



TRANSFORMING U.S. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES FOR THE 21st CENTURY

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Targeted Strategies

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Pink to Green

Promising Workforce Development Practices for Women in Nontraditional Occupations

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Jobs for the Future

The majority of women in the United States do not work in jobs where they have an opportunity to get by, let alone get ahead. Fifty percent of women work in just 26 occupational categories, or only 5 percent of the 504 occupations tracked by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and over two-thirds of women are concentrated in just 51 occupations. Today, as was true 60 years ago, “secretary” ranks as the top occupational category for women. Other leading occupations include cashiers, retail salespersons, home health aides, and jobs in the hospitality sectors, such as waitresses and housekeepers at hotels. Many of these jobs are among our economy’s lowest paying. With average hourly wages of between \$8 and \$12, these jobs do not enable women to afford the basics, let alone care for their families. Men, on the other hand, with similar levels of education are much more likely than women to access training in the trades or science, technology, engineering, and math fields, which generally offer higher pay and better career prospects.

However, women represent a small portion of the workers in the building trades, science, technology, advanced manufacturing, and

other traditionally male occupations. The small numbers of women who are in these nontraditional occupations typically earn 20–30 percent more than women in traditional occupations (such as those in health care, retail, and hospitality). An increase in women's participation in nontraditional occupations results in increased economic security for women, which means more economically secure children, families, and communities.¹

Gender stereotypes and women's lack of knowledge about these jobs and their entry paths are significant obstacles to increasing their representation in nontraditional occupations. Women may also lack the preparatory skills to be competitive in the selection process, and selection requirements and procedures still have a disparate and unfair effect on women's acceptance into apprenticeship programs. Worse, women who overcome these barriers and enter these fields often find discriminatory practices such as minimal support, inequitable training, hostile work conditions, and job opportunities limited by employer hiring bias.²

Overcoming the historical and cultural obstacles that prevent women from accessing these higher-wage nontraditional careers is challenging and requires direct interventions. Targeted, effective workforce programs that are developed and implemented with a gender lens are critical to the success of individuals and communities facing these significant barriers to employment (Lufkin et al. 2007). Wider Opportunities and Women (WOW) and Jobs for the Future (JFF) partnered on an innovative Green Jobs Innovations Fund project that provided the needed specialized technical assistance to address these gender barriers. This three-year project, called GreenWays, spanned seven cities and supported eight workforce partnerships, including two preapprenticeships to registered apprenticeships. GreenWays also included several sectors and occupations, including advanced manufacturing (quality assurance inspectors, computer numeric controlled machine operators), construction and building trades (weatherization technician, residential energy auditor, hazardous-waste remediation), landscaping and urban forestry (landscape technician), renewable electric power (solar photovoltaic panel installer, solar thermal installer, solar sales, electric line worker), and transportation (alternative fuels maintenance technician, hybrid electric auto technician).

Through targeted technical assistance and resources, WOW and JFF were able to expand their site partner's capacity to increase the

numbers of women served and placed into training programs and jobs that are nontraditional for women. Specifically, the GreenWays project served 283 women—roughly 25 percent of the total participants. Further, 80 percent of women completed the training programs, 77 percent obtained an industry-recognized credential, 64 women were placed in apprenticeships (out of 176 total placed in apprenticeships), 42 percent were placed in jobs, and the average starting wage of women in the program was \$15.71.³

CASE STUDY: TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM DESIGN

In order to successfully recruit, train, and place women in nontraditional jobs, WOW and JFF provided comprehensive and customized technical assistance to each site. In this chapter, we will provide a snapshot of the technical assistance provided to ensure that a gender lens would be incorporated into the project.⁴

By identifying barriers within the workforce development that limit women's participation in training programs for these jobs, WOW helped each site develop program practices and address the unique barriers that women face moving into nontraditional jobs. Based on thorough assessments, the organization drew on our best practices and materials to assist each site with phone and online services and a minimum of one visit annually. The visits enabled them to offer feedback and suggestions to improve outreach, intake, and assessment material and practices, as well as observe how well gender-inclusive job readiness, curriculum, and instruction styles are integrated into classroom and workshop training.⁵ WOW assisted each site in strategic planning to guide the expansion of programming or for the greater integration of women into training, including the following six strategies:

- 1) Establish goals for women's participation in job training and placement into nontraditional occupations
- 2) Establish strategic work plans to meet goals for women's participation in job training and placement into nontraditional occupations with partners' leadership and staff

- 3) Identify how to best work with industry partners, workforce systems, educational institutions, and other strategic partners to ensure that women are able to enter and succeed in high-paying, blue-collar jobs
- 4) Gain employer commitment and investment for gender equity from recruitment to career advancement through a variety of strategies, including professional development training, establishing partnership agreements, memorandum of understanding, and in-kind and tangible support
- 5) Share research about successful strategies and trends in curriculum development, credentialing, and labor market analyses
- 6) Create sustainability plans to maintain program strategies and practices, ensure ongoing integration of a gender lens, and maintain goals and outcomes that reflect incremental increases in women's participation in programming and nontraditional employment

Although strategic planning with a gender lens provided the critical overview and goals of the project, that was only part of the intervention. In order to help the organizations build capacity, WOW worked with partners to develop orientations and outreach to women, online and classroom setting survey courses to introduce women to nontraditional occupation training programs, and feeder courses that build women's prevocational skills. The organization helped the sites establish role model and mentor banks, job shadowing opportunities, support groups, career clubs, and links to professional associations. Technical support also offered a review of job readiness and wraparound case management services to ensure adequate support for women's successful participation and completion in training programs and their transition to employment.

WOW provided the following customized site-based technical assistance to each of the sites:

- 1) Identify site-specific strategies for attracting/recruiting women and engaging strategic partners in reaching out to their female clients, including creating orientation programs, survey classes, and preparatory courses. For example, at the annual Peer Learning Conference, WOW led hands-on learning labs to

craft outreach and recruitment flyers that included images of women performing the work.

- 2) Customize intake and assessment practices, gender-inclusive curriculum, and teaching practices. Across programs, WOW created a standardized assessment of the sites' assessment materials by evaluating each program's assessment requirements. For example, one site was able to transition from using a lifting requirement as a flat weight (i.e., participants must lift x pounds) to using a percentage of the participant's body weight. This seemingly small change allowed the site to continue assessing physical fitness, but also to respect that smaller participants—both men and women—may still be able to complete tasks properly without the ability to lift as much weight.
- 3) Develop programs on how to use gender-targeted and inclusive policies, practices, and materials. For example, in Milwaukee, WOW was able to add curriculum modules to the training program that were based on gender issues women often encounter in the workplace. In addition to sexual harassment, modules included health and safety issues and gender differences in learning and communication styles. For example, women are more likely to end their statements with an inflection. This can lead instructors to interpret women as less confident in their knowledge, despite this not being true.
- 4) Provide professional development and technical assistance on how to add a gender lens to the core elements of programs.
 - Recruitment. In Milwaukee, WOW analyzed current recruitment and retention practices for the site's job training. Key takeaways from this analysis included the site's relationship building with other external workforce development agencies as outside recruitment sources, as well as the staff committing to follow up with applicants.
 - Intake. Perhaps most often misunderstood by providers, the intake process is a key step in ensuring women's participation in nontraditional jobs. Best practices involve a theme of being inclusive of women as opposed to exclusive. For example, one site performs intake and assessment, including

literacy and mathematical testing, on the same day. By combining these two steps, the site was losing qualified applicants who were anxious about the testing required before allowing time for preparation.

- Case management. In Philadelphia, WOW worked with frontline staff on case management techniques. While all staff were exposed to the benefits of adding a gender lens to their management techniques, site leaders noted that many of the women working as case managers had more preconceived notions about what their female participants needed than did the male frontline staff. By ensuring that both men and women working with female participants are able to overcome stereotypes and work with the individual, the site's procedures have added a sharper gender lens.
- Core competencies for job readiness. Successful job readiness training varied throughout the sites, but each included the core requirement that all participants regularly and in a timely fashion attend their trainings. Job readiness trainings also included exercises to raise and discuss self-esteem, rights in the workplace, and skills to develop support systems. The training also targeted interviewing and application skills, maintaining healthy habits, balancing work/family, and surviving and thriving in a male-dominated environment. By mirroring the workplace requirements and realities, each training program ensured graduates had exhibited the skills necessary to be successful once graduated.
- Instruction and classroom practices. In Philadelphia, WOW observed classroom instruction for the site's solar installation trainees. The organization then offered feedback on instructional practices that prevented women's full participation, productivity, and comfort in the classroom. Key lessons include explaining differences in the way women and men respond to competition in the classroom, and coaching instructors to use gender-neutral pronouns when sharing anecdotal lessons.
- Job development. WOW presented daylong training to partners in Detroit, focusing on building a diverse workforce,

confronting employer perceptions of women in nontraditional jobs and subsequent reluctance to hire women, compliance with Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action agency requirements at the local level, and leveraging public investments as employment opportunities.

- Retention and career advancement. In Detroit, WOW was able to work with staff to design a mentorship program for future intervention. Successful elements of mentorship programs often involve working with a group of mentees assigned to a group of mentors, instead of a one-on-one relationship. This group approach removes much of the pressure that individualized mentorship relationships put on the participants and allow both mentors and mentees to grow a more organic relationship with a wider variety of more senior or junior women.
- 5) Facilitate partnerships with organizations that serve women trainees, American Jobs Centers, women in nontraditional career networks, professional associations to develop applicant pools, support services, and mentorship programs. One site was able to create a new preapprenticeship program, Access for All. Through this planning process, WOW spearheaded the evaluation of partner participation in the program, which included identifying partner agencies and community-based organizations, defining partners' roles and responsibilities, creating an internal organizational chart, identifying the individuals responsible for fostering each external relationship, and identifying resources necessary to make the relationships work for the agencies, employers, and the site.

REPLICATION

The GreenWays project demonstrates that if a program is developed and implanted with a gender lens, it can make a significant impact on the numbers of women entering into nontraditional occupations. WOW and JFF have compiled the best practices and resources into an online

curriculum, “Pink to Green Toolkit,” that programs can use to aid in replication, and is freely available online.⁶ The toolkit contains

- tools to help workforce development providers assess their capacity for recruiting, assessing, placing, and retaining women in nontraditional occupations;
- ways to assist training providers in developing relevant plans, processes, and curricula for recruiting and retaining women in nontraditional occupations;
- guidelines for case management of women and matters related to the unique wraparound and support services required for women to advance on a career path in nontraditional occupations; and
- tools to assist training programs in understanding and linking to organized labor, apprenticeships, and major employers to ensure women have access to jobs posttraining.

Notes

1. For a larger discussion of nontraditional occupations for women, see U.S. Department of Labor (2008).
2. For an additional discussion of the discrimination women face in nontraditional occupations, see Bergmann (2011).
3. Wage data are self-reported by each of the sites.
4. A gender lens involves approaching or examining an issue, paying particular attention to the potentially different ways that men and women are or might be impacted. For a fuller discussion see Neimanis (2005).
5. Gender-inclusive job readiness includes targeted training to identify interviewing and communication styles typical for women. For example, women often respond to interview questions with answers that end with inflections or words such as “right?”. This communication style can convey that the interviewee is unprepared or uncertain of her answers, despite this not being the case.
6. The toolkit can be found at <http://www.jff.org/pinktogreen> (accessed October 17, 2014).

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