



Meeting the Moment: Expanding Career Pathways for Women

Filed in [Employment and Training, Working families](#) • By: [Reeba Daniel](#) • October 26, 2022

The nation is at a critical moment of change. To date, the federal government has announced over \$100 billion in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding to rebuild America's infrastructure. These investments, plus the Biden-Harris administration's climate initiative, will create thousands of good-paying jobs for working and middle-class families for years to come. The industries where these jobs will be created are ones where women have historically been underrepresented. For example, [while women are roughly half the workforce, they represent only 4% of the construction trades](#). With this tremendous investment in new jobs, it's never been more important to create and expand promising career pathways for women in the skilled trades.



The U.S. Department of Labor's Women's Bureau continues to expand pathways to better jobs through the Women in Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupations (WANTO) grant program, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary on Oct. 27, 2022. WANTO seeks to increase the number of women in registered apprenticeships as well as historically male-dominated jobs with higher wages. The program has provided nearly \$33 million through 13 grants to community-based organizations since its inception in 1992. Using grant funds, WANTO grantees like Tradeswomen, Inc. have been planting the seeds for [women-only training cohorts](#) in local areas throughout the United States, creating the necessary spark for other organizations to replicate and scale this successful model.

The WANTO grant program is a proven roadmap for preparing women to gain access to good-paying jobs. WANTO is unique in that grantees provide job skills training programs to prepare women for promising careers, while simultaneously helping employers create a work culture that better facilitates women's success. WANTO grants also provide funding for childcare, transportation, tuition expenses, and work-related tools and gear since [evidence shows that women participate and succeed in job training programs at higher rates when they receive supportive services](#).

Cristina Barillas, a Local 130 plumber for 20 years and former WANTO participant, [said about the WANTO grantee Chicago Women in Trades \(CWIT\)](#): "When people ask me for assistance in getting their daughter, sister or friend into plumbing, I always suggest going through CWIT Technical Opportunities Program (TOP). There is nothing like CWIT TOP. You can learn about every trade, and not only by reading or meeting a person in a trade, but hands on. A woman can determine what trade would best suit her, and then start creating her own sister group with the other ladies in the program. CWIT is a vital organization. Besides TOP, it is a safe space for women to continue learning their trade with other sisters and a space with no fear of judgement, rejection or harassment. I have heard many sisters call CWIT 'home.'"

Supported by recent U.S. Department of Labor partnerships and investments, [the number of female apprentices has more than doubled from 2014 to 2022](#) and women now make up nearly 14% of active apprentices compared to

9.4% in 2014. [In 2021, the number of women working in trades occupations reached the highest level ever](#), at more than 314,000. And during the last five years, the number of tradeswomen increased by almost one-third.

To continue this positive momentum, the Women's Bureau will keep investing in the WANTO grant program, one of the only federal funding sources focused exclusively on women workers. With 30 years of history, WANTO and its best practices are poised to meet this critical moment. Now more than ever, it is important to build and scale successful programs like WANTO so that women have a seat at the table in this moment when federal investments in nontraditional jobs and training is higher than ever.

To learn more from leaders who are working on gender and racial equity in the trades and non-traditional jobs, [view the recording of the Women's Bureau's 2022 Equity in Focus Summit](#). Please also save the date and join us on Nov. 17, National Women in Apprenticeship Day, for a webinar on how our WANTO grantees are meeting the moment at this critical time.

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