

## Three ways to get more people into the trades

October 18, 2021



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If we don't take action, the construction industry faces a shortage of skilled trades in the not-too-distant future.

Over the next decade, the province's construction industry will need 100,000 workers to keep pace with the growth of the industry and the number of skilled trades set to retire. However, latest projections show that we are destined to fall roughly 22,000 workers short of that mark.

Clearly then, we must get more people to take up the tools. That means we must reach out to more youth, women and underrepresented groups to make up for the Baby Boomers that are set to retire.

There will be more demand for skilled trades on the ICI side of construction because of investment in infrastructure such as subways, rail electrification projects and hospital projects in the GTA. In residential construction, a pent-up demand and immigration will fuel the need for

housing. In other words, there will be plenty of construction work to go around, just not enough talent.

Our industry must find ways to recruit and retain workers, so we can build the supply of much-needed housing and rentals.

We set out our thoughts on this issue in a submission to the Ontario Workforce Recovery Advisory Committee (OWRAC). The committee was established by Labour, Training and Skills Development Minister Monte McNaughton to provide recommendations to shape the future of work in the province.

### **Promote the industry**

First, we must start by marketing and promoting the industry to youth and new immigrants. By adjusting our immigration program, we prioritize those who are interested in specialized careers in the residential construction sector, including but not limited to lowrise forming, concrete and drain workers, and various finishing trades.

In construction, specific voluntary-based skilled trades continue to rely on skilled foreign workers to offset domestic training programs. The current immigration system does not prioritize these careers adequately and therefore has created barriers for immigrants with these employable skills.

The trade equivalency assessment process should consider an immigrant's skill sets and his or her potential contributions to the construction industry at equal footing to other skilled workers across construction and the broader economy.

### **Improve marketing tools**

Second, jobseekers must be able to easily get information about in-demand careers and industries and find out where to get opportunities and training.

Existing marketing materials and digital tools should be used by industry and government alike. The Job Talks video series, which profiles almost 50 careers in the construction trades, is a great example of ways to engage students.

A digital portal that's being created as a result of Skilled Trades Ontario being formed will help ensure that apprentices are progressing through their training and remain on track to certification.

### **Increase support for employers**

Third, supports must be put in place to help employers who hire and employ skilled tradespeople, in particular graduates of specialized training and college programs. Consideration should be given to rewarding employers with robust mentorship programs.

Government-funded training programs should have significant mentorship components to ensure that youth are guided through their career pathways. They should also be extended to non-apprenticeable trades.

Because many workers in the residential sector learn on the job, employers should be compensated for the training they provide.

Our future depends on ensuring we have enough skilled trades to work in construction. There is no time to waste.



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