

# 2022 Evaluation of the Highway Construction Workforce Development Program

Dr. Maura Kelly, Portland State University  
December 2022

The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) have partnered in a statewide effort—the Highway Construction Workforce Development Program—to recruit, train, and employ a diverse workforce for highway construction jobs throughout the state. The Program began in 2010 and supports a variety of initiatives designed to improve the recruitment and retention of women and people of color in Oregon’s highway construction trades. As defined by the Program, highway trades include: carpenter, cement mason, inside electrician ironworker, laborer, operating engineer, and painter. This evaluation examines the impact of financial and non-financial supportive services on apprenticeship completion rates.

Receiving both financial and non-financial services had the largest positive impact on completion, followed by child care subsidies, non-financial services (e.g. mentorship, budget class), and hardship funds (provided for a destabilizing event, most commonly related to housing and transportation). Ready items (e.g. tools, clothing, and protective equipment) and gas and travel subsidies alone did not have a positive impact on completion.

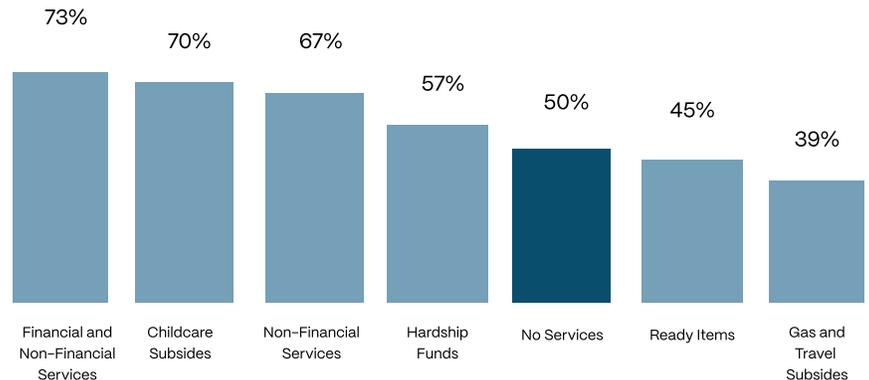
“Hardship funds provided me with a way to pay rent.”

“The Program got me the boots and tools and helped with child care”

“It helped tremendously; I didn't have much money at the time.”

“It helped me be able to perform the job and be confident and keep up.”

“It really got me started and informed, made me feel like someone wants me to be successful.”



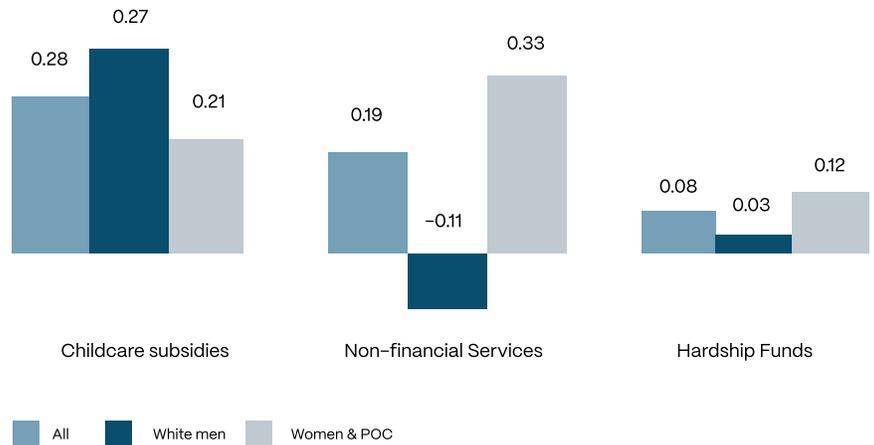
Percent of the 2014–2015 cohort of highway trades apprentices completing, by type of service (OAS)

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Childcare subsidies had a positive impact on completion rates for all groups, though the effect is greater for white men than for women and people of color. Non-financial services and hardship funds positively impacted completion rates for women and people of color, but not white men. Ready items and gas and travel subsidies did not have a positive impact on completion for either group (not shown).

Full 2022 report available at: <http://maura-kelly.com/>



## Recommendations

- Many apprentices benefited from the Program's coordinated services in which a single point of contact connects apprentices with financial and non-financial support available through the Program as well as additional support available within the trades and in broader communities. As the largest impact on completion was achieved by combining financial and non-financial services, we recommend more funding should be directed towards non-financial assistance.
- Childcare subsidies had a positive impact on completion rates; a strength of the Program's delivery of these subsidies is that friends and family are eligible childcare providers. Hardship funds also had a positive effect on completion rates of apprentices, particularly for women and people of color. Both these service types should be expanded.
- Receiving ready items did not increase completion in the current study period; however, previous evaluations did find a positive impact. The effectiveness of providing ready items should continue to be evaluated, including the way in which requests for ready items connect apprentices to the Program early in apprenticeship.
- Support for gas and travel was not associated with increased completion; these funds should be reallocated to other services that are more effective.

Marginal effect of each service type on completion net of other service types, 2014-2015 cohort, by race and gender (OAS)

