

Pathways to Success: Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc.

Location: Portland, Oregon

Host Organization: Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc.

Partner Organizations: Irvington Covenant Community Development Corporation, Youthbuild, Union and Non-Union Contractors, City of Portland, Worksystems, Inc.

Target Population: Women

Program Innovations

- Annual Women in Trades Career Fair sponsored by the industry that targets over 1500 females from middle school to adults and introduces them to careers in construction
- Use of program alumni as mentors and guest speakers for current training classes

Program History

Connie Ashbrook, a former tradeswoman and current Executive Director of Oregon Tradeswomen, helped found the organization in 1994. Ms. Ashbrook, who personally noticed the low representation of females in the construction trades and who learned from the successes of Cleveland Hard-Hatted Women and Chicago Women in the Trades, and was mentored by their Executive Directors Lauren Sugarman and Kathy Augustine, co-founded the organization with the mission of building a community of women within the trades.

Program Summary

Outreach for the Pathways to Success program is an essential component and is ongoing. The outreach and screening process prior to each class often lasts about three months. One large tool Oregon Tradeswomen uses for outreach and recruitment is the annual Women in Trades Career Fair. The Fair, sponsored by the local construction industry, was held for its 18th year in 2009. Fifteen hundred adult, middle school, and high school females attend and learn about careers in the construction trades, meet employers, and participate in hands-on activities

and workshops taught by female industry professionals. Participants may learn how to operate a crane, use a fire hose, work with concrete or climb a power pole. These activities, along with the chance to meet and talk with females working in construction, help build participants' self-esteem and show them that work in the construction sector is a real opportunity.

“We invest about \$17,000 a year in marketing to reach women to overcome the effect of occupational segregation because they don’t even think about doing this type of work until they are targeted directly.”

--Connie Ashbrook, Executive Director of Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc.

Before enrolling in training, participants must first attend an information session and sign up for a career counseling session. Trainees must have a GED or high school diploma, be drug free, be able to get a driver's license, have a stable living situation, be in good physical condition, be ready to work in the trades, and have English language proficiency. If an interested individual meets these requirements, they can enroll in the Pathways to Success Pre-Apprenticeship Trades and Apprenticeship Class, which is typically offered five times a year and enrolls 20 to 25 trainees for each course. American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding has allowed Oregon Tradeswomen to increase the size of some of their classes in 2010. Training is provided for 6½ hours per day, three days a week, for seven weeks. The short duration of the training helps accommodate the needs of women who have families, a job, or an immediate need to go to work, which were all considerations when the program was designed.

The **curriculum** of the program includes a mix of classroom and hands-on training. Participants create a resume tailored to the construction trades, practice job interviews, build math and measuring skills, learn about the construction culture and what it is like to work as a women in the trades. Trainees build strength and physical endurance through 25 hours of physical education and training. Partnerships with union and non-union contractors provide trainees with five days of field trips to visit apprenticeship training facilities and job sites. At each of these facilities and work sites, trainees not only receive an orientation to the trade, but also have the opportunity to participate in some of the work. Through these site visits and visits by industry professionals to the classroom, trainees are exposed to a large number of trades in different construction sectors. In addition to these engaging visits and tours, trainees also participate in 35 hours of hands-on training in which they perform work for other nonprofits under the direction of skilled female instructors to learn and practice how to use hand and power tools, and learn about the work expectations at a construction

site in a practical setting. Participants also earn an OSHA 10 safety certification and HAZWOPER 40 hour certification.

Green construction topics are also covered in the training. Trainees receive an introduction to green remediation and green building, and earn a certificate in environmental remediation. Through this training, participants learn about deconstruction and materials reuse, identification of hidden hazards at Brownfield sites, green and solar roofing systems, weatherization, energy efficiency, and innovative practices in the management, design and construction of storm water systems.

To effectively implement the curriculum and program, Oregon Tradeswomen's staff and instructors are skilled journey-level tradeswomen. The classes and expectations are set to emulate an industry-like setting where students are held accountable for their attendance, punctuality, professionalism, and performance. Furthermore, staff's industry experience makes them knowledgeable about the culture and working conditions women will face, and as a result, they can prepare trainees for the obstacles and issues, such as sexism, that they may encounter on a job site.

Support services are offered throughout the participants' training and include case management, mentoring, and assistance with tuition, child care, and transportation expenses. As part of their training, participants develop child care and transportation plans to help them begin to address these issues prior to starting work.

Graduates of the Trades and Apprenticeship Class receive **job placement** services and go on to a variety of positions and careers within the construction trades. Though Oregon Tradeswomen's relationships with union and non-union contractors takes energy and attention to manage and sustain, their diverse partnerships with a wide variety of trades, employers and construction sectors helps provide graduates with more opportunities. While some graduates of the program do enter an apprenticeship program, others may enter the field through a helper position. In addition, graduates enter different sectors of the construction industry, such as heavy/highway, commercial and residential. Oregon Tradeswomen also hopes to use Workforce Investment Act funding in the future to provide participants with training in welding or forklift certification, which would help open up job opportunities in warehouses and manufacturing.

As part of the mission of building a community of women in the trades, Oregon Tradeswomen remains engaged with program graduates. Through phone calls, personal visits and social networking sites, such as Facebook, contact is maintained to support the graduates in their new jobs or career. Furthermore,

graduates of the program may come back to speak to classes or mentor new trainees.

Finally, the Executive Director, staff, graduates and tradeswomen members are also heavily engaged in the **policy arena** on issues affecting women in the construction trades. They work on equity issues at the state and local level. Ms. Ashbrook sits on the Oregon State Apprenticeship Council and is involved in the annual Tradeswomen Leadership Institute, which works to involve tradeswomen in the policy arena. Ms. Ashbrook was also part of a group of stakeholders working on the Clean Energy Workforce Agreement to help ensure that community-based organizations would be first source hiring for green projects in the Portland area. Oregon Tradeswomen hopes to add an organizer to its staff in 2010 to more fully tackle the policies that would help women access opportunities in the construction sector.

“We realized we really needed to ramp up the policy stuff in order to make a difference here otherwise we’re just really going to be putting a band-aid on a sore that will never heal.”

--Connie Ashbrook, Executive Director of Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc.

Program Funding

Since 2004, the City of Portland has played a substantial role in funding Oregon Tradeswomen. The City’s move in 2004 to use Housing and Urban Development funding from the federal government not only for housing, but also for economic development and workforce training, provided Oregon Tradeswomen with a stable and consistent funding source. To supplement the City of Portland’s funding, Oregon Tradeswomen has also received several two year U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Brownfields job training grants.

While corporate and industry sponsorship helps pay for the annual Women in Trades Career Fair, other Oregon Tradeswomen partnerships also help sustain the program. Worksystems, Inc., the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) agency in Portland, with the mission of building and investing in a comprehensive workforce development system for the area, also contributes some funding toward the Trades and Apprenticeship Class. Oregon Tradeswomen hopes to access WIA funding in 2010 and beyond.

Industry Engagement

Central to Oregon Tradeswomen’s approach to industry engagement is involving construction and related sectors at as many different points and places as possible. Oregon Tradeswomen has relationships with a wide variety of employers, which include union and non-union contractors and associations that are involved in different sectors of the construction industry.

“We’ve always needed to cast a wide net in order to place the wide variety of women we serve, the wide interest they have, and the limited opportunity that exists.”

--Connie Ashbrook, Executive Director of Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc.

The organization as a whole does a lot to engage industry, such as:

- Having industry serve on advisory and curriculum committees;
- Listening to, and applying, industry’s recommendations regarding the program’s design and curriculum;
- Attending industry events such as picnics, apprenticeship graduation ceremonies and apprenticeship coordinator meetings; and
- Inviting industry to observe or participate in Oregon Tradeswomen training and graduation ceremonies.

Moreover, these activities to engage industry, according to Ms. Ashbrook, use an approach that is based on respect for the trades and the work they do.