

TRAINING OUTREACH LINKS CONTRACTORS WITH FUTURE WORKFORCE--AND INCREASES DIVERSITY

As the transportation workforce evolves from one generation to the next, it is necessary to unite our resources through multiple programs in order to compensate for the future is needed more than ever before. One of these programs being tested is in the state of Florida. The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) is making a valued effort that will help increase the awareness and diversity for the many job opportunities in the highway construction and maintenance industry.

The NRC's "Progress In Motion" newsletter is a time sensitive continuous resourceful way to share valuable technology and/or information that are taking shape that can help your programs/goals.

We encourage you to send in any information that you feel is important enough to be shared. We want to know about it.

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"At this point, the preliminary results show that the private and public sector cooperation has the potential of diversifying the highway construction workforce as the trainees are from all walks of life and are of different ethnic backgrounds and genders. The project team will continue soliciting input from contractors to improve the program."

- Dr. Renatus Mussa, Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering Florida A&M University

FDOT is sponsoring a pilot pre-employment training project focusing on introducing qualified trainees that may or may not have experience in the

highway industry. This pilot training program is designed to assist contractors to locate, hire, and retain people interested in working in highway construction. With assistance through the Florida Division Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) on-job-training/support services (OJT/SS) program, the pre-employment training was initiated in response to the review of contractors' compliance with federal and state diversity requirements. Past projects have shown that there was a need for more females and minorities to work in state and federal funded construction projects.

The pilot project is currently being tested in the Orlando metropolitan area and will be extended statewide in the future-if the outcome of the pilot project proves successful. FDOT has contracted the Florida A&M University (FAMU) to implement the program in cooperation with vocational, colleges, and other training

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Trainees during one of the heavy equipment orientation sessions.

centers available in the state. In Orlando, FAMU is working with the Central Florida Joint Training Association (CFJTA) to recruit, train, and place graduates who successfully completed the program with contractors. A network link with community and job link centers was established to locate candidates interested in working in highway construction. The response to the recruitment efforts was very good as an overwhelming number of candidates expressed strong interest for the training.

Analysis of the profile of candidates interested in the training showed that:

- **Approximately one third of the people were already working- and were looking for something else to enable them a career boost.**
- **Another one third were general laborers who had limited skills and were seeking employment.**
- **And another one third had some college training and were also seeking employment.**

A screening process was established to pick candidates who meet the requirements of working in a construction job site. Each training phase takes place over a two-week period.

The technical training involved:

- Math and Measurement reading
 - Hand tools
 - Excavation and orientation to heavy equipment used in highway construction.
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In the first held training phase in May of 2002, 12 candidates were screened and attended the training. In the following training in August of 2002, the number of candidates attended had almost doubled. Each training session gives instructions related to technical and life skills.

Facilities at Mid-Florida Technical Center were used to orient trainees with heavy equipment and safety. The training session also incorporated 10 hours of the Occupation and Safety Health Administration (OSHA) instruction certified by the U.S. Department of Labor. The training was generally conducted in the evening to give those who were working a chance to attend. Each trainee who successfully completed the 32-hour training was given a certificate of completion as well as an OSHA card.

Connecting With Contractors

A list of pre-qualified contractors with construction projects in the Orlando metropolitan area was acquired from FDOT. A letter was sent to the contracting companies followed by telephone calls to let them know the availability of these graduates for hiring. The first graduate was hired

on June 14, 2002. Since then, three different contractors have hired seven graduates. At this time, fourteen graduates are still available for employment and efforts are underway to secure positions with contractors for them. At this time, there is no cost to the contractors and all graduates from this program are available to them for free.

FDOT's pilot project is scheduled to continue for one more year. As the project continues to grow and gains visibility, a need and time-based training is planned in the future. Under this paradigm, contractors will be asked how many people they need and when they need them. It is only then that the training will be conducted in time to meet those needs. This paradigm shift together with cooperation from contractors has the potential of success as the contractors can influence the training curriculum to focus more on their needs.

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Additional information about the program can also be found at:

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