

Open to all: reimagining how construction attracts talent

■ *Creating opportunities for students from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds helps shape an industry made stronger and more innovative by their perspectives and contributions.*

By JUSTIN LEE
Skanska

INVEST IN PROGRAMS CREATING INCLUSIVE PATHWAYS

As a construction company, we often ask ourselves, who gets to see themselves in this industry? At Skanska, we believe the answer should be “everyone.” That belief guides how we attract talent and how we nurture it once people arrive.



Lee

We are investing early, often, and authentically. We’re meeting students in classrooms and on jobsites, connecting them to mentors and real projects, and building workplaces where every person is respected and able to grow. By creating opportunities for students from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds, we aim not only to open doors but also to help shape an industry made stronger and more innovative by their contributions. Here’s how we do it.

Creating a more inclusive construction industry starts with equity — making sure students from communities historically excluded from the field have clear pathways in.

Five years ago, Skanska launched Youth in Construction in collaboration with the African American Male Achievement initiative in Seattle Public Schools. The program was designed to give young Black students, many of whom had little exposure to the construction industry, a clear pathway into careers that had historically overlooked their community.

What began as a simple job-site visit has evolved into a sustained effort to build relationships and deepen exposure to the field. Through Construction 101 classroom presentations, hands-on tours, and paid high school internships, students engage directly with professionals, gain hands-on experience, and begin to envision themselves in con-



Skanska employees volunteer at the company’s back to school “Lined Up for Success” event.

Photo courtesy of Skanska USA Building

struction careers.

These touchpoints are designed not just to inform—but to inspire, connect, and support students as they explore opportunities in an industry that is actively working to welcome them in.

Similarly, Rainier Scholars sup-

ports Seattle students of color and first-generation college students. Skanska has built a unique and enduring relationship with the program — what began as a fundraising partnership has evolved into mentorship, career development and long-term support for its scholars.

Through these investments, the goal is not only to provide students with opportunities to see the work happening behind the fence, but also to help them see themselves as part of it. By opening these doors early, we are fostering talent that better reflects the diversity of our communities and ensures that more students from underrepresented backgrounds step confidently into the industry.

BUILD STRONG PARTNERSHIPS TO EXPAND OPPORTUNITY

Expanding access to construction careers requires more than one company’s effort — it takes deep partnerships with schools and nonprofits that are already trusted voices in their communities. Skanska works alongside these organizations to create hands-on experiences that introduce students to the industry and connect them with real, long-term career opportunities.

Through our partnership with ACE Mentor Program of America (ACE), Skanska employees volunteer to guide students through mock projects that mirror real preconstruction and delivery challenges. Our collaboration with ConstructDiversity introduces students to leaders across general contractors, trade partners, and electrical firms, while our work with Sawhorse Revolution gives young people the chance to experience construction through creative, community-driven projects. We also connect students and families with the city of Seattle’s Priority’s Hire Programs, which ensure that local new graduates have

first access to jobs in their own neighborhoods.

Together, these efforts ensure that opportunity isn’t limited to students who already have industry connections. Instead, it’s extended to communities who bring fresh voices and perspectives that make construction stronger.

EXPOSE STUDENTS EARLY AND OFTEN

The earlier we start introducing students to their career options, the more momentum students gain. I came to construction as a second career, and I often wonder how different my path might have been if I’d discovered this field sooner. That’s why we emphasize early and repeated exposure: visiting classrooms, hosting tours, and welcoming students back each summer.

Importantly, we also equip teachers and counselors with the resources to guide interested students. Educators are often the first door students knock on, and we make sure that door opens to clear, practical guidance. Social media also plays a role, as students research salaries, training paths, and day-in-the-life videos online. Meeting them there with credible, human stories ensures construction feels real, attainable and inclusive.

BREAK DOWN STEREOTYPES BY SHOWING ROLE DIVERSITY

The feedback we hear most often is, “I never knew I could do that in construction.” That shift happens when students realize the industry is far broader than the hard hats and tool belts they picture from the outside. A pillar of our mentorship approach is exposing students to the diversity of roles that exist across the industry, helping them see that there are many ways to contribute beyond the traditional trades.

Alongside carpenters and iron-

workers are engineers, estimators, safety leaders, drone pilots and accountants. Students who are passionate about robotics may discover opportunities in 4D modeling; those drawn to photography can explore construction’s drone usage for project data captures; others interested in math and planning uncover paths in estimating and scheduling, and students who care deeply about climate and sustainability can pursue careers in green building design, renewable energy integration, or sustainable materials innovation. These sparks of connection are what turn curiosity into career exploration.

FOSTER BELONGING TO KEEP TALENT IN THE INDUSTRY

Attracting diverse talent is only the first step — retaining it requires a culture of belonging. At Skanska, that commitment shows up in employee resource groups like the Skanska Women’s Network, in our mentorship programs, and in our Inclusion & Diversity commitment, which sponsors efforts like Youth in Construction and ACE Mentors. These structures, combined with the informal networks that develop when colleagues support each other through challenges, create a culture where people feel safe, valued, and heard.

Psychological safety is more than a principle; it’s lived daily in how teams collaborate and problem-solve. When employees from all backgrounds thrive, their voices influence how projects are delivered and how the industry evolves.

ENVISION AN INDUSTRY REFLECTING OUR COMMUNITIES

Looking ahead, our vision is simple: we want our project teams to reflect the diversity of

See OPEN TO ALL — page



Selome Muruts visiting DPR Construction’s Vantage Data Centers WA13 Project.

Photo courtesy of DPR Construction

Building up the future: how DPR’s internship program opens doors for tomorrow’s construction leaders

■ *The company’s Build Up internship empowers high schoolers with real-world experience, mentorship, and skills to launch careers in a more inclusive construction industry.*

By ASHLEY DURBIN
DPR Construction

For many high school students, summer is a time for new experiences and growth. At DPR Construction, the Build Up High School Internship program is transforming what those experiences can look like — offering teens hands-on exposure to the construction industry, working alongside professionals on significant projects. Since its launch in 2017, Build Up has become a model for how construction firms can invest in the next generation and make the industry more inclusive.



Durbin

the construction industry, with 22% returning as college interns and several joining DPR full-time. In 2025, the program welcomed 31 interns across the company.

Interns work full-time earning competitive hourly wages. The program is accessible to students whose family income meets HUD low-income standards, including those who may be the first in their families to attend college. Seventy-five percent of Build Up interns plan to be first-generation college students, and almost half are young women — a significant statistic in an industry where women have historically been underrepresented.

BUILDING SKILLS FOR SUCCESS

The Build Up program goes beyond technical training. Interns learn essential business skills, including communication, time management and navigating a professional environment. They complete a final presentation at the end of their internship, gaining experience in public speaking and project management. These experiences help students build confidence and prepare for future academic and career opportunities.

DPR’s approach is to treat high school interns with the same respect as college-aged interns. Participants are exposed to every

facet of the jobsite, from safety procedures to the latest construction software and technology. The goal is to provide meaningful skills exposure and mentorship to students who might not otherwise consider a career in construction.

Interns report learning about managing multi-million-dollar projects, using innovative technology for planning and design, and the wide range of professional roles needed to build great things. Many gain experience with industry-standard tools, such as BIM 360, CMIC, HammerTech, and Primavera, which gives them a head start in both college and future careers.

FOSTERING INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

DPR’s Community Initiatives Leader, Diane Shelton, emphasizes the program’s commitment to broadening possibilities for talented high school students who might not otherwise have access to professional internships.

“Participant cohorts are also more diverse than our industry as a whole, which we hope will contribute to a shift as we welcome a new generation into AEC,” Shelton said. “They can help the construction workforce of the future look more like the communities we serve.”

LOCAL IMPACT: SELOME MURUTS’ STORY

In Seattle, Selome Muruts’ journey stands out as a powerful

See INTERNSHIP — page



American Heart Association
Hard Hats with Heart™

The American Heart Association applauds these leaders and companies for working to build a culture of health within the construction industry through Hard Hats with Heart.

2026 Hard Hats with Heart Chairperson

Marjorie Chang, Hoffman Construction

2026 Hard Hats with Heart Executive Leadership Team

Matt Allen, McKinstry	Tony Parker, Goldfinch Brothers Inc.
Ruben Cañas, MacDonald Miller Facility Solutions	Karl Pihl, EBD Services
Jenny Chin, Cochran Inc.	John Schuh, Aldrich & Associates
Hisham N. Elkhawad, Providence Swedish	Ashley Sherwood, Seyfarth Shaw LLP
Seth Cirrotti-Caruso, Cochran Inc.	Mike Stein, Granite Construction
Kirk Cannon, Valley Electric	Todd Stine, ZGF Architects
Jenae Goldfinch, Goldfinch Brothers Inc.	Robert Taaffe, Sound Transit
Ryan Haines, Gensler	Brad Velasco, VECA Electric & Technologies
Kyle Hepper, Abbott Construction	Nick Vovakes, Swinerton Builders
Mark Jonson, McKinstry	Nicole Wenzel, MultiCare Health System
Bryan Maggio, Mortenson Construction	

2026 Hard Hats with Heart Sponsors

Hartung Glass	Howard S Wright	One Workplace
Hillis Clark Martin & Peterson P.S.	JTM Construction	Sequoyah Electric
	Lease Crutcher Lewis	Skanska

Learn more at heart.org/PugetSoundHHWH and get involved by contacting Julia Martin, Julia.Martin@heart.org.

Building together: why inclusion matters in construction

■ *The construction industry can foster safety and belonging, building a strong workforce that's essential to our future success.*

By **KINDRA DAVIDSON**
JTM Construction

One of the purposes of Construction Inclusion Week is to pause, reflect, and commit to ensuring that construction sites and offices are places where every person feels valued, respected and empowered to contribute. It is a time when construction companies of every size work together to foster respectful job sites, strengthen supplier partnerships, and ensure that all employees — regardless of background — feel valued and supported.



Davidson

The construction workforce is one of the largest in the country, employing over 8 million people across diverse trades and professions. Despite this scale,

challenges remain in attracting and retaining talent, particularly tradespersons. Building an inclusive workforce is essential to our industry's future success. Here's why:

- 1. Talent shortage:** With ongoing labor shortages, we cannot afford to overlook talented individuals who may not fit traditional molds. Inclusion broadens the pipeline.
- 2. Better problem-solving:** Diverse teams bring fresh perspectives, leading to more creative solutions on complex projects.
- 3. Driving innovation:** New voices bring fresh ideas. Inclusion encourages problem-solving that keeps projects efficient and forward-looking.
- 4. Stronger communities:** A workforce that reflects the community fosters trust, credibility, and pride in the work being done.
- 5. Improved safety and culture:** When employees feel respected and heard, they are

more engaged, more collaborative, and more committed to safety.

INCLUSION ON THE JOB SITE

- Inclusion doesn't happen by accident — it requires intentional effort. On job sites, that means: Ensuring all voices are heard during planning and safety meetings.
- Providing mentorship and advancement opportunities to employees from all backgrounds and demographics.
- Making zero tolerance for harassment, hazing, or exclusionary behavior a standard. Using inclusive language and signage that makes everyone feel welcome.

Small actions — like inviting input from apprentices or recognizing contributions during daily huddles — send a powerful message: **YOU BELONG HERE.**

A CALL TO ACTION

As leaders, coworkers, and partners, we all have a role to play:

See **TOGETHER** — page



Carolyn Stovall (left), JTM's assistant survey superintendent with Ardel Kennard (right), project accountant on a job site. Photo courtesy of JTM Construction

Partnering as the ultimate inclusion tool

■ *Involving MWDBE partner firms increases project buy-in and leads to more success overall.*

By **MEG WINCH**
Communication Resources Northwest

Having helped develop multiple programs to maximize inclusion of MWDBE firms on projects across the U.S., I've found that most programs are developed by primes for the benefit of MWDBE firms. While well-intended, these programs primarily engage MWDBE firms in key scopes, but do not engage the firms in the activities that define how a team will work together.



Winch

I propose rethinking subcontractor/subcontractor engagement overall, pushing to fully involve our partner firms in project partnering to fully participate in creating the agreements that define project success.

ENGAGING PARTNERS

As a senior facilitator with the International Partnering Institute, I've conducted more than 150 formal partnering processes with teams from around the world. Seldom do I see significant participation from subcontractor or MWDBE partners. I'd like to propose an alternative; what if

we engaged the full range of project partners — in both design and construction — in project partnering?

In the few instances where primes have engaged MWDBE partners in partnering, the consistent feedback is that they enjoyed the process, felt more deeply engaged in the project, and felt more confident in their roles after having engaged directly with the owner and key members of the team. In many cases, however, primes seek to restrict the number of participants, choosing to create agreements between the leaders of design-construction-owner-and owner's representation teams.

TAKING IN ALL PERSPECTIVES

Partnering, however, provides an excellent opportunity to practice true inclusion. During partnering sessions, we define a common definition of project success, listening deeply to the perspectives of all parties, oftentimes including key users and AHJ stakeholders. We also develop rules of engagement for communication, decision-making, and dispute resolution.

Ultimately, an effective partnering session results in a project charter that directs and informs the activities and key decisions of all project parties. Including more parties in the creation of these agreements can only benefit projects and relationships.



At the Reno-Tahoe International Airport for the new concourses project, team members, including the Reno-Tahoe Airport Authority, McCarthy Construction, and Gensler met in small groups to unpack core processes and review them with the larger team in interactive presentations. Photo courtesy of Meg Winch

benefit projects and relationships.

INCLUSIVE PARTNERING, EVEN WITH BIGGER GROUPS

A common challenge to inclusion in partnering processes relates to group size; in many cases, those planning the event

seek to keep the group small to make it more manageable. We've found several solutions that work to create ownership and commitment to agreements among team members, even with extremely large groups of participants. The trick is to bring in a larger facilitation team to break the scale of the event into manageable

groups and to engage the project leadership team in the planning process in a more significant way. For example, at the Harbor UCLA Medical Center, the Communication Resources team has worked for multiple years on large partnering processes involving 50-75 participants, depending on the project stage.

We initiate each session with significant pre-work with a core leadership team and then provide opportunity for broad participation of participants from across firms and functions.

Similarly, for the Reno-Tahoe International Airport, we are leading partnering initiatives with an active leadership group. We welcomed 60 people into an interactive session, with plans for ramping up participation as the team expands throughout design and construction.

For the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, currently in construction in Medora, North Dakota, we've conducted multiple partnering sessions from the initiation of design during the pandemic in a virtual session that included 75 participants from around the world to small group partnering interventions between the owner and scope-specific teams. To date, we've completed seven different partnering events/processes tailored to meet the needs of the project and the team members as they moved through the phases and challenges of a once-in-a-lifetime project. From Day 1, we've worked with the team to prioritize inclusion, echoing Teddy Roosevelt's exhortation to 'get into the arena' with the team and 'strive for greatness,' even under challenging circumstances.

LESS PERFORMATIVE, MORE STRATEGIC

Teams that embrace partnering as central to their project delivery processes see the benefits at every stage — from getting key team members on the same page relative to vision, decision-making, risk management, and process prioritization to creating a framework for the resolution of conflicts. Partnering is also cen-



BNBUILDERS CELEBRATING CONSTRUCTION INCLUSION WEEK

LAYING THE FOUNDATION TODAY FOR A MORE DIVERSE TOMORROW

- K-12 & College Student Events
- School Presentations
- Mentorship Programs
- Community Outreach

CONNECT WITH US! | WWW.BNBUILDERS.COM

See **PARTNERING** — page

Partnering

Continued from page 3

tral to a Lean approach to project delivery in its prioritization of respect for people and the clarification of roles, responsibilities, and critical processes; it is the essence of ‘go slow to go fast.’

Partnering processes, therefore, should be less performative and more strategic, engaging the broadest possible cadre of team members to participate in creating the governance structures and relationships critical to project success. Whether key subs or MWDBE partners — or both — we build stronger relationships and demonstrate the value of each team member by including them in partnering processes.

Inclusive partnering should be central to the initiation stage of any complex project, engaging the broadest range of project partners in developing success frameworks, creating the charters that will guide team behaviors throughout the project’s duration. Ownership in agreements matters; instead of socializing team members to agreements, let’s engage them in their creation.

Ultimately, effective partnering defines how we treat people as we design and build projects. By inviting the broadest group of project partners to the table to create the agreements that will guide and constrain behavior, we practice inclusion as we build a more resilient team community.

Meg Winch is president of Communication Resources Northwest, and a lean-certified facilitator who holds Senior Partnering Facilitator designation with the International Partnering Institute and has led more than 150 formal partnering processes.

Together

Continued from page 3

• **Leaders:** Set the tone by holding teams accountable for inclusive behaviors. Invest in training and professional development so employees can build long, sustainable careers.

• **Supervisors:** Model respect on the job site and mentor the next generation. Celebrate successes of individuals and teams alike

• **Employees:** Speak up, support each other, and commit to building a culture of belonging.

Every project starts with a foundation. By making inclusion part of ours, we can strengthen the industry for generations to come.

LOOKING AHEAD

The looming talent shortage is real, and we must create workspaces in which newcomers can enter, engage, learn, thrive and recruit. The construction industry can foster safety and inclusiveness extending beyond our project boundaries. Internships, school partnerships, and community initiatives foster early connections and show young people that construction has a place for them.

The structures we build will stand for decades and we have the privilege to build a sustainable workforce — one that not only meets today’s needs but also ensures a strong future for industry — through inclusion, respect and opportunity.

Construction Inclusion Week reminds us that true strength is not just in concrete and steel, but in the people who bring projects to life. Together, we can build a future where everyone has a place, and everyone belongs.

Kindra Davidson is an HR leader in the construction industry, passionate about building people-first programs that strengthen culture, support growth, and create sustainable workplaces.

Open to all

Continued from page 2

the communities where we live and build. That means growing Youth in Construction into more school districts, transforming jobsites into living classrooms and inviting clients and partners to join us in making workforce development part of every project.

As emerging technologies like drones, 4D modeling, and data analytics reshape how buildings come to life, they also open new entry points for students who may not have considered construction before. By aligning these innovations with education and mentorship, we can spark curiosity and turn interest into opportunity.

The future of construction will be defined by those who bring a wide range of perspectives and lived experiences — and that future is one we are committed to building.

Justin Lee is a commercial manager at Skanska USA Building, serves as co-coordinator of Skanska’s Youth in Construction (YIC) program and is an active member of Skanska’s Inclusion & Diversity Council.

Internship

Continued from page 2

example of the program’s local impact.

Muruts first joined Build Up as a high school intern in 2023. She was unsure what to expect from the construction industry but eager to learn. As a student, she was always curious about the large projects unfolding across Seattle. Her interest was sparked by walking past the Seattle Convention Center Expansion project every day on her way to class. This led to her being part of the ACE mentorship program where she later learned about DPR’s Build Up internship program.

“I initiated conversations with project engineers, superintendents and safety managers at DPR — not knowing what to expect — but I received encouraging mentorship,” Muruts said. “It’s clear DPR’s values run deep, and I wanted to return to experience that dynamic on the office side.”

After completing a second high school internship with DPR, Muruts returned as a college intern, working with the Preconstruction and Virtual Design and Construction teams. “I applied for the DPR internship out of curiosity for the industry, but I came back because of my admiration for the company,” she said.

She is now pursuing a degree in civil engineering at the University of Washington.

“I’m excited to apply the knowledge I’ve learned through my internship experience to my college classroom work and future internships.”

Muruts’ experience reflects the program’s broader goals: providing mentorship, building confidence and opening doors for students who might not have considered construction as a career.

A LAUNCHPAD FOR THE FUTURE

As DPR continues to expand Build Up, our commitment to inclusion and education remains a central focus. For students in Seattle and across the country, it’s more than just a summer job — it’s a launchpad for a future in the construction industry.

With each new cohort, Build Up is helping to build a more diverse, skilled, and confident workforce — one that reflects the communities where DPR builds. The program’s success is measured not just in numbers, but in the stories of students like Selome Muruts, whose journey shows how real-world experience and mentorship can shape a career.

Ashley Durbin serves as an Estimator for DPR Construction’s Pacific Northwest region and chairs the Community Initiative Committee in Seattle.