

Diversity in construction? Hire union

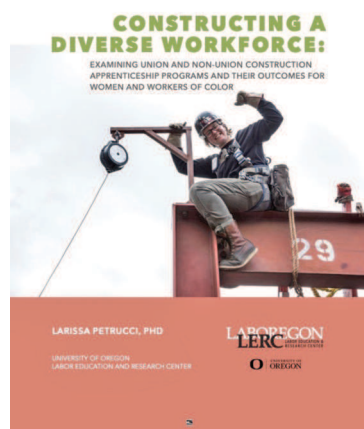
By Don McIntosh

When it comes to getting Black, Hispanic, and women workers into high-wage construction careers, union apprenticeship programs in the Portland area are having much greater success than non-union programs. That's the main finding of a newly released report by the University of Oregon Labor Education and Research Center (LERC).

The study draws on data from the Apprenticeship and Training Division of the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) over the period 2011 to 2020. It focuses on the Portland metro area because the Metro regional government is looking at setting region-wide goals for recruiting more women workers and Black workers to the construction workforce.

Altogether, 17,964 people were enrolled in Portland-area apprenticeship programs in the 2011-2020 time period—72% of them in one of 36 union programs, and 28% of them in one of 15 non-union programs.

Of the apprentices overall, 74% were white, 15% Hispanic, 6% Black, 3% Native American, 2% Asian American, and less than 1% were Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander. That's roughly comparable to the Portland area overall, except that Hispanics are over-represented



SEE THE REPORT: lerc.uoregon.edu

in construction and Asians are underrepresented.

But the demographic differences between union and non-union programs were significant:

■ **In the union programs**

64% of apprentices were white men, 26% were men of color, 7% were white women, 2.5% were women of color.

■ **In the non-union programs**

75% of apprentices were white men, 20% were men of color, 4% were white women, and 1.5% were women of color.

Looking at construction crafts where there were both union and non-union apprenticeship programs, the study found that women and minority apprentices were also more likely to complete an apprenticeship in the union programs. That was true of apprentices overall: Union

programs had a 58% graduation rate, while non-union programs had a 36% graduation rate. And in all programs, men graduated at higher rates than women, and white workers at higher rates than non-white workers. Among women apprentices, 50% graduated from the union programs, compared to 29% in the non-union programs. Among people of color, 45% graduated from the union programs compared to 40% in the non-union programs.

The report comes at a moment when local governments are increasingly declaring a commitment to greater opportunities for Black workers in particular. Its policy implications are clear: Construction project owners that want to prioritize opportunity for Black workers will get the best results when they employ a union workforce.

The LERC study was constructed along the same lines as a similar statewide study LERC published in 2009, authored by Barbara Byrd.

The new study was authored by Larissa Petrucci, who worked as a research assistant at LERC while she was earning her Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Oregon. She's now at the School of Labor and Employment Relations at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.



COMING SOON: 500,000 electric charging stations, many of which will be installed by union members. "IBEW members will lead the way in building out the charging infrastructure needed for the wide-scale adoption of electric vehicles, buses, trains, and trucks," said IBEW president Lonnie Stephenson in response to passage of the Infrastructure bill.

Infrastructure

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cused on dealing with climate change.

"I passed that through a real legislative process, many hours in committee, hundreds of amendments, days on the floor. It went nowhere under Trump, and then I passed it again early this year. Unfortunately, the Senate in its dysfunction could not take up the bill because of the filibuster rule."

Instead, President Biden had to negotiate with the Democratic-led Congress to get the infrastructure bill passed, and in the Senate, 10 Republicans and two conservative Democrats cut DeFazio's bill by about two-fifths.



Oregon U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio has been fighting for an infrastructure bill like this for decades.

DeFazio says the final bill was slightly larger than his bill on highways but significantly lower on transit and rail. But DeFazio said he hopes to fight to restore some of those investments in the next big bill to be taken up, Biden's Build Back Better Act.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE ACT

- **ROADS AND BRIDGES** On top of reauthorizing surface transportation programs for five years, an additional \$110 billion to repair roads and bridges, \$11 billion for transportation safety programs, including projects to reduce traffic fatalities, and \$1 billion to reconnect communities (disproportionately Black neighborhoods) that were divided by highways.
- **PASSENGER RAIL** \$66 billion in additional rail funding to eliminate the Amtrak maintenance backlog, modernize the Northeast Corridor, and bring rail service to areas outside the northeast and mid-Atlantic.
- **ELECTRIC TRANSMISSION LINES** \$65 billion to construct thousands of miles of new transmission lines to facilitate the expansion of renewables and clean energy.
- **BROADBAND INTERNET** \$65 billion toward broadband infrastructure.
- **DRINKING WATER** \$55 billion to improve water infrastructure and eliminate lead service pipes.
- **EXTREME WEATHER RESILIENCY** \$50 billion to develop infrastructure to protect against droughts, heat, floods and wildfires.
- **PUBLIC TRANSIT** \$39 billion of new investment to modernize transit, on top of \$50 billion from existing transit programs for the next five years, will be the largest investment in public transit in U.S. history, paying for 24,000 buses, 5,000 rail cars, 200 stations, and thousands of miles of track, signals, and power systems in need of replacement.
- **CLEANUP OF TOXIC SITES** \$21 billion to clean up Superfund and brownfield sites, reclaim abandoned mine land and cap orphaned oil and gas wells.
- **PORTS AND AIRPORTS** \$17 billion for port infrastructure and waterways, and \$25 billion for airports to address repair and maintenance backlogs.
- **ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING STATIONS** \$7.5 billion to develop a national network of 500,000 EV charging stations—both within communities and along highway corridors to facilitate long-distance travel.

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