



Building Diversity in Infrastructure

Part I

Abstract

- Women and minorities are the largest pool of untapped potential for private companies and utilities – and needed more than ever as the U.S. gears up to revamp its infrastructure due to the recent passing of the \$1 trillion+ Infrastructure [Investment and Jobs Act](#).
- By dedicating resources towards efforts like diversity training, STEM education, and workforce training, American companies and government entities can close the workforce gap, generate additional revenue growth and innovation, and future-proof employee retention and recruiting efforts.
- It is a unique moment in time to reflect on America’s demographic and racial diversity more fully while embarking on a historic transformation of our critical systems. This white paper addresses the context of our current infrastructure, identifies workforce challenges and their impact throughout sectors, and proposes proven solutions to achieve greater inclusion of women and minorities in infrastructure-focused businesses and government services.

State of Infrastructure

Throughout the country, infrastructure is in dire need of attention - particularly in minority communities.

While some segments have infrastructure maintenance and repair requirements, others require new construction all together. The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) has given America's infrastructure an overall grade of C- on the 2021 infrastructure [report](#).

It is estimated that there is an “infrastructure investment gap” of nearly \$2.6 trillion in this decade that, if left unaddressed, could cost the United States \$10 trillion in lost GDP by 2039.



State of Infrastructure (continued)

In a [statement](#) released by The White House:

"The Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal will rebuild America's roads, bridges and rails, expand access to clean drinking water, ensure every American has access to high-speed internet, tackle the climate crisis, advance environmental justice, and invest in communities that have too often been left behind."

- The Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal is primed to add on average **1.5 million** jobs per year for the next 10 years. These developments are positive, but the place of women and minority professionals in infrastructure remains inadequate.
- To know how to correct these challenges, it is necessary to first understand the primary hurdles faced by women and minorities in infrastructure-focused organizations.



Key Constraints for Women & Minorities in Infrastructure

- **Low number of people pursuing education in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics)** – According to the [Pew Research Center](#), Black and Hispanic workers remain largely underrepresented in the STEM workforce.
- **Lack of awareness and role models** – A lack of awareness of careers in the infrastructure industry is a deterrent in attracting more diversity. Women and minorities may also have concerns about professional growth opportunities since there is a scarcity of influential role models to emulate. A [report](#) released by the World Bank Group titled “*Stepping Up Women’s STEM Careers in Infrastructure*,” remarks that an absence of mentors, sponsors, professional networks, and quality training frequently limit women’s advancement as they progress in STEM careers.
- **Aging workforce** – Many within the skilled infrastructure workforce are approaching the age of retirement and the industry has failed to generate a pipeline of young, new talent to fill the widening gaps. Justin Kane of the Brookings Institute made the following [observation](#): “*Just as our physical infrastructure systems are aging and in need of attention, so too are the workers who design, construct, operate, and oversee these systems.*” Recruitment and retention are mounting concerns of the industry experienced by most enterprises.
- **Workplace prejudice and harassment** – Research has consistently shown that women and minorities confront greater proportions of pay discrimination, sexual harassment, pregnancy discrimination, and racial prejudice that creates barriers to entry in the infrastructure industry.



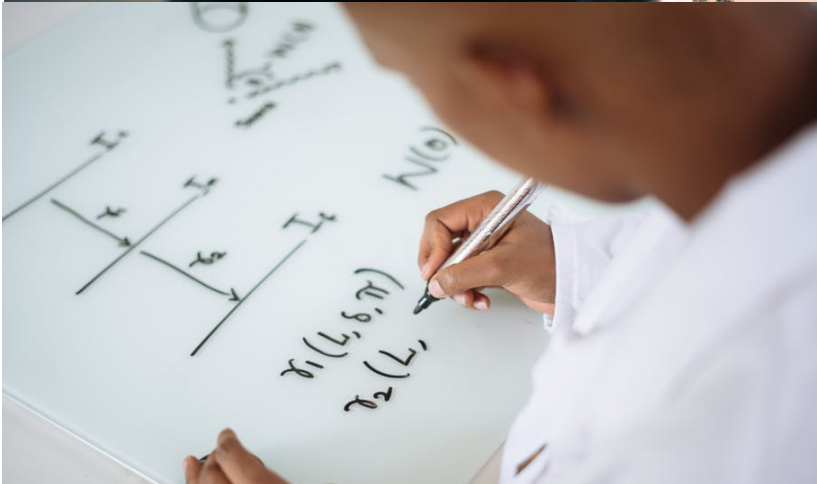
Key Constraints for Women & Minorities in Infrastructure

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The workforce challenges elaborated above in turn, trickle down into negative impacts for businesses, governmental organizations, and society in general.

These externalities include:

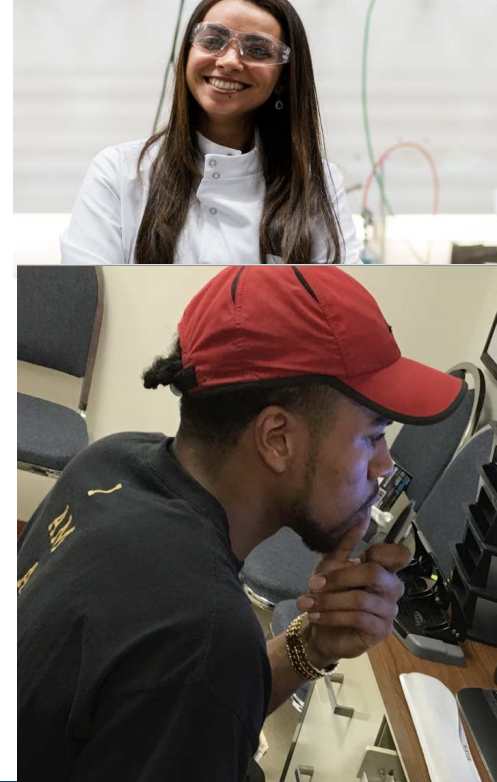
- Limited employment opportunities for minorities and women which discourage candidates to join the industry
- Lack of diversity halting innovation and growth due to limited perspectives
- Limited access to capital and professional training
- Shortage of skilled workforce from the underserved sectors who are impacted by industry deficiencies at disproportionate rates



Solutions

The priorities of the new administration have shifted [the outlook](#) of the infrastructure industry and it is anticipated thousands of new jobs will be created in private companies and government agencies. In addition, according to [the new proposed investments](#), minorities and women must also have equal access to quality infrastructure jobs.

There is therefore a strong need for top-down approaches coupled with proactive strategies by company and government leaders to improve their organizations and prepare for this wave of employment.



- **Gender and ethnicity diversity strategies** – Set clear goals and objectives for the participation of women and minorities that accurately reflect and address current workforce disparities.
- **Industry outreach** – Implement digital platforms to reach a wider recruitment pool, attend job fairs, and develop internship programs to highlight and offer career paths and role models of diverse leaders in infrastructure.
- **Workforce training and development** – Develop content whereby organizations educate their workforce through in-person training, books, webinars, podcasts, and videos on gender and diversity training and recruitment strategies.
- **STEM-based education** – Focus on supporting STEM education via presence at middle and high school career events, on social media, and communication strategies that highlight the accomplishments of women and minority STEM professionals.
- **Incentives** – Consider flexible working hours, competitive wages, paid time off, ongoing education and training, and maternity / paternity leave that help women and minorities balance the demands of work, community, and home life.

Conclusion

- It is a unique moment in American history to revitalize our infrastructure – but the participation of women and minority professionals will be key to a successful and equitable recovery and renewal.
- By making businesses and organizations aware of the business justifications and the challenges to recruiting and retaining a more diverse workforce, we are empowering companies to develop talent that looks like the communities they serve.
- More importantly, however, infrastructure businesses and government units must implement proactive solutions that integrate the talents, innovation, perspective, and potential of women and minorities. It is a critical approach for building a better future.



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