



# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGY 2024



## Executive Summary

To support the American Public Works Association's vision of advancing quality of life for all, the public works industry must continually develop strategies to prepare and adapt to the ever-changing workforce. The [Workforce Development Committee's](#) (WDC) mission is to identify, develop, and promote resources and partnerships for a successful career in public works. The committee was formed to develop a workforce strategy and ensure that the association's workforce development investment, activities, and programs produce the outcomes to support a skilled workforce in the public works sector.

**Goal Statement:** Develop a comprehensive workforce plan to ensure that APWA takes a proactive strategic approach to mitigating workforce recruitment and retention challenges in the public works sector.

**Success Statement:** APWA's committees, chapters, and members develop and implement relevant workforce planning strategies in their recruitment and retention activities.

The work of the WDC aligns with APWA's Workforce Strategic Initiative.

**Purpose Statement:** The public works industry has a global, sustainable, and skilled workforce to meet current and future challenges.

**Success Statement:** Agencies rely on APWA to provide education, training, and support for existing and new employees to develop and expand their skills to meet current and future needs.

## How APWA Defines Workforce Development

The public works workforce faces significant challenges in recruiting, developing, and maintaining employees for public works positions. Theories abound as to the reasons for the difficulties, including a lack of awareness of public works as a career option, few qualified applicants with the required abilities, not enough programs to develop qualified applicants, and limited career growth opportunities for employees.

## The Importance of Education to Workforce Recruitment and Retention

Educating the community on public works is a way to represent the careers and training options available within the industry needed to recruit and retain top talent. Developing competency-based processes that guide people of all ages to the field of public works and towards resources and opportunities to support their professional goals is imperative to a successful workforce. The WDC, along with APWA, will develop priorities, actions, benchmarks, and metrics for success around the following:

- Define competency-based career paths for the public works industry.
- Develop competency-based self-assessments for each set of core competencies.
- Develop cross-discipline and discipline-specific core competencies for the public works industry.

Education programs that support APWA's credentialing programs, such as APWA's certification and certificate programs, allow employees to enhance their skills and knowledge, enabling them to perform their duties more effectively and efficiently and improve their professional development in the public works industry.

APWA is committed to providing excellence in education and credentialing by creating exceptional learning experiences for professionals at all levels of public works. Certificate programs are an increasingly important part of a career pathway in public works that can offer economic mobility, involve progressive levels of education, and support skill development and career progression. The committee's efforts in education will align with APWA's goal of providing a strong benefit to the public works industry and ultimately to our communities by promoting experience and excellence to an improved workforce and improved delivery of services.

The WDC will align its workforce strategy to APWA's strategic goals and activities for education and credentialing by:

- Providing an exceptional learning experience
- Complementing and supporting chapters' educational programming
- Delivering a world-renowned public works credentialing resource

## Strategy Focus Areas

In addition to education and the promotion of careers in public works, the WDC's two focus areas include:

- **Recruit**—the process of attracting, hiring, and onboarding qualified, skilled candidates or those capable and willing to learn and be trained for a specific position or job in public works.
- **Retain**—the process of retaining motivated, productive, and skilled employees by fostering a positive work environment and implementing onboarding, career development, succession planning, and recognition practices.

## 1. Recruit

The career opportunities in public works are vast. Some great jobs require only a high school diploma or GED, while others may offer on-the-job training or apprenticeships. There are also exciting career paths that require vocational/technical degrees, associate degrees, undergraduate degrees, and graduate-level degrees.

National visibility and outreach efforts should create awareness and enhance understanding of public works activities and career options. APWA must help educate organizations charged with advancing career options for primary/secondary education and reach vocational/technical schools with information regarding public works career paths.

Recruitment must also focus its efforts outside the traditional process of recruiting high school, technical school, and college graduates. APWA must explore ways to expand the workforce by attracting individuals new to the workforce, and those re-entering the workforce from the military, post-incarceration, and retirement.

The WDC, along with APWA, will develop priorities, actions, benchmarks, and metrics for success around the following recruitment goals:

- Promote APWA's tools and resources for high schools, technical schools, community colleges, and universities.
- Develop the tools and resources needed to promote public works as a career of choice.
- Identify ways to make public works more visible across all chapters and affiliates.
- Work collaboratively with APWA education initiatives to create career lattices in public work sectors.
- Research upcoming trends in workforce development and the public works sector to build a pipeline to public works and provide appropriate data for use in outreach and advocacy efforts.

## 2. Retain

APWA must focus on key retention areas, including onboarding, developing training programs based on position core competencies, career lattices succession planning, and recognition. Developing training programs based on position core competencies and career lattices provides employees with an ongoing mechanism to enhance their skills and knowledge that can lead to mastery of their current jobs, promotions, and transfers to new or different positions. This will directly impact the entire organization by improving morale, career satisfaction, motivation, productivity, and responsiveness in meeting departmental and organizational objectives.

Public works employees serve their communities with pride and dedication. They are motivated by the challenges of a growing industry and find satisfaction in collaborative problem-solving and being a central part of their community's future.

The WDC, along with APWA, will develop priorities, actions, benchmarks, and metrics for success around the following retention goals:

- Prepare APWA chapters to ensure there's sector readiness to increase retention by conducting leadership training focused on topics such as: improved decision making, effective communication, improved conflict resolution, and professional development for all employees.
- Create customizable tools and resources that can be used as best practices for employee retention.
- Research employment trends in the public works sector and provide data for use in retention efforts.

### Chapter Communication and Deployment

APWA chapter involvement and deployment will be critical to the success of many of these efforts. Communication with chapters will be accomplished as resources and deliverables are completed to enhance chapter participation and involvement. This should include evaluating each deliverable and determining the best way to communicate it to the membership and how it should be implemented. The committee will work with the Council of Chapters to:

- Identify workforce development initiatives currently being used to educate, recruit, and retain individuals in public works.
- Promote outreach and hiring tools chapters can use when communicating with high schools, technical schools, community colleges, and universities.

The committee's work highlighting workforce development strategies will align with APWA's strategic goal of visibility by dedicating time and effort to promote public works careers and implementing workforce recruitment and retention strategies.

### APWA Strategic Initiative: Visibility

**Purpose Statement:** Future public works workforce, government leaders, and media know and appreciate what the public works industry does to advance their quality of life.

**Success Statement:** Future public works workforce, government leaders, and media can generally describe how public works impact their everyday lives for the better.

### Priority Populations in the Workforce

Fostering an environment of belonging promotes a healthier workplace for employees. To strengthen and improve the public works workforce and help build strong pipelines, the WDC will focus on developing relationships and collaborations with those high-priority jobs and careers within public works.

Special populations the WDC may choose to focus on include:

- Women in traditionally male fields
- Veterans and veteran spouses
- Individuals with disabilities, both youth and adults
- Second Chance youth and adults
- Public assistance recipients (TANF, SNAP, SSI)
- Youth in foster care
- Individuals over age 55
- Workers skilled through alternate routes (STARs)

## Public Works as a Career of Choice

Recognizing the need for a skilled public works workforce with the necessary capabilities to construct, maintain, and operate critical infrastructure, APWA supports federal policies that will ensure a pipeline of public works professionals well into the future. The following key areas outlined in [APWA's Workforce Development Policy Primer](#) should be considered as workforce development legislation and regulations are drafted and implemented:

- Awareness of public works careers
- Workforce development programs and integration of public works careers
- Eligibility of public works agencies for workforce development funds
- License portability
- Support for innovative training programs
- Legislative forums with key stakeholders on workforce challenges

The WDC works collaboratively with the Government Affairs Committee by providing input on workforce development, advocacy efforts and resources.

## Workforce Trends Impacting the Future

Identifying current and future trends and best practices is imperative to ensure that APWA is delivering the tools and resources needed for tomorrow's workforce. Efforts will be made to understand national industry studies, survey public works professionals, and work with external partnerships to assist the committee in forming future work plans and priorities. Because workforce development is ever-changing, it is important to evaluate future trends to prepare public works organizations with the skills needed to adapt quickly and continue to grow. Upcoming trends, such as the ones highlighted below, may be some of the trends for which the committee will develop tools, resources, and research:

- Population declines and declining participation in the workforce
- The importance of upskilling to retain employees
- Engaging the workforce across multiple generations
- Leading workers in the AI era

## Workforce Strategy Implementation

The WDC will implement components of this strategy in its work plan, collaborating with APWA committees, chapters, and external partners.

## Responsible Parties

The WDC will work with the board of directors, chapters, committees, and staff to ensure workforce efforts align with the APWA Strategic Plan and operational objectives.

APWA has dedicated one FTE to career and workforce development. This position will focus on developing, implementing, and monitoring career and workforce development strategies focused on promoting public works as a career of choice by working with the WDC and APWA's Chief Learning Officer to align efforts with the APWA Strategic Plan and operational objectives.

## Acknowledgments

APWA's WDC created the Workforce Development Strategy Plan. Contributors include:

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