

Meeting the Shortage of Skilled Workers Head On

Construction is booming all across Oregon. From the renovation of the downtown Portland transit mall to the statewide \$1.3 billion OTIA III State Bridge Delivery Program, the number of public works projects taking place across Oregon is unprecedented.

To help meet the growing need for qualified construction workers, the Oregon Department of Transportation is working to support the Associated General Contractors by developing a program that will expand the skilled labor pool.

The 2003 start of ODOT's bridge program, which is repairing or replacing hundreds of aging highway bridges, was the impetus for this effort. ODOT and AGC met with federal, state, and local representatives, as well as community-based organizations, Native American tribes, unions, and apprenticeship organizations to determine the best way to prepare workers to be ready for contractors to hire.

The result was the establishment of a pool of skilled workers ready to start working on heavy-highway construction projects across the state. Currently, 25 potential workers are in the pool and more will join their ranks in the coming months.

All potential workers in the qualified construction workforce pool have met the following industry-standard requirements:

- Participated in a general construction trades orientation
- Registered in the iMatchSkills® database of the WorkSource Oregon Employment Dept.
- Passed a job-readiness screening
- Undergone an educational assessment that shows they meet trade-specific minimum requirements

- Verified their educational achievement (high school or GED equivalent)
- Passed drug-testing

The skilled, diverse labor pool is made up of women and men of various ethnicities, as well as veterans. Contractors can draw from this new source of qualified workers for jobs in any region. For those whose contracts specifically contain equal opportunity provisions and whose workforce provider is unable to meet this requirement, ODOT's qualified workforce pool is an alternative and is race and gender neutral.

By establishing this new source of skilled labor, AGC and ODOT are investing in the future of Oregon's transportation infrastructure and in Oregonians. Your company can be part of this innovative program by following these simple steps:

1. Register with the iMatchSkills database

The iMatchSkills database allows employers to list openings and find candidates matching their criteria. To register online, go to www.iMatchSkills.org and follow the online instructions for new employers.

You can request registration assistance either by phone or at your local WorkSource Oregon Employment Department office. To find the phone number and location of a nearby office, visit www.WorkinginOregon.org and click on "Office Locations," or call 1-877-517-JOBS (5627).

2. Hire apprentices from the qualified labor pool through iMatchSkills

Browse through a diverse group of qualified workers with the "OTIA ready" button, which limits your search to profiles of those already screened and accepted into the labor pool.

In the coming months, representatives from ODOT's Office of Civil Rights and Oregon Bridge Delivery Partners, the private company helping to manage the OTIA III bridge program, will be meeting with Oregon contractors to answer questions, gather feedback, and provide contractors with a "how to" package of materials.

For more information about the qualified construction workforce pool, you can call the ODOT Civil Rights specialist in your region:

Region 1 (Portland metro area)

David Dixon, 503-731-4560

Region 2 (Willamette Valley)

Rick Whelan, 503-986-4356

Region 3 (Southwest Oregon)

Marie Wright, 541-957-3698

Region 4 (Central Oregon)

Janet Sharp, 541-388-6234

Region 5 (Eastern Oregon)

Henry Manjarres, 541-962-0568

As construction continues to boom, the qualified construction workforce pool will help ensure we will be ready to meet the demand for skilled workers. ❖

ODOT/Industry Meeting a Success



Matt Garrett, ODOT Director

On February 9 over 175 Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) personnel, contractors, and design professionals convened at the annual ODOT/Industry Meeting in Salem. The event, co-sponsored by ODOT and AGC, provided a forum for information sharing and an opportunity to raise issues for ODOT to address.

Attendees heard presentations about environmental compliance, the new specifications book due out this year, design/build, and an update on where the current Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and the Oregon Transportation Investment Act (OTIA) stand. The program update highlighted the cliff effect that will occur if ODOT does not obtain additional funding. The funding for the OTIA III program will drop off sharply after 2011, creating a significant shortage of work in comparison to current levels after that time.

At lunch, ODOT Director Matt Garrett addressed the group with a similar message: without additional funding, the industry and ODOT will struggle in a few years. Director Garrett also highlighted the positive working relationship between AGC and ODOT, and the benefits to both the industry and the agency of this partnership.

A major presentation featured BidX—the vendor ODOT has selected to implement the new electronic bidding system. BidX walked participants through the bidding process, how to access bid tabs, information on upcoming bids, etc. One of the more interesting features of the system will be the ability of contractors to issue a call for bids for subcontractors, and a subscription capability for subcontractors to provide information back to the general contractor on that bid item. ODOT is currently in the testing phase with the electronic bidding system with the goal to bring the system online by the end of the year. ❖