



In Her Own Words:

A Call to Action From the Field



The National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) conducted research to better understand the benefits women bring to individual construction projects and the industry as a whole. The goal was to also provide owners and contractors with straightforward ways to improve recruitment and retention of women in the construction industry. The following seven recommendations are based on the responses of the 176 tradeswomen who participated in the research focus groups. The full white paper is available at nccer.org/research, *In Her Own Words: Improving Project Outcomes*.

- Treat women equally
- Accommodate mothers
- Eliminate discrimination and sexual harassment
- Ensure consistent hiring practices
- Offer training opportunities
- Increase the number of women in field leadership positions
- Improve jobsite experience

Each recommendation has actions that contractors can take to build more inclusive projects and companies. Some actions are easier and faster than others to implement; however, every step is a step in the right direction to recruiting and retaining more women in construction.

Treat women equally

- ☐ Do not relegate women to “easier” or “basic” level tasks.
 - While co-workers may have the best of intentions by taking on the “harder or more manual” work, this denies women the opportunity to be fully engaged in their craft and can cause resentment and friction on teams.
- ☐ Allow full and equal participation on the project site to increase knowledge and skills.
 - Focus group members expressed their passion and dedication to their craft. They want to be on-site contributing fully to the work and not a token hire.

Accommodate mothers

- ☐ Designate parking spaces on large project sites for single mothers/parents, so workers can depart the job site quickly to pick up children from school, childcare or in an emergency.
 - Our focus group members shared that entering and exiting the parking lot can be a major delay causing issues with childcare arrangements.
- ☐ Provide work hours that are consistent and predictable to allow for childcare arrangements.

- ☐ Provide financial assistance for daycare and afterschool programs through a corporate benefit or work with a childcare provider to offer services; both provide the employer with tax credits.ⁱ
 - Some of the services offered by larger childcare providers include transportation and extended hours.
 - For large projects that span multiple years, consider an on-site or company-sponsored childcare option.ⁱⁱ
- ☐ Consider flexible hours, alternate working hours or staggered start and end times.
 - Our participants voiced strong support for beginning work earlier to be able to manage caregiver and work responsibilities.
 - While a departure from traditional project site scheduling, shift work can provide all employees with options and encourage people who typically would not choose careers in the trades to take a second look.
- ☐ Allow flexibility for women craft professionals missing work due to family emergencies.
 - 25% of tradeswomen reported facing disciplinary action to attend to family emergencies.

Eliminate discrimination and sexual harassment

- ☐ Establish and publish a policy that explicitly defines the organization's position on discrimination, bullying and harassment, with a specific focus on sexual harassment.
 - Our study found sexual harassment is the number one concern of women in the field.
 - Communicate the policy broadly, including project site signage and inclusion on the company website.
 - Consistently enforce the policy throughout the company – office and field.
 - Provide training for craft professionals on how to interact with the opposite sex in the work environment.
 - Educate foremen and superintendents and ensure they understand and are enforcing the policies.
- ☐ Implement a reporting process.
 - Ensure follow-up on reports and address situations promptly and appropriately.
 - Consider hiring a third-party firm to collect, vet and provide reports to company leadership.
- ☐ Check with the women craft professionals to find out if they have experienced changes in behavior since the release and publication of the policy.
- ☐ Commit to the policy.
 - Actions, and inactions, speak volumes. Zero tolerance can ultimately boost employee morale, retention and company reputation.

ⁱ<https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/irs-employer-provided-childcare-tax-credit-page-helps-employers-determine-eligibility-for-up-to-150000-business-tax-credit>

ⁱⁱParticipants shared several creative ideas for childcare including on-site and assistance with the cost. Especially with large projects or those that are some distance from a town center, partnering with a provider to create a pop-up facility might be an option. <https://cardinalnews.org/2024/01/09/when-its-employees-struggled-to-find-child-care-a-small-town-coffee-company-stepped-in-to-help/>

Ensure consistent hiring practices

- ☐ Focus on what applicants know, not who they know.
 - Many companies ask for a reference from someone in the industry. Most of the women we interviewed did not know anyone in the industry prior to employment.
- ☐ Ensure the hiring department is not overlooking candidates based on their gender.
 - For example, one of the women in our focus groups applied for a job with the name Christine and did not get a call from the company. When she reapplied using the name Chris, she received a call about the position.
- ☐ Ensure equal pay for equal positions through transparency and consistency.
 - Some tradeswomen in our study experienced being offered lower pay than men with less job-specific experience applying for the same position.
- ☐ Provide consistent benefits for field and office staff.
 - Field staff have the same family and medical needs as those in the office, but without PTO, they cannot meet the needs of their family or their personal health.

Offer training opportunities

- ☐ Provide mentoring and sponsorship for career development.
 - Based on our data, women come to construction because of the higher pay but stay because of the opportunities to continue to learn new skills and advance their career.
- ☐ Encourage, incentivize and promote craft training and multi-skilling.
 - Many of the tradeswomen shared how much they value the craft training opportunities offered by the companies they work for, the desire to pursue additional training and the loyalty they feel toward these companies.

Increase the number of women in field leadership positions

- ☐ Encourage women to apply for leadership roles and have existing female field leaders mentor early-career craftswomen.
 - 57% of the women from our survey indicated never having a female supervisor.
 - 64% indicated they wanted to be in a leadership position at some point in their career.
- ☐ Be intentional and consistent in identifying the qualities your company wants in field leaders.
- ☐ Consider men and women equally for all field leadership roles.
 - Women in our study shared, “Promote because positions are earned, not as a token.”
- ☐ Develop and implement a plan to identify women in the field early in their careers for potential leadership positions.

Improve jobsite experience

- ☐ Provide safety equipment that is designed specifically for women — not just men’s extra small.
- ☐ Under OSHA 1926, employers are required to provide properly fitted PPE, and there are numerous companies specializing in PPE for women that a company can work with. A list of these companies should be provided to women so they can purchase boots and other workwear to feel comfortable and safe at work.ⁱⁱⁱ
- ☐ Recognize there are different personal hygiene needs for women.
 - When hiring sanitation service providers, inquire if facilities and services are available to accommodate women’s hygiene needs.
 - Stock the women’s restroom facilities with personal products and a suitable means of disposal. Consider including this as part of the contract with the janitorial service company.
- ☐ Encourage conversations to foster communication and relationship building between and among office and field team members.
 - Provide opportunities for female front-line supervisors and tradeswomen to share concerns and support each other.
 - Develop a plan for listening sessions and information sharing between all female employees that is supported and facilitated by company leadership at least quarterly.

Determine which recommendations make sense for your company, choose a project site or two, implement the actions and document the results. Let us know the outcomes!

Contact NCCER at research@nccer.org to share your results.

ⁱⁱⁱ<https://www.cpwrr.com/research/research-to-practice-r2p/r2p-library/resources-for-stakeholders-and-researchers/construction-personal-protective-equipment-for-the-female-workforce/>