



**School for Workers**  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

# Launching Madison women in trades campaign

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According to the United States (U.S.) Bureau of Labor Statistics, the construction sector of the economy is expected to grow through 2026. Yet, as stated by a 2017 article from the Associated General Contractors: “Seventy-percent of contractors have a hard time finding qualified craft workers to hire amid growing construction demand.” Wisconsin is experiencing its own labor shortages. With the construction economy showing growth and baby boomers retiring, there’s a need for new workers. Wisconsin Public Radio reports, “Builders face skilled labor shortage as new home construction rises” (April 17, 2017). A Milwaukee Journal Sentinel headline from September, 2017 declares, “Construction workers in demand as Milwaukee area building booms.”

Though women comprise just under half the U.S. workforce, building trades occupations consist of approximately 97% male workers (U.S. Department of Labor, 2014). Therefore, women are an excellent potential recruitment source. Historically women have been passed over as the group providing the next truck drivers or electricians, but they have potential to fill this labor shortage, and Wisconsin building construction trade unions can benefit from the influx of an underutilized labor pool. Equally important, women, who have often been told implicitly and explicitly to stay out of the construction field, need true equal opportunity to enter an industry providing good wages and benefits.

In response, Heidi Wagner is amidst an applied research project supported by WiSys and UW System (ARG, AR-WiTAG).[1] The centerpiece of the project is a pre-apprenticeship program to encourage women’s entrance into the building construction trades. Another part of the project is to work with industry and community partners to leverage resources and knowledge regarding this topic. Wagner’s applied research will investigate and assess outcomes concerning the following three issues:

- recruitment of women for building construction trades jobs (marketing analytics)
- rapid trades work orientation for women to acquire jobs (pre-apprenticeship program design and assessment)
- examination of what contributes to job acquisition and retention of women (follow-up, outcomes, recommendations)

Findings from the project could be used in total or in parts and applied by unions, construction companies, and non-profit training programs. In the widest scope of the project, the findings can support successful interventions in increasing women’s participation in the building trades workforce in Wisconsin and beyond.