Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Apprentice Standards

THIRD SECTOR

Increasing Gender and Racial Diversity in Massachusetts' Construction and Building Trade Apprenticeship Programs:

A How–To Guide of Strategies & Tactics

A How-To Guide of Strategies & Tactics

Massachusetts is experiencing a construction boom, and the demand for construction and building trade apprentices is increasing every year. Many skilled tradespeople are retiring, providing the construction industry the opportunity to create better workforce pipelines and develop improved strategies to meet the high demand of workers.

With this opportunity, the Division of Apprentice Standards continues to strive to increase diversity while supporting programs to meet the demand of workers, by developing guidance that focus on strategies and tactics that serve as actionable items to address both demand and increased diversity.

Strategies for Increasing Diversity and Strengthening Your Workforce

This guide contains strategies for three phases along the apprenticeship program journey:

1) Outreach and Recruitment
2) Application and Selection
3) Experience and Completion

Each section contains tactical suggestions for actions your program can take. Sponsors are encouraged to implement tactics from each section to achieve the best results and amplify impact, address the construction and building trade worker shortage, meet diversity goals, and support women and people of color to achieve economic mobility.

Table of Contents

Section 1 | Outreach & Recruitment

Attracting a diverse pool of candidates is the first crucial step toward meeting the high demand and building a strong workforce pipeline. The recommendations in this section are organized into three strategies A) Targeted Outreach B) Accessible Materials and C) Strategic Partnerships.

Targeted Outreach

This strategy is for meeting people where they are and ensuring the message you are communicating is specifically designed for your targeted candidates. Before employing these tactics, be sure to articulate the individuals your organization is targeting. By being specific – for example, women who are veterans, people who are immigrants, etc. – you can tailor outreach in ways that directly resonate with that audience.

❑ **Work with recruiters who are women and BIPOC**

When potential candidates see people who look like them working in the organization, they are more likely to envision a place for themselves there. If your organization does not have capacity to hire diverse recruiters, one idea is to compensate employees who can serve as representatives to join recruiting events such as job fairs.

❑ **Feature photos and/or personal success stories of current staff who are women or people of color in application materials and public channels (e.g. website, social media, etc.)**

Communication and marketing materials are the face of your organization. Highlight the strengths of diversity in your company. Be sure to get permission and consent before using people's information.

❑ **Specifically call out individuals you are aiming to recruit (i.e. "actively seeking female applicants")**

While stating "everyone is welcome" is very inclusive, specifying who you want to attract can be especially effective for increasing willingness for candidates to apply. Use asset-based and strengths-based language (i.e. looking for women who have determination, perseverance, who are goal-oriented, etc.) to recognize strength in diversity and communicate your values.

❑ **Include DEIA commitment in messaging**

Every organization is required to follow Equal Employment Opportunity policies and can use Equal Employment Opportunity statements to communicate fair and equitable hiring policies. In addition, personalize your messaging by including statements on your organization's values and culture. Ensure communications are consistent across your website, social media pages, outreach materials, and application materials.

Case Study

Several apprenticeship programs in Massachusetts highlight not only their Equal Employment Opportunity statement, but their commitment to DEIA on their websites, sending a clear message that women and people of color are welcome and encouraged to join. Turner Construction states, "At Turner our differences are celebrated and our common values unite us. We want our people to lead with empathy, and we are increasing our knowledge of issues such as unconscious bias, racism, and privilege. This understanding will make us better. We accept our responsibility to promote the right, safe, and inclusive environment. It all starts with active caring. When we actively care and respect others, we all have a sense of belonging." The Turner Construction website also includes an equity report and lists various employee resource groups available.

❑ **Clearly communicate resources and wraparound supports available through the program (e.g. transportation, child care)**

Stating upfront any support offered during the application process or during the program itself can attract candidates who otherwise would not apply without access to those resources and supports.

❑ **Clearly communicate job possibilities (positions, average wages etc.) available after program completion, along with expected timelines**

Paint a picture for the future so that candidates can appropriately manage expectations, work toward milestones, and prepare a multi-year plan that fits their lives.

❑ **Host regular information sessions at times and locations accessible to women and people of color (i.e. evenings or weekends at community centers, online)**

Seek community feedback on what schedules and forums work best for the people you are aiming to recruit.

Accessible Materials

This strategy is for making the application process as easy and accessible as possible.

❑ **Create targeted outreach materials written in multiple languages**

Spanish is the second most spoken language in Massachusetts. Consider conducting recruitment and outreach using other languages other than English. This is a very strong signal to those potential candidates indicating you are actively seeking to recruit them.

❑ **Use plain language in materials (at or below 8th grade reading level)**

Application processes can require many steps, however, communicate using short and simple words to increase clarity.

❑ **Make outreach materials accessible via multiple channels and locations (e.g. in-person, online)**

Offer multiple options to maximize flexibility. Record and redistribute any information shared online so people can review it on their own schedule.

❑ **Transparently communicate application process and selection process (e.g. tests, fees), along with resources available to support candidates in applying (e.g. translator)**

Ensure potential candidates are equipped with what they need to apply and that they know how to access any resources your organization offers.

❑ **Indicate application checklist of both requirements & "nice to haves"**

It is important to communicate requirements during the recruitment process, prior to the application stage so potential candidates can assess whether they meet criteria.

❑ **Provide targeted outreach materials to recruitment partners at least 30 days in advance of open application windows**

Give your partners enough time to disseminate information and support your recruitment efforts.

Strategic Partnerships

This strategy is for leveraging the network and resources of strategic partners to support your organization in recruitment efforts. For each strategic partner, consider their track record for sourcing apprentice candidates who identify as women or people of color.

❑ **Partner with a pre-apprenticeship program**

Pre-apprenticeship programs provide the strongest link and pipeline for apprenticeship programs.

❑ **Partner with VocTech schools**

For age appropriate trades, fostering interest when potential candidates are younger can lead to higher application rates at the time or later on.

Case Study

The Greater Boston Joint Apprentice Training Center (JATC) Local 103 IBEW has developed strong relationships with VocTech schools that serve as a direct source for diverse apprentices annually. For example, every year, JATC 103 offers direct entry to one male and one female graduate per each of their 24 partner VocTech programs, yielding up to 48 apprentices (approximately 10% of their annual class) and ensuring gender parity for that portion of the class. Additionally, JATC 103 operates a co-op program with Madison-Park, a local Boston VocTech high school that serves primarily students of color, which serves as a source of additional apprentices.

❑ **Conduct outreach with community-based organizations, local workforce boards, high schools, youth organizations, national nonprofits, rehabilitation centers, veterans' organizations, the military, community colleges and universities**

Identify specific organizations where your targeted potential candidates might already be connected. Use those organizations' communications channels to share apprenticeship opportunities and work with organization representatives to share news by word of mouth.

❑ **Work with local Department of Transitional Assistance offices & MassHires to identify potential job-seeking candidates, especially those who are currently earning low income (i.e. receiving SNAP, TAFDC)**

Individuals connected to Department of Transitional Assistance and MassHire offices are likely seeking better jobs and higher wage opportunities. Apprenticeship programs especially for jobs with high earning potential are aligned with Department of Transitional Assistance and MassHire priorities. Partnering with these offices can build a strong pipeline and strengthen Massachusetts' workforce overall.

Section 2 | Application & Selection

After building a stronger applicant pool and entry pipeline, the next step is to support candidates through the application, selection, and enrollment phases. The recommendations in this section are organized into four strategies A) Application Design B) Data Review C) Selection Process and D) Enrollment.

Application Design

This strategy is for designing application materials and processes in a way that is simple, easy, and user friendly. The application process itself should not be a barrier, or include unnecessary hurdles to identify qualified applicants.

❑ **Use simplified application materials (i.e. single form or application packet)**

Reduce the number of documents applicants need to sort through by consolidating the application form into a single document, or bundling information into a single application packet.

❑ **Provide support throughout the application process, a "human help button"**

Appointing specific individual(s) to be available in person, by phone, or email can help applicants answer questions that may prevent them from finishing the application.

❑ **Communicate a clear application window and when applications period will be closed**

Setting a clear deadline will help applicants plan when to apply and how long they have to get application materials ready.

❑ **Communicate clear expectations of next steps and timelines**

Give applicants information about how long the selection process will take and what is expected of them; for example: communicate what and when each next step is, and whether they will be contacted through phone, text, mail etc.

❑ **Communicate non-starters and automatic disqualifications**

If your program has mandatory job requirements, for example, driving to work sites which requires employees to have valid drivers' license and safe driving records, communicate this in the application so people are not wasting your time and theirs.

Data Review

This strategy is for using real-time information review to understand the progress toward increasing diversity in your recruiting process.

❏ **Ensure applications include data which you are looking to review (e.g. gender, race, veteran status etc.)**

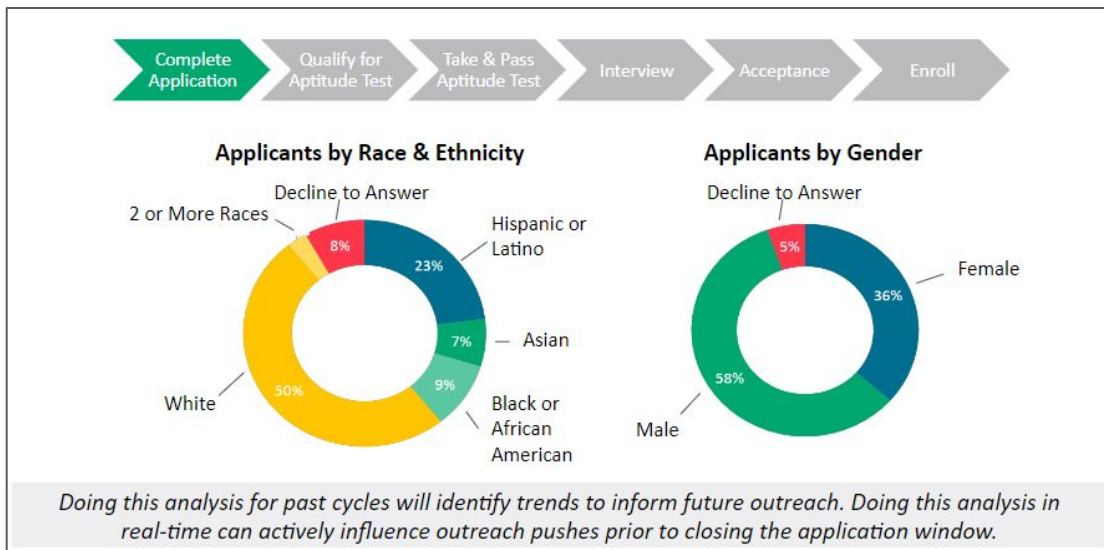   Collect the data you want to track during the application process.

❏ **Set specific goals for number of applicants and type of applicants (i.e. at least 10 women)**

   Set targets that are higher than the number of apprentices you are seeking to enroll.

❏ **Review data on applicants before the application period is closed to determine if additional specified outreach is needed**

   If the applicant pool is not tracking toward the diversity and representation targets you are seeking, consider reaching back out to strategic partners or hosting additional outreach efforts.

The figure below is an example of data review at various stages of the application process

Complete Application | Qualify for Aptitude Test | Take & Pass Aptitude Test | Interview | Acceptance | Enroll

Applicants by Race & Ethnicity

Decline to Answer 8%
2 or More Races
Hispanic or Latino 23%
Asian 7%
Black or African American 9%
White 50%

Applicants by Gender

Decline to Answer 5%
Female 36%
Male 58%

Doing this analysis for past cycles will identify trends to inform future outreach. Doing this analysis in real-time can actively influence outreach pushes prior to closing the application window.

The figure below is an example of data review at various stages of the application process

Complete Application → Qualify for Aptitude Test → Take & Pass Aptitude Test → **Interview** → Acceptance → Enroll

Applicants by Race & Ethnicity Accepted After Interview

	Hispanic or Latino	Asian	Black or African American	White	Two or More Races	Decline to Answer
Series 1	17	5	7	37	2	6
Series 2	11	1	3	19	1	4

Understanding if all races and genders advance through different phases at the same rates can point to the phase of the process that might need a closer look

Selection Process

This strategy is for ensuring a fair and equitable selection process once applicants are being reviewed and assessed for acceptance.

❑ **Use a blind process to review all candidates (remove names or other identifying information) to reduce implicit bias in initial application review process**

Once all applications are submitted and initial screening (e.g. aptitude test) is complete, conduct your initial review blind to ensure no implicit bias is impacting which candidates move on to the next stage of the process.

❑ **Organize candidates into categories and set a goal for # to proceed to next stage (i.e. aim to advance 7 women)**

Once qualified candidates are screened and identified, set acceptance targets for a number of candidates to keep advancing along the process.

❑ **Use fair and consistent application review criteria (e.g. rubric) and communicate it to applicants for transparency**

Be clear about the types of skills you are seeking from candidates. Consider how people with different experiences might present skills differently.

❑ **Positively weight specific criteria rubric (i.e. speaks language other than English)**

All other skills and qualifications equal, you might consider how someone who contributes to diversity is an added strength.

❑ **Ask consistent questions that align with criteria and allow for maximum comparability between applicants**

To maximize consistency and comparability among candidates, keep assessment criteria and processes the same. Ask the same interview questions of everyone.

Case Study

Iron Workers Local 7 Apprentice Program not only has established a detailed evaluation rubric for assessing apprentice candidates, but also shares that information publicly with candidates via their website. Additionally, Local 7's website includes "tips for a successful application" that provides candidates with additional information and practical guidance on document uploads and reference forms. This transparency of evaluation criteria both reduces subjectivity and bias in application scoring, as well as clearly communicates to candidates the program's requirements.

❑ **Provide interviewer training and protocols**

Train all interviewers and others involved in the selection process to ensure everyone is using the same approach and evaluating candidates consistently.

❑ **Assess skills using multiple tactics, including work samples and panel interviews**

Use different ways to allow a person to demonstrate their skills, keeping in mind that people have different learning and communicating styles.

❑ **Be cognizant of the message and culture that interview questions communicate**

The application process is a two-way street. You are assessing candidates as candidates are also assessing your company's values, culture, and the skills and experience they can gain in your program.

❑ **Use a selection team that is diverse**

Having a diverse selection team can add perspective and minimize singular biases.

Enrollment

This strategy is for ensuring that accepted applicants have a smooth transition into the company after undergoing the recruitment and application process.

❑ **Communicate "first day" expectations (i.e. prepare the following supplies, expect to wear boots, etc.)**

Ensure apprentices have what they need to be prepared for the first day prior to starting the program.

❑ **Use a questionnaire to ask apprentices what supports they need and when (i.e. tools, documents in another language to review prior to beginning training, etc.)**

Communicate what supports are available to apprentices as well as when and how they can access them.

❑ **Prepare for various learning styles**

Ask apprentices what their preferred learning styles are (i.e. video, hands on, flashcards, quizzes) and prepare their learning experience accordingly.

❑ **Pair mentors or "welcome buddies" of similar backgrounds as a non-evaluative source for questions early, ideally prior to starting the program**

Having a go-to person already assigned to an apprentice even before they show up the first day is a great way to build relationships early and increase comfort and familiarity for the apprentice as they begin their program.

Section 3 | Experience & Completion

After enrolling a great class of apprentices, the next step is to ensure they have a positive experience, successfully complete the program, and continue to build a strong career path. The recommendations in this section are organized into three strategies A) Culture B) Training & Supports and C) Career Path & Leadership.

Culture

This strategy is for strengthening the key to making everything work. Nothing is more important than establishing, building, and promoting your company culture that embraces diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

❑ **Leadership leads culture, and building culture is everyone's job (new/tenured, field/office, senior/junior employees)**

Company leadership can be one of the strongest signals of culture, however, every single member of the company makes culture what it is.

❑ **Culture is written and unwritten**

Clearly communicate company values (on your website, during meetings or trainings) and act by them.

❑ **Focus on strategic-level effort and positive impact to performance instead of compliance based requirements**

DEIA is what companies should do, not only because policies or regulations require it.

Training and Supports

This strategy is for designing training and resources for both apprentices and current employees to create a positive working environment that supports everyone.

❑ **Create processes for real-time performance feedback to promote interactive and engaging learning**

   Frequent feedback is very valuable for learners to adapt and adjust as necessary.

❑ **Have regular check-ins with apprentices to ask about their experience and any needs for support**

   Built-in meetings make it easier for people to share updates, resources, and ask for support as opposed to making apprentices feel they have to make a special ask.

❑ **Meet anti-harassment training requirements for everyone**

   Trainings are not only mandatory, but are helpful regular reminders for what is and is not acceptable or harmful to employees and company culture.

❑ **Communicate a clear grievance and complaint process, and ensure the individual harmed is supported as the problem is addressed**

   Ensure that the issue is resolved; for example, do not simply remove the individual harmed from the job site as the sole solution to an issue, be sure the individuals causing the issue understand the impact of their behavior and stop further harm.

❑ **Offer a mentorship and coaching program for apprentices**

   Mentors and coaches can have a huge impact on enhancing the apprentice experience by being someone to answer questions, help build relationships, increase confidence and comfort, increase skill-building, increase job satisfaction and retention.

Case Study

[Sheet Metal Workers Local 63](), in partnership with SMART International and with support from the University of Washington and the Center for Construction Research and Training, has launched a formal mentorship program that trains female journeypeople to serve as mentors to new female apprentices. The program is intended to support female retention in the trades, create more potential for female leadership roles, and nurture an environment that is more attractive to prospective female apprentices.

❑ **Offer training for journeypeople on what makes a positive apprenticeship experience**

Ensure employees are given resources for helping to improve the apprentice experience.

Career Path and Leadership

This strategy is for building out the continued apprentice journey toward a full career path into leadership opportunities.

❑ **Set list of skills to be acquired during job assignments to ensure all apprentices gain necessary experience**

Ensure all apprentices are matched with tasks and assignments that give them the appropriate opportunities to gain and practice the skills they need to successfully complete the program and secure a job.

❑ **Set company leadership goals (i.e. 50% of leadership is women or BIPOC)**

Work toward a goal of diverse representation in your company leadership.

❑ **Identify and pursue immediate opportunities to diversify leadership, instructors, company staff, etc. through open positions in the company (i.e. on people, sales, marketing teams etc.)**

Increasing diversity in all areas of your company will contribute to improved DEIA overall.

Case Study

Two contractors of different sizes, JC Cannistraro and USI Services, Inc. have focused on diversifying their office staff, in addition to actively seeking female apprentices and apprentices of color. Contractor leadership shared that they have significantly more office staff than apprentices and also more control over who they hire, so focusing on diversifying staff is a way to embody their organization's DEIA priorities as they continue efforts to diversify apprentices and field teams.