

CONSTRUCTING A DIVERSE WORKFORCE:

EXAMINING UNION AND NON-UNION CONSTRUCTION APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS AND THEIR OUTCOMES FOR WOMEN AND WORKERS OF COLOR



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The construction industry serves as one of the most important sources of family-wage jobs in Oregon and across the country. Construction employment has been growing since 2010, and the Oregon Employment Department projects that the industry will add nearly 11,900 new jobs between 2019-2029, making construction the third fastest growing industry in the state.

Construction apprenticeships have long provided workers with valuable on-the-job and classroom training, high wages, and clear career pathways. Research suggests that apprenticeship programs also help reduce social inequalities. Because apprentices do not require the same financial investment as community or four-year colleges, they are more likely to attract low-income individuals and promote upward socio-economic mobility. Moreover, apprenticeship programs offer strong pathways to earning a steady income without attending college: workers without a college degree typically earn less than \$40,000 a year, while the mean wage for Oregon workers in construction and extraction occupations was \$59,010 in 2020. However, construction has historically been one of the most gender segregated industries in the United States, with particularly low representation of women of color. In 2020, women made up just 10.9 percent of the construction workforce.

The boom in construction jobs has created labor market gaps in some areas, as more construction workers reach retirement, and new jobs need to be filled. Given this opportune time to recruit apprentices, stakeholders in the greater Portland area, including public agencies, unions, and community-based organizations, have partnered with the Portland Metropolitan Service District (Metro) to form the Construction Career Pathways Project (C2P2) Public Owner Workgroup in order to improve recruitment and retention of women and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) in construction apprenticeships.

As more workers join construction apprenticeship programs, and as firms in the industry make targeted attempts to recruit and retain women and workers of color, we conducted this research in order to assess the state of construction apprenticeships in Oregon, including a comparison of apprenticeship outcomes for historically marginalized workers, in both union and non-union programs.

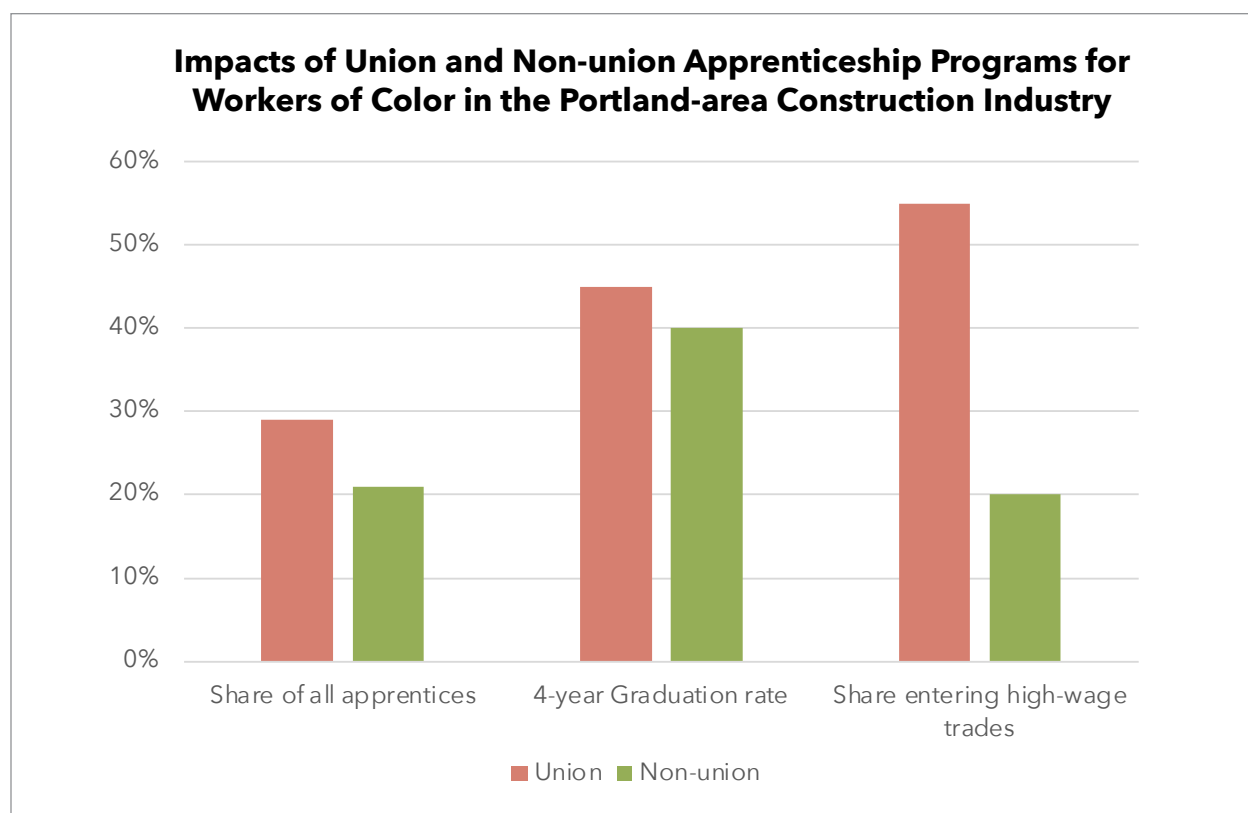
Drawing upon data from the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI), this report analyzes outcomes for 17,964 people who were enrolled in apprenticeship programs in the greater Portland area between 2011-2020. This report includes aggregated and disaggregated data to examine enrollment, graduation, separation, and wage rates across various gender categories and racial/ethnic groups, including comparisons between union and non-union programs.

In measuring progress towards more equitable employment practices, these findings show that union apprenticeship programs provide significantly better outcomes overall for women and BIPOC compared to non-union programs, suggesting that an investment in union apprenticeship programs would support the construction industry's stated goal of making positive strides towards greater equity and inclusion.

KEY FINDINGS

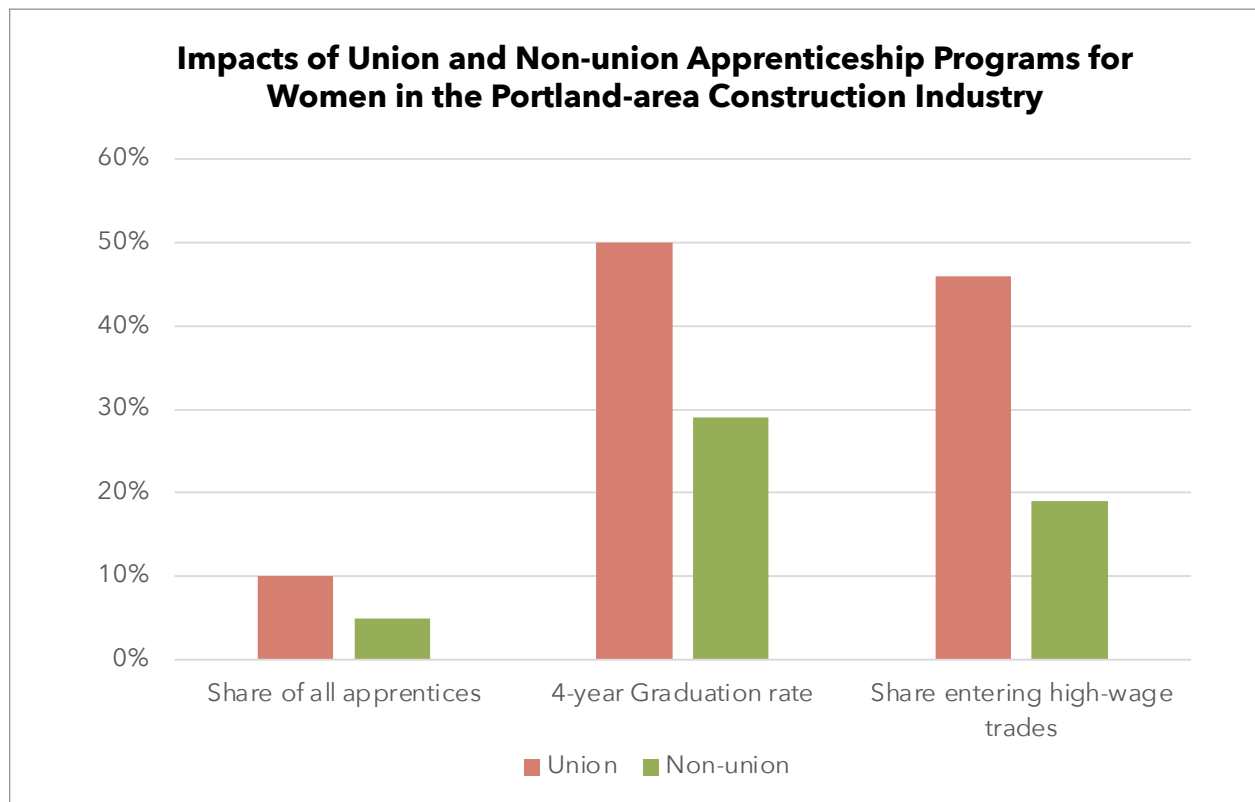
ENROLLMENT

- Construction apprenticeship enrollment in the greater Portland area more than doubled between 2011 and 2019, with 2,647 new enrollments in 2019, up from 1,206 new apprentices enrolling in 2011. Between 2011-2020, the majority of construction apprentices (72%) were enrolled in union programs.



- Union programs have greater apprenticeship diversity, in terms of gender and race, compared to non-union programs.
- In union programs, 64% of apprentices are white men, 26% are men of color, 7% are white women, 2.5% are women of color, and less than 1% are white non-binary people

- More women and BIPOC have enrolled in apprenticeship programs in the last decade. In 2020, 11% of all newly enrolled apprentices were women, a 57% increase from 2011. In 2020, 31% of newly enrolled apprentices were BIPOC, a 55% increase from 2011.
- Union programs continued to recruit a higher proportion of women and BIPOC apprentices compared to non-union programs between 2011 and 2020.
 - In non-union programs, 75% of apprentices are white men, 20% are men of color, 4% are white women, 1.5% are women of color.



GRADUATION

- Fifty-three percent of apprentices who enrolled in programs between 2011-2015 graduated.
- In trades represented by both union and non-union programs, unions graduate a significantly higher proportion of apprentices. Unions had a graduation rate of 58% while non-union programs had a graduation rate of 36%.
- Men graduated at higher rates than women, and white apprentices at higher rates than BIPOC. Forty-five percent of women who registered between 2011 and 2015 completed their programs by 2020, compared with 53% of men in the same cohort. A smaller proportion of apprentices of color (44%) graduated compared to white apprentices (55%).

- Women and BIPOC are significantly more likely to finish their programs when enrolled in a union apprenticeship compared to a non-union apprenticeship. Of the 416 women enrolled in union programs between 2011 and 2015, 50% completed, compared to only 29% of the 108 women enrolled in non-union programs. People of color also had higher rates of completion in union program (45%) compared to non-union programs during the same period (40%).
- Black apprentices experienced the lowest graduation rates of all racial/ethnic groups (30%). However, a substantially higher proportion of Black apprentices in union programs graduated (33%) compared to non-union programs (23%).



Women and BIPOC are significantly more likely to finish their programs when enrolled in a union apprenticeship.

Photo: Dawn Jones Redstone, Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc.

SEPARATION

- Separated workers include both those who were involuntarily terminated and those who voluntarily ended their apprenticeship. Overall, there were comparable proportions of workers who separated (38%) from union and non-union programs.
- On average, workers of color separated at higher rates than white workers, 44% compared to 35%, and women separated at higher rates than men, 41% compared to 37%. White women have lower separation rate than both men of color and women of color, with women of color having the highest separation rates of any group.

- Forty-seven percent of people of color enrolled in non-union apprenticeship programs separated, versus 43% in union programs.¹
- A significantly higher proportion of women separated from non-union programs (51%) than from union programs (38%).

A greater proportion of BIPOC workers separated during their probationary period (a time in which an apprentice can be terminated without cause) than did white apprentices. Four percent of Indigenous workers, 2.5% of Asian-American workers, 4% of Black workers, and 4% of Latinx workers separated during their probationary period, compared with less than 2% of all white apprentices. As a group, workers of color made up 40% of all those separated during their probationary period, despite accounting for only 26% of all apprentices.

Women and workers of color are more than twice as likely to enter a high-wage trade if they go through a union- as opposed to non-union apprenticeship program.

WAGES

- White men still dominate the ranks of apprentices in the highest-paid trades. But apprenticeship programs are serving to improve both racial and gender wage inequalities – particularly union apprenticeship programs.²
- Forty-six percent of all women in union apprenticeship programs are entering trades with an average hourly wage of \$40 or higher, compared to 19% of all women in non-union programs.
- Similarly, 55% of BIPOC in union programs are enrolled in trades with an average hourly wage of \$40 or higher, versus just 20% of BIPOC in non-union programs.