

# The Construction Workforce Development Center: Fighting the Perfect Storm

By Daniel Groves, Workforce Program Director, CURT

The outlook for industrial construction signals at least another decade of growth and prosperity. Yet the demand for skilled labor is increasing more rapidly than the supply. Craft workers are retiring and efforts to recruit new workers are hampered by a lack of understanding of current craft career opportunities.

Some argue that they aren't responsible for the problem because shortages are not affecting their current projects. In reality, everybody in the industry owns this problem because eventually it will impact everyone's ability to meet the business needs of industry.

This perfect storm presents the best opportunity for the industry to change the approach to recruiting—if owners take the lead. For many years, owners have required effective safety programs and, in the future, they must require that contractors participate in qualified training programs and in the Construction Users Roundtable (CURT) initiative with the Construction Workforce Development Center (CWDC).

About fifteen months ago, CURT engaged the non-profit CWDC to execute a three-pronged approach, supported by industry funding, to resolving workforce shortages:

1. A secure, reliable web-based supply/demand forecasting model;

2. A contemporary marketing campaign to improve industry's image and recruit new workers; and
3. A industry-wide partnership with existing organizations to train, place and retain workers.

## Labor forecasting

In November 2008, CWDC will launch [www.cwdcforecasting.com](http://www.cwdcforecasting.com), designed to collect information on major industrial capital and maintenance projects and turnarounds. The objective is to provide a comprehensive database of craft labor supply and demand by state, region and nationally. The tool will also enable the user to develop predictive forecasting models to eliminate the typical "going out of business" curves that frustrate the ability to adequately plan.

The CWDC Forecasting Model's summary information will be available without subscription cost to the industry and is patterned after Canada's successful Labor Market Link. Access to comprehensive data and analysis tools will be available to those that participate by inputting supply and/or demand data on their projects for the model.

Benefit to owners:

- Reliable web-based tracking system;
- Ability to view regional summary information;

- Easy access to provide the latest information on a regular basis;
- Secure interface to ensure confidentiality of data;
- Common methodology for all projects and regions; and
- Lower cost than conducting regional surveys.

Benefit to contractors:

- Timely data to assist with recruiting and training strategies; and
- Reliable web-based tracking system to understand labor supply and demand.

Benefits to training organizations:

- Data to implement future training programs to meet the needs of industry.

Benefit to Local User Councils (LUC):

- LUC's can provide more timely data than annual surveys;
- Data will be comprehensive and include information for inside and outside the LUC region;
- LUC's can provide regional forecasting data to members without incurring the cost of a survey; and
- The supply/demand database will be a service that could enhance membership growth potential.

The database will start with industrial projects and later add commercial projects and other economic data to provide a comprehensive picture of the U.S. construction market.

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## Marketing and recruiting

In the first quarter of 2009, CWDC will launch a long-term, contemporary marketing campaign that captures the attention of its target audience—individuals already in the workforce, students preparing for the workforce and the influencers of those students—and delivers quality, employable candidates for training. The campaign will portray industrial construction in a way that draws promising, talented candidates to the industry and dispels outdated perceptions of construction as an undesirable career option.

## Training/placement/retention

There are training and outreach programs already in place and most need more candidates in the seats. CWDC will be recruiting new candidates for them and will partner with them to promote the benefits of the existing qualified training programs.

Benefit to industry:

- Effective training through existing qualified programs;
- Collaboration with contractors to place candidates in real jobs in the industry;
- Tracking of candidates to help ensure their retention;
- Coordination of numerous silo efforts into a single network for delivering skilled crafts; and
- Access to a network of qualified training programs.

The project reflects no labor preference and has an unprecedented level of support through the endorsement and alliance of CURT, ABC, AGC, NCCER, the Alabama AFL-CIO and others.

If industry expects to find and train a sufficient number of workers, owners must lead by requiring contractors to actively engage in qualified workforce development programs and in CWDC's initiatives.

A solution is at hand. The time to act is now. ●