

Abstract: Investing in Equity in Infrastructure Initiative

Organization: Chicago Women in Trades (CWIT)

Funding Requested: \$749,033

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill has presented a once in a lifetime opportunity for the U.S. to rebuild its infrastructure and diversify its workforce. Underrepresented groups, especially women and people of color, can benefit from the career opportunities that come with the more than \$17 billion designated for projects in IL and \$18 billion for projects in PA. Women, however, have historically been denied access to careers in construction and other skilled trades due to a lack of career education and outreach from RAPs, sex-segregated Voc-Ed and WIOA programming, discrimination, and lack of supportive services to jump start their careers. Chicago Women in Trades (CWIT), recognizes the present opportunity to combine equity with infrastructure investments, and is proposing to launch the **Investing in Equity in Infrastructure Initiative**. The initiative is guided by the goals set forth in the *Ten Components Needed to Promote Equity and Inclusion for Women and People of Color Working in the Trades and on Publicly Funded Infrastructure Projects*, developed by CWIT in collaboration with the National Taskforce on Tradeswomen's Issues. The initiative will promote the adoption of the workforce equity in infrastructure platform, in full or in part, and guide its implementation in Illinois and Pennsylvania. CWIT has developed a four-prong strategy to actualize this work. CWIT will:

- 1) Provide technical assistance to help employers, RAPs, contractors, and local, state, and federal agencies adopt policies and practices to ensure that infrastructure investments include and support women, particularly women of color,
- 2) Expand general and launch new trade specific pre-apprenticeship programs for women, to ensure that women can compete in the infrastructure workforce,
- 3) Build upon our successful local tradeswomen peer networking and mentorship programming to support the development of a national/regional mentorship model, and

4) Promote sustainability and scaling of the best practices learned from the project, by hosting two institutes on *Maximizing Workforce Equity in Infrastructure*, and *Building Mentorship Models to Ensure Equity for Tradeswomen* for industry stakeholders, tradeswomen, community-based organizations, and state/local agencies overseeing infrastructure investments.

These four goals are intertwined: promoting adoption of the equity platform is critical to ensuring that projects include hiring goals, mandates for respectful workplace policy and training, and strong compliance monitoring that will lead to increased hiring and retention of women. The initiatives' training programs will provide a supply of prepared, competitive and enthusiastic new entrants to the skilled construction trades, while the mentorship program is designed to support tradeswomen's retention. The fourth prong is a strategy to take the lessons learned, best practices and new program models to scale, by hosting peer learning and capacity building institutes to encourage adoption at the local, regional or national level.

The initiative relies on provision of technical assistance and expanded and partnerships, including with state and municipal agencies, the Mid-America Carpenters Regional Council and the Ironworkers' District Council of Chicago to create all-female, pre-apprenticeship classes, and working with the Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers, (BAC), the Ironworkers International Union (IWI) with the Michigan Workforce Development Institute, (WDI) to develop the mentorship program. As a result of the initiative, 270 women will complete pre-apprenticeship programming, 215 will be placed into apprenticeships, 200 women will benefit from supportive and retention services. Two new pre-apprenticeship programs will be launched, and 180 industry stakeholders, unions, contractors, RAPs, public agencies will benefit from technical assistance.