations, feedback, and networking

Training effectiveness depends on interactive methods: skip PowerPoints in favor of hands-on simulations, role-playing, and group discussions. Two-way communication and peer-to-peer coaching build accountability and ground training in real-world experience. The best leaders are also active listeners who take time to understand before reacting.

Building the pipeline requires long-term planning with clear career ladders showing paths from trainee to foreman to superintendent. Requiring mentoring as part of advancement ensures leadership means lifting others. Teaching resilience—the ability to adapt, recover, and keep learning through challenges—prepares leaders for construction's inherent volatility.

For more information, contact:

- **Dan Beatty**, Constructive Leadership Solutions | [LinkedIn](#)
- **Paul Flentge**, Flentge Development Group | [LinkedIn](#)
- **Warren Kiesel**, Curriculum Development Director, AGC of America | [LinkedIn](#)

::: Designing Career Frameworks and Internal Universities

Structured career frameworks with role-specific competencies provide clear growth pathways while helping organizations identify bottlenecks and training needs

Stephen Hunt presented a comprehensive approach to creating career frameworks that function as roadmaps for employee development while addressing organizational workforce planning needs. The concept of an internal “university” rests on four pillars: structured training (core skills, processes, compliance), role-based learning (tailored to career stages), on-the-job learning (mentorship, shadowing, check-ins), and growth mindset (career literacy).

The step-by-step process begins with auditing current roles and bottlenecks, typically starting with operations where the clearest pain points exist. Next, map career tracks for each department with defined milestones showing progression from entry-level through senior positions. Form committees to tackle departmental role-specific frameworks, with representation from each role being essential—those doing the work know best what competency looks like.

Committees define departmental competency buckets (categories of skills and knowledge), then turn those competencies into action statements: “What do we want to see team members DO to achieve mastery?” This behavioral focus makes assessment objective and provides clear guidance to employees on what advancement requires.

Link learning content and resources to each competency and milestone, creating a library employees can access for self-directed development. Determine where frameworks will live—ideally a high-traffic digital location accessible to all employees. Finally, build a company-wide communication plan ensuring employees at every level understand how to use the frameworks and what opportunities exist.

Measuring ROI involves tracking turnover percentage, internal promotion rates, time-to-productivity for new hires, LMS engagement or training completion rates, and securing executive buy-in by demonstrating bottom-line impact. Career frameworks reduce recruiting costs when internal promotions fill senior roles, decrease turnover by showing clear advancement paths, and accelerate capability development by focusing training on specific competencies needed for each role.

The frameworks also support succession planning by revealing gaps in the pipeline and help managers have more productive career development conversations with specific, documented progression criteria rather than vague promises of “opportunities.”

For more information, contact:

- **Stephen Hunt** | [LinkedIn](#)

::: Recruiting Construction's Future

New hires from Baldwin & Shell Construction Company, Granite Construction, and J.T. Vaughn Construction share what drives career decisions and long-term commitment

Early-career professionals from AGC member companies shared candid insights into how the next generation evaluates employers—and what ultimately drives long-term commitment to a construction career. Moderated by Jaime Andress, MBA, SPHR, Vice President & Chief Human Resource Officer at Caddell Construction, the panel emphasized that strong company culture is rooted in transparency, mentorship, and a clear investment in people.

Panelists Jill Cates (Assistant Superintendent, Baldwin & Shell Construction Company), Lillian Huchro (Field Engineer, Granite Construction), and Brennan Lantzy (Junior Estimator, J.T. Vaughn Construction) reflected on their transitions from school to industry and the role internships, co-ops, and AGC Student Chapter involvement played in shaping their career decisions. For all panelists, job fair recruiting, AGC Student Chapter engagement, and internship experiences were the primary ways they were exposed to different companies and ultimately selected their current employers.

Beyond compensation, panelists noted that mentorship, professional development, and clearly defined growth pathways were critical differentiators among employers. Mentorship emerged as a defining indicator of a healthy company culture, with panelists highlighting the importance of engaged supervisors, access to experienced professionals, and structured development that supports early-career success.

Throughout the discussion, Jaime guided panelists through honest reflections on “green flags” and “red flags” encountered during the hiring process. Green flags included accessible leadership, clear communication, intentional onboarding, and a willingness to discuss challenges openly. Red flags most often surfaced when career paths were vague, values felt misaligned with interview experiences, or development conversations were avoided. Panelists emphasized that authenticity mattered—attempts to oversell roles or avoid tough questions were quickly recognized and undermined trust.

Looking ahead, panelists shared goals for their first five years in the industry, including technical growth, leadership development, and strong mentorship relationships. The panel concluded with a clear takeaway: companies that prioritize early engagement, mentorship, and transparent development pathways are best positioned to attract, retain, and develop the next generation of construction leaders.

For more information, contact:

- **Jaime Andress**, VP & CHRO, Caddell Construction| [LinkedIn](#)
- **Paige Packard**, Program Director, AGC Education and Research Foundation| [LinkedIn](#)



: RETENTION AND CULTURE BUILDING

::: **The Six Essentials That Cut Gen Z Turnover**

Haydn Shaw's research-based framework provides practical tools for reducing Gen Z turnover through truth-telling, supportive onboarding, clear feedback, open dialogue, transparent policies, and honest career conversations

Haydn Shaw delivered the conference's opening keynote focusing on Gen Z retention grounded in real-world success rather than theory. His six essentials work in sequence:

- 1. They get told the truth before they start** – Younger employees don't complain about or quit over surprises. The "Truth of the Job Summary" tool and "reverse selling" technique involve being transparent about tough aspects (long hours, 3am starts, weather exposure) to ensure candidates say "yes" with full knowledge. If they still accept after hearing the challenges, retention probability increases dramatically.
- 2. They aren't alone after they get hired** – Most Gen Z workers won't stay if you don't invest effort because you're uncertain about their commitment. The "Deserted Island Checklist" and "Looking Around" exercises help new hires build connections, understand who does what, and feel integrated rather than isolated.
- 3. They don't have to guess how they're doing** – Gen Z expects feedback frequency to be immediate and continuous. The "3 Conversations Guide," "Effective Feedback Adjustments," and "Not Awkward 1-on-1s" tools enable managers to double their positive-to-negative feedback ratio and provide supportive coaching without handholding becoming burdensome.
- 4. They have open conversations about how it's going** – Rather than suppressing frustrations (which actually makes them grow), Shaw's "Lean into the Negative" and "Cool Listening" techniques create safe spaces for employees to voice concerns. This prevents surprise resignations and builds trust.
- 5. They know policies and understand why** – Gen Z questions policies that don't make sense to them. Tools like "How to Ask Questions," "Change Curve Conversations Map," and "Help Cooler Heads Prevail Gameplan" help leaders explain the "why" behind decisions and know when to let negative emotions burn out versus when to intervene.
- 6. They have clear conversations about their future** – Avoiding career path discussions because you fear disappointing employees actually increases turnover. The "Opportunity Map" and techniques for "Motivating people when you don't have what they want" enable honest dialogue about realistic advancement timelines and lateral growth opportunities.

Shaw emphasized that these aren't generational preferences but emerging adulthood characteristics (ages 18-28) driven by freedom, choice, and change.

For more information, contact:

- Haydn Shaw, CSP, Founder, People Driven Results | [LinkedIn](#)

::: **Building Trust to Improve Jobsite Collaboration and Safety**

Dr. Alejandra Mielke’s framework reveals that trust isn’t a feeling but a system built through clarity, connection, and commitment—transforming compliance into commitment

Dr. Alejandra Mielke presented a practical, research-based approach to building trust on construction jobsites, emphasizing that trust is “choosing to risk making something valuable vulnerable to another person’s actions.” It’s not automatic—it’s a deliberate decision foundational to collaboration, safety, and performance.

Trust is particularly hard in construction because workers constantly try to prove capability independently, the physical nature of work and weather create stress, and critically, no one teaches how to build trust. Supervisors and new leaders are promoted for technical skill, not interpersonal connection, leaving a gap in essential leadership capabilities.

The framework rests on three pillars:

Pillar One: Clarity – Leaders need self-awareness about their personal trust style (do you trust easily or cautiously?). Understanding the difference between task-based trust (common in the U.S., where “you do the work, I trust you”) and relationship-based trust (common in Mexico, India, China, where “I trust you because I know you”) is critical for diverse, multilingual crews. Having boundaries actually builds trust by creating safety and clear expectations rather than distance.

Pillar Two: Connection – Connection must be built intentionally through structured processes. Two simple tools: 5-minute check-ins (What’s going well? What challenges are you seeing? What support do you need from me?) and structured one-on-one meetings where leaders learn to talk and listen with intent. Even short, regular conversations build stronger relationships than infrequent long meetings.

Pillar Three: Commitment – The critical distinction is that expectations are assumptions of what we think others should do, while agreements are mutual decisions on what we’ll do together. Teams should replace vague expectations with clear, agreed-upon commitments. Agreements prevent confusion, reduce conflict, and make accountability easier because everyone participated in creating them.

Practical applications include tying trust practices into existing processes (safety huddles, daily logs) so they feel natural rather than extra work. For large crews, start with small groups developing agreements, then share and vote on top priorities for the whole jobsite. Watch interactions in meetings for 20 minutes to observe where trust breaks—who speaks up, who doesn’t—then discuss observations and make small adjustments.

Dr. Mielke emphasized that trust exists on a continuum and changes with situations, people, and context. Cultural and language barriers require extra attention; even small efforts like learning key phrases or using translation tools make a significant difference. Younger workers may lack experience with teamwork, authority, or feedback, while diverse teams need psychological safety to turn diversity into innovation rather than division.

For more information, contact:

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∴ **Crafting Solutions to Retain Existing Workers**

A facilitated discussion revealed practical strategies for retaining field employees, from implementing SOPs and project completion bonuses to transparent hiring and coaching rather than assuming

Haydn Shaw facilitated a collaborative session where contractors shared retention challenges and co-created solutions. Several themes emerged around introducing standard operating procedures to reduce inconsistency and yelling on jobsites, though the perennial question remains: how do you get people set in their ways to follow new procedures?

Successful approaches included creating playbooks with committee involvement from older employees so they feel ownership, conducting sessions on specific playbook sections, and consistently explaining the “why”—how changes benefit workers personally. Getting buy-in from superintendents requires face-to-face interaction, asking them to guide conversations, and branding the initiative (one company called theirs “Building Excellence”) to create ownership and pride. Non-negotiables must be clearly communicated: if someone refuses required standards, they may not fit the company’s future direction.

For retaining star players resistant to change, contractors emphasized visiting jobsites, building relationships first through real conversations, showing personal benefits (time saved, less paperwork, fewer headaches), framing new tools as resources rather than restrictions, and involving high performers early so they feel they’re consulting rather than being controlled.

Retaining traveling and remote workers requires special strategies: project completion bonuses built into pre-construction budgets and paid after finishing full projects; better accommodations (stop putting crews in tents—invest in clean, comfortable housing); family engagement through paid visits or gestures like sending flowers home to spouses; and travel incentives, with some firms adding 15 percent pay increases for employees who travel regularly.

The hiring and retention connection starts at interviews: be transparent and realistic about job realities, use behavioral questions (“tell me about a time when...”) to reveal real experience, show career path visuals demonstrating earning potential and growth paths, and conduct 30/60/90-day check-ins as short, personal conversations that identify problems early and build connections.

A critical insight for younger workers: many Gen Z and younger millennials have less prior work experience than older generations, so supervisors should coach fundamentals like punctuality rather than assuming knowledge. One company cut early turnover in half by coaching instead of immediately firing for tardiness or small mistakes—teaching rather than terminating.

For more information, contact:

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∴ **Creating Welcoming and Inclusive Work Environments**

J.F. Brennan Company and Granite Construction demonstrate that starting with manageable inclusivity initiatives leads to sustainable efforts that improve retention, especially for non-traditional workers

Janelle Pogodzinski of J.F. Brennan Company and Jorge Quezada of Granite Construction explored practical approaches to making work environments more welcoming and inclusive without overwhelming organizations with unsustainable commitments.

Granite created an Engagement Portfolio where employees can post questions, access inclusive learning programs, participate in quarterly Community Hour discussions, and sign up for an inclusion-focused Ambassador program. The portfolio provides structure while allowing organic participation based on employee interest rather than mandates.

Janelle urged firms to start small, focus on mastering a few initiatives, and build toward greater inclusivity over time. The emphasis on “manageable” initiatives recognizes that creating inclusive environments takes time, education in inclusivity strategies is crucial, and attempting too much too quickly leads to abandonment rather than sustainable culture change.

Both presenters noted that AGC of America’s Culture of CARE program offers extensive resources to help firms become more diverse and inclusive, providing frameworks, training materials, and case studies. The Culture of CARE emphasis on preventing injuries and creating psychological safety aligns naturally with inclusion efforts—both require leadership commitment, clear expectations, and accountability systems.

The overall message: finding ways to make firms more inclusive has played a key role in enabling better retention of the workforce, particularly workers from backgrounds underrepresented in construction (women, criminal-justice-involved individuals, refugees, disabled workers, LGBTQ community members). Inclusion isn’t just ethically right—it’s strategically essential for workforce availability.

Practical starting points included reviewing policies for unintended exclusionary effects, conducting listening sessions in multiple languages to understand diverse employee needs, ensuring Employee Resource Groups are open to anyone interested rather than limited by identity, and training managers on recognizing unconscious bias and creating psychologically safe team environments.

For more information, contact:

- **Janelle Pogodzinski**, Chief Human Capital Officer, J.F. Brennan Company, Inc. | [LinkedIn](#)
- **Jorge Quezada**, VP of People & Culture, Granite Construction | [LinkedIn](#)

::: **Getting Compensation Right**

PAS Inc.'s analysis reveals that compression between experienced and entry-level pay creates retention risks, requiring proactive compensation reviews by job family

Jeff Robinson of PAS Inc. presented comprehensive compensation data revealing critical trends affecting retention. While competitive pay for new hires is important, managing compensation for experienced and long-tenured employees is equally essential—yet many firms have focused disproportionately on entry-level increases, creating dangerous compression.

The data shows concerning patterns: from 2024 to 2025, Assistant Superintendents received 4.2% increases, Superintendents 4.2 percent, Project Superintendents 3.7 percent, and Construction Managers 5.5 percent. However, over five years (2020-2025), the picture is more dramatic: Assistant Superintendents saw 17.7 percent cumulative increases, Superintendents 22.0 percent, Project Superintendents 21.1 percent, and Construction Managers only 14.6 percent.

This compression makes it hard for firms to retain their best employees. The differentials that historically recognized experience, knowledge, and skill have narrowed significantly, putting seasoned talent at risk of departure. In some heavy civil and highway sectors, mid-level positions saw 6-10 percent increases while senior positions received only 2-3 percent, inverting traditional experience premiums.

Robinson emphasized that while pay is just one retention element, it's a powerful tool that doesn't end with getting new hires through the door. As employees mature in their careers, compensation must grow proportionally—or they'll seek employers who properly value their contribution.

The analysis also examined cost-of-labor versus cost-of-living, revealing that almost every position has experienced increased buying power over the past 40 years. For example, Project Superintendents earned equivalent to \$120,283 in 2021 dollars but \$144,898 by 2025—real wage growth beyond inflation. However, the 2021-2023 inflation surge temporarily inverted this trend, and workers still remember feeling behind even though 2024-2025 corrections restored buying power.

Robinson recommends that firms: conduct regular compensation reviews by job family to identify compression issues, pay particular attention to experienced worker retention as labor markets remain competitive, monitor both cost-of-living (BLS inflation calculator) and cost-of-labor (Employment Cost Index for construction), review construction unemployment rates as leading indicators of pay pressure, and understand that 2026 projections hover around 4 percent increases but could fluctuate based on economic conditions.

For HR positions specifically, firms saw dramatic variance: Recruiters increased 5.8 percent overall but 7.1 percent at mechanical contractors; HR Managers saw 5.9 percent increases overall but only 2.6 percent at building contractors and 9.8 percent at design-build firms. These disparities reflect differing competitive pressures and strategic priorities across contractor types.

For more information, contact:

- **Jeff Robinson**, President, PAS Inc. | [LinkedIn](#)

::: Integrating HR and Marketing for Unified Brand

J.F. Brennan Company's collaboration between HR and Marketing demonstrates how aligned employee and customer messaging strengthens both talent acquisition and brand loyalty

Janelle Pogodzinski and Kimberly Walters of J.F. Brennan Company presented an innovative approach to workforce retention and attraction by integrating HR and marketing functions around a unified employer brand. Their core insight: branding isn't just a marketing job—when HR and marketing align, they amplify each other, and employee voice plus customer voice equals trust.

The distinction between company brand (how we present ourselves to the world) and employee brand (how it feels to work here) is critical. Alignment builds credibility and trust both internally and externally. Strong together means HR brings people and values while marketing brings strategy and voice, creating a comprehensive Employee Value Proposition (EVP).

Shared objectives include culture alignment (ensuring external messaging reflects internal reality), talent attraction (making the company appealing to desired candidates), brand consistency (all touchpoints tell the same story), and building trust (authenticity resonates with both employees and customers).

Practical implementation involves “one message, two voices”: the customer voice explains why the company is best to solve their problems, while the employee voice explains why it's the best fit for their lives. This dual approach drives easier talent acquisition, higher employee engagement, more authentic external perception, and brand loyalty from both constituencies.

Practical branding includes establishing brand standards to reinforce positive work environment, showcasing logos to increase visibility and recognition, featuring real field and office photos rather than stock photography, employee spotlights on social media (speaking engagements, awards, personal wins), internal newsletter stories, and success showcases. Career pages should reflect company voice and culture, job descriptions should echo the brand, and HR-led events should receive marketing support to create on-brand stories around DEI, wellness, and safety initiatives.

For more information, contact:

- **Janelle Pogodzinski**, Chief Human Capital Officer, J.F. Brennan Company, Inc. | [LinkedIn](#)
- **Kimberly Walters**, J.F. Brennan Company, Inc. | [LinkedIn](#)

::: **Running Effective Construction Internship Programs**

A facilitated discussion revealed best practices for internship programs that serve as transformational experiences and bridges to long-term employment

Anthony Alleman of Pepper Construction and Justin Shields of Mass Excavation facilitated a collaborative session on maximizing internship program effectiveness. The consensus: internships should be transformational experiences that serve as bridges to long-term growth, turning interns into future hires and advocates who return strategic value.

Model programs run 10-12 weeks targeting Construction Management and Civil Engineering students, with goals for interns to gain hands-on experience, bridge classroom learning and real-world application, connect with mentors, and develop professionally. Company goals center on developing future hires by exposing interns to multiple aspects of the business.

Key rotational focus areas include: field operations and project engineering (shadowing foremen/superintendents, daily huddles, timecards, logs, safety procedures, equipment exposure, change orders, RFIs, QA/QC); estimating and pre-construction (quantity takeoffs, bid reviews, subcontractor coordination, construction software); safety and compliance (audits, safety briefings, near-miss reports, safety plan participation); and administration/reporting (cost coding, job cost tracking, project meetings, invoice support, document management).

Deliverables and expectations include weekly progress reports (what they learned, what they want to learn), journal entries, mentor meetings, mid-term evaluations, end-of-internship evaluations, and capstone presentations. Some firms use panel presentations rather than solo presentations to reduce intimidation, and many incorporate service projects where intern teams build items like dog houses for charitable groups.

Assigning mentors requires using “gut feeling” to match personalities, conducting weekly check-ins with both students and mentors, providing mentor training on their responsibilities, and creating formal mentor programs rather than ad hoc arrangements. First-year interns often receive the same rotation for everyone, while second-year interns get customized rotations aligned with their interests and career goals.

Eligibility typically requires junior/senior standing, majors in construction-related fields, willingness to work in the field, and Microsoft Office/software proficiency. However, some firms are targeting freshmen because the competitive environment means juniors and seniors have often already signed contracts with competitors.

Incorporating internships into talent pipelines requires competitive pay (discussions revealed wide variance, with some offering stipends and others paying \$20-25/hour).

For more information, contact:

- **Anthony Alleman**, Vice President, Operations, Pepper Construction | [LinkedIn](#)
- **Justin Shields**, Vice President, Mass Excavation, Inc. | [LinkedIn](#)



: LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

::: **AI in Construction HR: Opportunity, Risk, and Real-World Impact**

Zach Giglio's keynote and hands-on session demonstrated that AI rewards expertise rather than replacing it, with construction HR teams already using AI for recruiting, job descriptions, FAQs, workforce planning, and data storytelling

Zach Giglio, CEO of GCM, delivered both a keynote and hands-on workshop on artificial intelligence in construction HR, emphasizing that AI is a tool—not a solution—that amplifies the quality of your processes. If HR processes are good, AI makes them better; if bad, AI makes them worse.

The “AI effect” shows significant productivity gains: 12-30 percent more tasks completed, 20-33 percent quicker completion time, and 40 percent improvement in work quality for those using AI tools like ChatGPT, Copilot, or Gemini. Critically, AI rewards expertise—it doesn't replace it. Judgment beats prompts (AI needs someone who knows what “good” looks like), context is power (the more you understand the work, the better AI performs), and experience now scales (ten years on the job can scale like fifty with AI assistance). Curiosity wins: those willing to test and learn with AI will outpace everyone else.

Public perception has shifted dramatically: 35 percent describe AI as a tool or assistant (practical, helpful, human-centered), 20 percent cite time-saving as the top benefit (AI gives hours back, not extra work), and positive-to-negative perceptions run about 3:1 with fear fading as optimism rises.

Construction HR teams already use AI for:

- **Recruiting:** Streamlined scheduling and candidate outreach, filling roles faster with less friction
- **Job Descriptions:** Clearer postings and templates reflecting company culture, removing bias in language
- **FAQs & Employee Support:** Chat tools that answer employee questions instantly about PTO, policies, benefits, reducing the “HR is Google” problem
- **Meetings & Follow-Up:** Instant notes, takeaways, and next steps to keep teams aligned (though Giglio cautioned that AI can't always decide what's important—better to use transcripts to refine your own notes)
- **Workforce Planning:** Data-driven forecasting identifying staffing needs and training priorities by combining project data with AI analysis
- **Data & Storytelling:** Actionable insights highlighting wins and surfacing issues early

For more information, contact:

- **Zach Giglio**, Founder & CEO, GCM | [LinkedIn](#)

::: **CareerPathway.com: Connecting Students with Construction Careers**

Bo Jones's platform unifies career exploration, education, and hiring into one experience, allowing organizations to post unlimited jobs and map full career ladders from entry-level to expert roles

Bo Jones, Founder & CEO of CareerPathway.com and President of Tru-Built Construction, introduced a workforce development platform connecting individuals with construction career and education opportunities. The platform unifies career exploration, education, and hiring into a single, integrated experience.

Organizations can post unlimited jobs and map complete career ladders showing progression from entry-level positions through expert roles. Beyond traditional job postings, the platform includes opportunities for job shadows, scholarships, certificates, and degree programs, providing career growth visibility so candidates see where to start and how to advance. Transparency before applying ensures informed, motivated applicants who understand the full career pathway.

For construction specifically, the platform connects students to real construction companies with authentic videos, photos, and career stories (carpenter, project manager, estimator, etc.). Students explore roles, learn about education and training requirements, and build career-ready profiles. The all-in-one platform covers exploration, learning, connection, application, and hiring with measurable engagement data throughout.

Community rollout involves several coordinated steps: engage schools by having students create profiles during career-readiness or advisory periods; activate businesses and colleges by encouraging local employers and institutions to create profiles (free or premium options) and post pathways, jobs, and educational opportunities; host community career events such as signing days, career fairs, and classroom connections powered by the platform; and promote collaboration by sharing stories, videos, and content to inspire students and showcase local opportunities.

The platform addresses a fundamental challenge: students often don't know construction careers exist or understand the pathways to enter and advance in the industry. By providing concrete, visual representations of career journeys with real people from real companies, CareerPathway.com makes construction careers tangible and achievable for young people exploring options.

For more information, contact:

- **Bo Jones**, Founder & CEO, CareerPathway.com & President, Tru-Built Construction | [LinkedIn](#)

::: **The Special Operator Mindset: Placing Veterans in Construction Leadership**

Dominic Perez's Special Operators Transition Foundation places military veterans in construction leadership roles with 97 percent success rate, leveraging skills in adaptability, problem-solving, and mission-focused execution

Dominic Perez of the Special Operators Transition Foundation presented a compelling workforce solution that places military veterans—particularly special operations personnel—into construction and other industries with remarkable success rates. The foundation's model has facilitated over 850 lifetime transitions, with 169 in 2025 alone, and 97 percent of participants hold bachelor's degrees with 65 percent holding graduate degrees.

The average starting salary of \$143,000 reflects the caliber of talent: these are not entry-level workers but experienced leaders trained in pressure situations with proven skills in adaptability, problem-solving, mission-focused execution, team cohesion, and accountability. The “special operator mindset” translates directly to construction challenges: the same leadership under pressure that wins military missions can build safer, stronger teams on jobsites.

The program provides comprehensive support including assessment and coaching, leadership and business training, mentorship and networking, and placement with ongoing support—not just a handoff but sustained engagement to ensure both veteran and employer succeed.

The foundation emphasizes three value propositions: mission-ready leaders built for pressure, precision, and people; proven programs; and stronger workforces with better safety, retention, and results. For construction firms facing leadership shortages, particularly at project management and operations levels, military veterans offer immediately deployable talent with transferable skills and proven leadership under adversity.

The economic value is compelling: rather than developing leadership capability over 10-15 years, firms can access leaders with 10-20 years of intensive leadership development through military service. The cultural fit is strong: construction's emphasis on safety, teamwork, mission accomplishment, and clear communication aligns naturally with military values.

For more information, contact:

- **Dominic Perez**, Special Operators Transition Foundation | [LinkedIn](#)

::: **Building Better Together: Best Practices from Local HR Committees**

Arizona Builders Alliance, TEXO, and other local HR committees demonstrate how collaborative, member-driven forums advance workforce development while providing valuable networking and knowledge sharing

Meloni Raney of TEXO, Carrie Gardenhire of Arcoro, Sarah Rathborne of Rogers-O'Brien Construction, and Shelby McEntire of Skiles Group showcased how local AGC HR committees drive workforce success through collaboration, shared learning, and practical resource development.

The Arizona Builders Alliance HR Committee started by researching membership through surveys to understand investment levels, meeting frequency preferences, and topics of interest. They ensured active members were represented and committed to covering the top two topics during the first year, hosting events every 2-3 months. Starting small with 10 attendees at the first meeting, they've grown through consistency and delivering value.

Signature programs included a marijuana panel addressing five years since legalization in Arizona, featuring legal experts, drug testing companies, and a moderator with prizes to boost attendance. An immigration policy panel brought three industry experts to share critical updates and new resources.

Committee meetings are brief to respect members' time, with no formal leadership roles initially to allow organic emergence. The committee creates varied event types recognizing people won't attend everything. Events avoid days when companies typically conduct onboarding, and content often comes from members.

TEXO's approach emphasizes member-led content, practical topics that immediately apply to daily HR challenges, and building an email network connecting HR professionals across companies. Rogers-O'Brien organized "Horror Stories" events to share retention and turnover lessons, while Skiles Group conducted participant surveys to identify key discussion priorities and implemented interactive activities like trivia games to foster engagement.

The committees provide critical value during times of regulatory uncertainty: when DEI guidance shifted, HR committees became forums for sharing compliance approaches; as immigration enforcement intensified, committees hosted expert panels; when AI tools emerged, committees explored ethical use cases together. The peer-to-peer learning and support helps HR professionals navigate change more confidently than they could in isolation.

For more information, contact:

- **Meloni Raney**, President/CEO, TEXO Association | [LinkedIn](#)
- **Carrie Gardenhire**, Director of Partner Marketing, Arcoro | [LinkedIn](#)
- **Sarah Rathborne**, Senior HR Manager, Rogers-O'Brien Construction | [LinkedIn](#)
- **Shelby McEntire**, Director of Human Resources, Skiles Group | [LinkedIn](#)



: NAVIGATING REGULATORY TRANSITION

:: Understanding the New DEI and Discrimination Landscape

The Trump administration's executive orders fundamentally reshaped the legal framework around diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, creating both compliance risks and strategic opportunities for construction employers

The 2025 conference devoted significant attention to helping contractors navigate the dramatic shift in federal enforcement priorities around DEI programs. Fisher Phillips LLP attorneys provided comprehensive guidance on the new executive orders, EEOC enforcement priorities, and practical steps contractors should take immediately.

Key developments include the elimination of affirmative action requirements for federal contractors under Executive Order 11246, new DOJ investigations targeting “illegal” DEI practices in the private sector, and EEOC guidance clarifying that Title VII protections apply equally to all groups with no “diversity interest” exception. Contractors learned that while lawful DEI programs remain viable, they must be carefully designed to avoid quotas, preferential treatment, or mandatory training that could be construed as discriminatory.

The practical guidance emphasized several immediate actions: conduct attorney-client privileged reviews of all DEI programs and materials, remove or revise language that suggests preferences based on protected characteristics, broaden recruitment efforts to emphasize diverse backgrounds including veterans and disabled workers, train managers on anti-discrimination compliance, and reframe diversity initiatives to emphasize workplace culture and merit-based opportunity rather than demographic targeting.

Importantly, speakers clarified that Title VII's core protections remain unchanged, state and local discrimination laws still apply, and contractors can continue programs that expand candidate pools and create inclusive workplace cultures—they simply must ensure these programs don't involve preferential treatment based on protected characteristics.

For more information, contact:

- **Tami Culkar**, Partner, Fisher Phillips LLP | [LinkedIn](#)
- **Stephen E. Irving**, Partner, Peckar & Abramson | [LinkedIn](#)

::: **Preparing for Increased Immigration Enforcement**

With ICE budgets tripling and enforcement operations intensifying, contractors must implement comprehensive I-9 compliance and crisis response protocols

Immigration enforcement emerged as one of the most urgent compliance concerns at the conference. Bruce Buchanan of Littler Mendelson and Jackie Hickman of Hedrick Brothers Construction provided sobering insights into the scale of the enforcement surge: ICE received \$29.9 billion for enforcement operations in fiscal year 2026—a three-fold increase—with funding to hire an additional 10,000 deportation officers and dramatically expand detention capacity.

The Trump administration has conducted worksite raids at construction sites in Savannah, Tallahassee, and Bellingham, among other locations. Meanwhile, the number of I-9 audits are projected to increase from fewer than 500 annually under President Biden to 12,000-15,000 per year during this new administration. Construction is almost certain to be targeted given the high percentage of foreign-born workers in the sector.

Contractors learned critical distinctions between judicial warrants (which must be obeyed) and administrative warrants (which do not provide authority to enter non-public areas without consent). The session provided detailed protocols for responding to ICE raids, handling I-9 audits, and assembling crisis management teams in advance.

Key recommendations included conducting internal I-9 audits with legal counsel to cure errors before ICE arrives, ensuring all staff are trained on proper I-9 completion and storage, never waiving the three-day production period when served with a Notice of Inspection, and establishing clear escalation procedures so receptionists and site personnel know exactly what to do when agents arrive.

For more information, contact:

- **Bruce Buchanan**, Senior Counsel, Littler Mendelson P.C. | [LinkedIn](#)
- **Jackie Hickman**, Hedrick Brothers Construction Company, Inc. | [LinkedIn](#)

∴ Navigating National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) Changes and Union Relations

Shifting NLRB priorities under the Trump administration will affect both union and non-union contractors, requiring updated approaches to protected concerted activity and collective bargaining

The conference provided important updates on labor relations, particularly the pendulum swing at the National Labor Relations Board following Crystal Carey’s confirmation as General Counsel. Tami Culkar of Fisher Phillips and Danielle Curtiss of GH Phipps Construction outlined how current NLRB members are rescinding Biden-era guidance on noncompete agreements, stay-or-pay provisions, and the McLaren Macomb decision regarding confidentiality in severance agreements.

Even non-union contractors must understand protected concerted activity, as employees have the right to discuss wages, working conditions, and workplace concerns collectively—and can file NLRA complaints even without union representation. The session clarified that supervisors do not have the same NLRA protections as other employees, an important distinction for construction firms promoting field personnel into leadership roles.

For union contractors, several trends are reshaping collective bargaining: unions are providing less formal training than historically, shifting responsibility to employers who must now proactively secure training. The pay gap between union and non-union has narrowed, creating challenges in incentivizing foremen to accept bargaining unit roles. And mandatory sick leave laws are creating complications compared to traditional approaches to compensation and benefits.

The session emphasized the distinction between Section 8(f) voluntary pre-hire agreements (common in construction) and Section 9(a) majority-based representation. Contractors operating under 8(f) agreements should understand that unions may file for elections to obtain 9(a) status if contractors attempt to terminate the relationship, converting voluntary project-based arrangements into permanent bargaining obligations.

With multi-year agreements featuring consistent 4 percent wage increases becoming more common and fringe benefit costs rising alongside base wages, contractors need sophisticated approaches to workforce planning and succession planning, particularly as experienced foremen retire without adequately trained replacements.

For more information, contact:

- **Tami Culkar**, Partner, Fisher Phillips LLP | [LinkedIn](#)
- **Danielle Curtiss**, General Counsel, GH Phipps Construction

∴ **Wage and Hour Compliance in a Complex Environment**

With federal regulations in flux and state laws diverging, contractors need robust systems for overtime calculation, worker classification, and travel time compensation

Fisher Phillips provided essential guidance on Fair Labor Standards Act compliance amid regulatory uncertainty. Key developments include the Trump administration's request to put salary basis test increases on hold (reverting to \$684/week from the proposed \$1,128/week) and signals that independent contractor classification tests may become more employer-friendly.

However, contractors cannot simply wait for federal clarity. State minimum wage requirements continue to increase (22 states raised minimums in 2025, with three states plus DC exceeding \$15/hour), and state-level classification tests like California's strict ABC test remain in effect regardless of federal changes. This creates a patchwork compliance challenge for multi-state contractors.

The session emphasized common construction industry violations: misclassifying supervisors who perform manual labor, failing to compensate off-the-clock work (pre-shift equipment preparation, post-shift cleanup, safety meetings), incorrectly calculating regular rates by excluding bonuses and other compensation, and improperly handling travel time between jobsites and to remote locations.

Particularly important for construction: travel time from home to work is generally not compensable, but travel between jobsites during the workday is fully compensable, as is travel during normal working hours for overnight trips. Once an employee passes through the "work portal" at a central yard, subsequent travel to remote sites must be paid.

The session cautioned that misclassification penalties multiply based on the number of affected workers, duration of violations, and willfulness. With first offense knowingly hiring violations reaching \$5,724 per employee and paperwork violations up to \$2,861 per individual, the financial exposure can be devastating. Contractors should conduct regular classification audits, maintain comprehensive documentation, and provide specialized training for supervisors on proper worker treatment.

For more information, contact:

- **Micah Dawson**, Partner, Fisher Phillips LLP | [LinkedIn](#)
- **Lindsay Reimer**, Of Counsel, Fisher Phillips LLP | [LinkedIn](#)

∴ **Staying Compliance-Ready Through Changing Administrations**

J.F. Brennan Company's proactive compliance framework demonstrates how contractors can maintain readiness regardless of which party controls enforcement agencies

Kelley Blank of J.F. Brennan Company presented a practical framework for maintaining compliance readiness amid regulatory volatility. Rather than reacting to each administration's priorities, Brennan built systems that remain audit-ready regardless of external changes.

The approach centers on data accuracy as the foundation of compliance. Brennan maintains clean HRIS records with accurate employee counts, correct job titles, and aligned pay data across payroll, project tracking, and compliance systems. This enables real-time report generation for any audit or inspection, dramatically reducing response time and demonstrating credibility to investigators.

For I-9 compliance, Brennan implemented a review-refine-reinforce cycle: conducting internal audits of all active and terminated employee I-9s to identify gaps, correcting errors following USCIS guidance, and conducting refresher training for HR staff, hiring managers, and field administrators. The company developed a clear response plan identifying points of contact, escalation procedures, and protocols that remain accessible to all employees.

Critical to success is building communication bridges between field operations, HR, and legal counsel so compliance isn't siloed in the home office but integrated into daily operations. Blank emphasized that compliance data tells your organization's story—maintaining accurate records isn't bureaucratic overhead but rather the evidence of your company's values and commitments.

For more information, contact:

- **Kelley Blank**, J.F. Brennan Company, Inc. | [LinkedIn](#)
- **Janelle Pogodzinski**, Chief Human Capital Officer, J.F. Brennan Company, Inc. | [LinkedIn](#)

Closing Thoughts

The 2025 AGC National Construction Workforce & HR Conference took place during a period of extraordinary transition, yet the event's overarching message was ultimately one of resilience and opportunity. At a time when regulatory frameworks around DEI, immigration, labor relations, and wage-hour compliance are shifting, the need for workforce development remains constant.

Contractors facing uncertainty should respond proactively. This means conducting regular compliance audits to identify and cure I-9 errors before ICE arrives, reviewing DEI programs with legal counsel to ensure they emphasize inclusion and opportunity rather than preferences, implementing systematic career frameworks so employees see clear advancement paths, building HR and marketing alignment to strengthen employer brand, and experimenting with AI tools to enhance recruiting, employee support, and workforce planning.

Most important, workforce challenges are best addressed collectively rather than individually. The success of AGC of Wyoming's comprehensive K-12 workforce development program, the collaborative problem-solving evident in HR committee meetings, the knowledge sharing between contractors and nonprofit organizations like Building Pathways, and the peer-to-peer learning throughout facilitated discussions all demonstrated that AGC's network effect multiplies the impact of individual firm efforts.

We encourage you to view this report as a catalogue of workforce development and retention opportunities. Reach out to the experts and organizations behind these proven strategies and figure out how you can replicate what they are doing. If every member were to implement even one of the approaches outlined here, the industry can make a big dent in workforce shortages.

The 2025 conference made clear that the industry can control how it recruits, develops, supports, compensates, and retains the people who make projects possible. In doing so, contractors can turn workforce challenges into competitive advantages and uncertainty into opportunity.

Save the Date:

Join us for the **2026 Construction Workforce & HR Conference.**

Phoenix, Arizona, October 21-23, 2026.

Details to be announced at www.workforcehr.agc.org

Join AGC of America's HR Forum where AGC members can connect with each other, keep pace with the latest construction HR developments and participate in association policymaking on HR matters.



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