

Legal Update Article

Construction Industry Gaining in Diversity and Inclusion

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Construction has long been a difficult industry for women, minorities, and LGBTQ+ workers as old ideas are slow to fade. The situation is starting to change. Both employers and labor unions increasingly recognize the value of diversity and inclusion and implement programs and practices to encourage members of underrepresented groups to join the building trades.

On the employer side, the Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) has launched a series of initiatives to enhance diversity. The impetus, in part, is to overcome an historic scarcity of construction workers, but it also reflects a more general understanding that diversity of teams produces measurable benefits, as described in the McKinsey & Company 2018 [*Delivering Through Diversity*](#) report.

Early in 2020, AGC plans to expand nationally a program started by the Washington Chapter, entitled “Culture of Care,” that focuses on creating inclusive project sites to bring new individuals into the industry. The goal is to “ensure that jobsites and workplaces are safe, welcoming, inclusive places that are free from harassment, hazing, and bullying,” according to Brynn Huneke, AGC director of diversity and inclusion.

In addition, at least 20 engineering and construction companies have signed the [CEO Action for Diversity and Inclusion](#) Pledge. The 850+ signatory CEOs promise to create workplaces that support dialogue on difficult conversations about diversity, enhance or begin unconscious bias education, share best practices, and raise diversity and inclusion as a board-level strategy.

At the same time, employee unions are promoting diversity and inclusion. For example, the Ironworkers Union established a “Be That One Guy” training program to encourage male coworkers to become “upstanders,” rather than bystanders, and stand up for coworkers who are being bullied or harassed. Among other benefits, the union believes the program can help improve workplace safety and worker retention.

As is often the case, efforts to support inclusion of women and minorities have expanded to include greater support for members of the LGBTQ+ community. Initiatives such as CEO Action and Be That One Guy include support for LGBTQ+ workers in the construction industry. These efforts are buoyed by organizations created specifically to support LGBTQ+ workers, including [Queer Advocacy and Knowledge Exchange](#) (QuAKE) and the New York-based [Build Out Alliance](#), which provide resources to both LGBTQ+ workers and employers seeking assistance in how to best support those workers.

While there is a long way to go, the efforts of major employers, national unions, and independent advocacy groups to increase the diversity of the construction industry, and ensure greater inclusion of these underrepresented workers, will generate more welcoming workforces and create role models who likely will drive greater diversity in the industry for decades to come.

Please contact a Jackson Lewis attorney with any questions.

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