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Construction Trade Association Urges Minorities and Women to Join Construction Trades

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The leading organization for general contractors in the U.S. has announced a new effort to attract more women and minorities to construction.

The Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) said it will push to expand vocational education in high school and establish mentoring programs in college, [according to the New York Daily News](#). AGC CEO Stephen Sandherr said, “We’re launching a nationwide effort to make the industry more diverse and inclusive and seize every possible opportunity to grow our industry to look more like the modern American workforce.”

AGC’s efforts are not happening in a vacuum. According to [an AGC survey](#) of members, “eighty percent of construction firms report they are having a hard time filling hourly craft positions that represent the bulk of the construction workforce.” Factors creating the shortage include decreased support for technical and vocational educational training and the fact that many workers who were laid off during the economic downturn either found jobs in other industries or retired. Without action, labor shortages likely will become worse due to a retirement wave that is expected to hit the industry. According to AGC’s 2018 “Preparing the Next Generation of Skilled Construction Workers: Workforce Development Plan,” “roughly 40 percent of the construction workforce is 45 years of age or older. That means there are 3.7 million construction workers who will be approaching retirement within the next 10 years.”

In response to these realities, AGC has created a number of [initiatives](#), including one focused on vocational education and college mentorships, as well as continuing its Workforce Development Plan and publishing “The Business Case for Diversity & Inclusion in the Construction Industry.” Many of AGC’s programs expressly expand outreach to minorities and women, who are traditionally underrepresented in the industry.

While the recent announcement did not provide any specifics, AGC’s “[Workforce Development Plan 2.0](#): AGC of America’s New Plan to Address Growing Construction Workforce Shortages” details opportunities to improve construction industry hiring and retention — including of minorities and women — through federal legislation, AGC’s own outreach and recruiting efforts, and enhanced recruiting by individual construction companies.

Skeptics of both AGC’s motives and methods are concerned that the push for increased vocational education and the emphasis on underrepresented groups will result in a two-tier track where “poor and minority students are funneled into trades while more affluent and white students are prepped for college.” Construction companies, AGC, and other industry leaders will have to guard against this outcome and educate prospective employees, skeptics, and the public about the opportunities for all, including minorities and women, in the construction industry.

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