



# MASSACHUSETTS' SUPPLY & DEMAND STRATEGY: A SUCCESSFUL MODEL FOR INCREASING GENDER DIVERSITY IN THE TRADES

Massachusetts has developed a unique Supply and Demand model that is showing results for increasing the number of women in the trades.

**On the Supply Side**, Building Pathways Inc. is a six-week pre-apprenticeship training program set up by the Boston Building Trades Unions. Since it was founded in 2011, over 40 percent of its participants have been women, nearly 90 percent have been people of color, and close to 80 percent of its graduates have entered apprenticeships or industry-related employment.

**On the Demand Side**, both the Policy Group on Tradeswomen's Issues (PGTI) and the Boston Residents Jobs Policy (BRJP) are key drivers for meeting diverse workforce hiring targets. PGTI is a multi-stakeholder collaboration, with participation from unions, contractors, community leaders, researchers, and government officials, established in 2008 to "crush the barriers to good jobs for women in the construction trades [and] get to 20 percent tradeswomen by 2020." **The Policy Group on Tradeswomen's Issues has developed a set of tools to increase hiring of tradeswomen that are being implemented on over \$3 billion of construction projects, driving up women's workforce participation on targeted jobs to a range of 6 – 11 percent, well above the national average of 2.5 percent.**

As a result of the engagement between job training providers, contractors, developers, and PGTI, along with proactive enforcement of BRJP and other workforce goals, women's share of apprentices in Massachusetts has increased by almost 200 percent over the past five years and is currently almost three times as high as the national average for the construction trades (in the second quarter of 2017 women were 7.3 percent of union apprentices in Massachusetts and 6.9 percent in all apprenticeships, compared to 2.5 percent nationally). Some union locals in the Boston area, such as the Plasterers and Cement Masons Local 534, the New England Carpenters Training



“It is a two-part equation:  
supply and demand.  
[Building Pathways and  
PGTI] work hard on both  
sides of that equation.”

**MARY VOGEL**  
*Executive Director,  
Building Pathways Inc.*



Fund, and Iron Workers Local 7, have a substantially higher proportion of women apprentices (close to 13, 8, and 9 percent respectively; PGTI n.d.).

The intersection between these key elements, building the pipeline, engaging contractors to build demand, and advocates on the ground strategically pushing for and enabling change, is documented below.

## **SUPPLY SIDE: BUILDING THE PIPELINE**

Unlike many other pre-apprenticeship programs, Building Pathways Inc. (BPI) was founded by the building trades to diversify their membership and ensure a skilled construction workforce into the future. Since its inception, Building Pathways has held 15 pre-apprenticeship classes for more than 200 low-income Boston area residents.<sup>1</sup> It has funding from a range of sources, including state workforce development funds, the U.S. Department of Labor, the City of Boston, federal and state transit funds, and the state Attorney General’s Office.

BPI’s executive director Mary Vogel explains that the key to BPI’s success is their home in the building trades, their focus on **supply** – recruiting and training women and men able to succeed as apprentices—and their work with PGTI on increasing **demand**—ensuring that there is work for students after graduation.

### **BPI’s home in the Building Trades**

During its first four years, BPI was housed directly by the building trades; this made a critical difference in placement compared to previous pre-apprenticeship programs in Boston. In 2015 BPI became an independent nonprofit organization in order to increase the diversity of funding sources, but the building trades continue to be closely involved with the program. BPI has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the building trades that formalizes the relationship and ensures that quality graduates are placed into apprenticeship programs. Additionally, three of seven BPI Board members are from the building trades: the General Agent of the Boston building trades, the President of the Boston Building Trades, and the President of the Building Trades Training Directors Association.

Through BPI’s close relationship with the Building Trades, program graduates receive priority when new apprenticeship

opportunities become available. One of the unions – the International Union of Elevator Constructors – offers direct entry to BPI's graduates: meaning that graduates from the program do not have to sit for further admissions tests to enter apprenticeship. In other unions, such as the Carpenters, graduates get bonus points for completing the program and will be accepted as long as they pass the apprenticeship tests and meet the basic requirements. If an apprenticeship position is not immediately available, BPI advises graduates on the type of jobs that can help them gain experience while waiting for an appropriate opportunity.

Without such a preferential entry program, women graduates can find it difficult to gain acceptance into apprenticeship. There is strong competition for these opportunities and applications can be 'experience rated' – meaning applicants who have already worked in construction receive additional points in the evaluation process. Given prevailing discrimination in much of the building trades, it is much harder for women to gain experience to meet these criteria.

## Increasing the Supply of Tradeswomen:

### Proactive Recruitment

BPI has focused much of its time on creative outreach to enroll more women into their program. As Brian Doherty, General Agent of the Boston Building Trades, points out: "If you want gender diversity, you have to work really hard at reaching out and being systematic about your recruitment- typically that makes it much easier to also reach a diverse set of men who may be interested in training." Recruiting women to work in the construction trades often takes an extra step because many women have never considered a career in construction. The BPI team goes to where women are: they put fliers in grocery stores and courthouses, reach out to athletic teams, and give presentations at unemployment offices, One-Stop career centers, and high school career fairs, and have started to reach out to girls as young as middle school to introduce them to careers in the construction trades.

BPI also works in close **partnership with the Boston Housing Authority (BHA) and Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD)**. BHA initially took on a lead role in recruiting local residents, especially women, for the initial cycles of the BPI pre-apprenticeship programs. BHA staff directly reached out to residents by calling them to tell them about the Building Pathways pre-apprenticeship program in addition to hanging flyers about the

"Women just don't know that [a career in the construction trades] is an option. So the starting point [for recruitment of] women is way back further than it is for men."

#### LIZ SKIDMORE

*Business Representative/  
Organizer at New England  
Regional Council of Carpenters*

"If you want gender diversity, you have to work really hard at reaching out and being systematic about your recruitment- typically that makes it much easier to also reach a diverse set of men who may be interested in training."

#### BRIAN DOHERTY

*General Agent of the Boston  
Building Trades*

“[Building Pathways does] a great job of vetting candidates and getting them ready [...].So when the candidates are ready for the apprenticeship and are accepted, they understand what’s in front of them and what’s expected of them. When they come to us, they are ready to go.”

**BRIAN BARTON**

*Superintendent ECD at Sullivan & McLaughlin Companies*

program in buildings and community centers. As BPI has become more established in the Boston community, it has developed a wider network of referrals sources, including its many alumni, who are the program’s most effective recruiters.

## **Training High Quality Graduates**

Many participants, particularly women, have little real experience with the work and the structure of the construction industry. The program exposes participants to different aspects of construction work to help them – and the unions and contractors – ensure that any trade they end up with is the right fit for them. BPI knows that its graduates may come under particular scrutiny as women and works hard to ensure that its graduates have the skills and training they need to succeed in a construction apprenticeship. BPI’s rigorous training includes a basic understanding of construction math, tool recognition and use, measuring, and blueprint reading as well as gaining hands-on experience at union apprenticeship programs and active construction sites. Part of the training also includes ensuring that its participants are serious about pursuing a career in construction: BPI uses a rigorous selection process which typically whittles an initial pool of about 65 applicants down to about 15-16 participants per cycle. Brian Barton, Superintendent ECD at Sullivan & McLaughlin Companies, attests to the success of this strategy: “[Building Pathways does] a great job of vetting candidates and getting them ready [...].So when the candidates are ready for the apprenticeship and are accepted, they understand what’s in front of them and what’s expected of them. When they come to us, they are ready to go.”

## **Involvement of Contractors and Employers**

BPI also works to build relationships with contractors and employers who are committed to increasing diversity in the building trades. BPI has created an Employer Advisory Committee, which meets quarterly, to seek input on program improvements and discuss placement opportunities for graduates. BPI also regularly brings in contractors to meet with trainees. Employers, for example, assist with mock interviews: these not only prepare the participants for finding a job, they also introduce employers and contractors to the participants right at the time when they are about to graduate and are ready to enter an apprenticeship.

## DEMAND SIDE: ENSURING WORK OPPORTUNITY

### The Boston Residents Jobs Policy

Since 2017, the Boston Residents Jobs Policy (BRJP) has required that 51 percent of workforce hours on all city-funded projects be completed by local residents, 40 percent by minorities, and 12 percent by women.<sup>2</sup> BRJP was established in 1983<sup>3</sup> in response to efforts to diversify Boston's building trades that began in late 1970s when community leader Chuck Turner and other union organizers proposed linking affirmative action demands with demands from local residents for better access to good jobs. These goals apply to all city-funded construction and all privately funded construction in Boston that is over 50,000 sq.ft.

For the first 25 years of the BRJP, the policy remained largely a paper commitment. In the mid to late 2000s, the Boston Building Trades, under the leadership of Marty Walsh (Boston Mayor since 2014, and previously Secretary-Treasurer and General Agent of the Boston Metropolitan District Building Trades Council from 2010 to 2014) and a coalition of community groups, unions, politicians, and women's groups, such as PGTI, came together to improve the policy's enforcement, especially for women.<sup>4</sup> The commitment to enforcing the BRJP resulted in new incentives for contractors to comply and new consequences if they do not. This strategy will only work if there are skilled women and minority construction workers ready to be hired. BPI was specifically developed to bridge this gap by preparing residents, including women, to compete for and succeed in union apprenticeship and skilled trades' careers.

### Accountability Through Access and Opportunity Committees

PGTI identifies larger projects with community interest in a diverse workforce, and works with owners to require contractors to submit data monthly on the numbers of hours worked by women and minorities, and for those data to be publicly available. Some of these targeted projects have Project Labor Agreements (PLA), which can include a focus on meeting diversity targets. To make sure that targets are met, PGTI promotes the establishment of an Access and Opportunity Committee (AOC) for each major project. For example, the PLA for the UMASS Boston project states: "The Access and Opportunity Committee will assess the obstacles to the success of achieving inclusion of minority and

"I entered Building Pathways determined to be a carpenter. As part of the program you tour different unions - brick layers, painters, this & that, plumbers - I never thought I would want to be a plumber! At the end of the tour I was flabbergasted - cool technology, solar power - not at all what I had thought - instead of just a job I would help protect the health & safety of the nation!"

**SYLVIA ROCHE**

*Building Pathways graduate and Plumber apprentice*

“[Contractors] can’t do this alone. Building Pathways can’t do it alone. They need the unions’ buy in, they need general contractors like myself to buy in, they need subcontractors to buy in, they need the community to buy in, so there’s a lot of partnerships you have to build to strengthen the process.”

**BRIAN MCPHERSON**

*Masterplan Diversity & Inclusion Partners, previously Suffolk Construction*

women workers in the construction opportunities and shall make recommendations for additional programmatic efforts to overcome some of those obstacles” (PGTI 2016, p.19). The AOC is a forum for creating external accountability for compliance with the utilization goals and commitments set out in a PLA or under law, with representatives from local, minority, women and community groups, as well as from unions and contractors. Ideally AOCs should meet at least monthly to be able to pick up on problems early and discuss with contractors how problems can be addressed and noncompliance avoided.

Continuous monitoring and the public posting of data ensures compliance with BRJP standards, and creates demand for women workers on the biggest construction projects in Massachusetts. The City of Boston now posts their compliance data online, as does the Mass Gaming Commission (for construction of two large, new casinos). BPI is recruiting and training women to supply that demand.



**SHAMAI AH TURNER**, a 2012 Building Pathways graduate, who recently completed a five-year apprenticeship as a sheet metal worker.

From <https://buildingpathwaysboston.org/programs/>

## WHO DRIVES THIS PARTNERSHIP

### The Policy Group on Tradeswomen's Issues

Susan Moir, a founding member of PGTI and Director of Research at the Labor Resource Center of the University of Massachusetts Boston, notes: "For close to 40 years, women were trained [in the trades]. And it didn't change anything." PGTI works to change the status quo, creating accountability and oversight to ensure that goals for hiring women are set and met and connecting these efforts with quality pre-apprenticeship training. Mary Vogel is an active member of PGTI, whose leaders are also regularly involved with BPI. PGTI focuses its efforts on the state's largest construction projects and currently helps coordinate monitoring and evaluation of 14 major projects worth about \$3.5 billion. PGTI's bi-monthly meetings are used to track and record progress and setbacks, to discuss solutions for those who remain noncompliant, to assist participants to lead from where they are in the industry, and to identify ways to ensure lasting commitment to hiring women on construction projects. PGTI has identified some key game changers:

1. An integrated supply and demand strategy.
2. Access and Opportunity Committees on target projects.
3. *Finishing the Job*, a "how-to" manual for meeting workforce goals with checklists for owners, GC/CMs, subcontractors, unions and community partners.
4. Diversifying core crews as a key strategy subcontractors can utilize to increase the numbers and retention of women.
5. Engaging with the joint boards of apprenticeship programs – the contractor management partners are uniquely positioned to push apprenticeship programs to bring in a more diverse workforce.

### Looking Ahead

Building Pathways has been very successful at recruiting and placing a diverse set of female and male graduates into apprenticeships. BPI's success is built on partnerships, between the Building Trades, PGTI's 75 industry stakeholders, the Boston Housing Authority, the Carpenters Union, and community

"For close to 40 years, women were trained. And it didn't change anything. Training does not change it, it's the rest of it. It is a massive policy failure and complex social problem, it requires complex solutions."

**SUSAN MOIR**

*Director of Research for Labor Resource Center, UMass Boston*

“We are a pipeline, a very small pipeline, but we vigorously pursue changes in industry policies and practice to ensure that there is both supply and demand for more women.”

**MARY VOGEL**  
*Executive Director,  
Building Pathways*

activists. Together with the commitment of Mayor Marty Walsh to see things change, the Boston Residents Jobs Policy has provided the means for holding employers and contractors accountable. The partnerships have helped to create accountability, broaden recruitment, and ensure that training leads to real apprenticeship prospects. Based on its success in Boston, BPI has established several satellite BPI programs throughout the state of Massachusetts, in New Hampshire, and in Connecticut.

The supply and demand work of BPI and PGTI shows what is possible when industry partners are working together to increase diversity in the trades. Yet, both BPI and PGTI are small programs, relying on the often unfunded efforts of its partners. While some contractors are already on board – viewing increased diversity as part of good business – others are still resistant to change. Changing practices, such as greater diversity of core crews, a greater focus on gender equity in career counselling in secondary and post-secondary education, and a more proactive enforcement of gender targets in all contracts, beyond the efforts of PGTI and its partners, can make the goal of 20 percent tradeswomen by 2020 a reality.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:**

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CENTER FOR WOMEN’S EQUITY IN APPRENTICESHIP AND EMPLOYMENT: <http://womensequitycenter.org>



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## ENDNOTES

1. Unless otherwise indicated, information in the report is based on interviews conducted for this case study between March and May of 2017 with Mary Vogel, Executive Director of Building Pathways; Elizabeth Skidmore, Business Representative/Organizer at New England Regional Council of Carpenters; Susan Moir, Director of Research for the Labor Resource Center, UMass Boston; Brian McPherson, former Director of Diversity & Workforce Compliance at Suffolk Construction, Founder, Masterplan Diversity & Inclusion Partners; Brian Barton, Superintendent ECD at Sullivan & McLaughlin Companies; Maeve Comer at Sullivan & McLaughlin Companies; and Sylvia Roche, Plumbers Local 12 in Boston. IWPR researchers also spoke to Erin Johansson, Research Director at Jobs With Justice and used the information she gathered for the *Building Career Opportunities for Women and People of Color* report as foundational information for this briefing paper.
1. Boston, MA, City of Boston Municipal Code § 8-9.2 (2017).
1. Until the policy was changed in 2017, the targets were for 50 percent residents, 25 percent minorities, and 10 percent women.
1. Chuck Turner, interview with Erin Johansson. Boston, 2015.

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