

White House Evidence Team highlights King County's Priority Hire Program

King County's Priority Hire program has been featured by the White House as one of six examples from across the country to share [how evidence can inform practices and policies](#).

"When we use evidence to inform our practices and policies everyone benefits," said Sandy Hanks, Manager, Business Development and Contract Compliance in the Department of Executive Services.

The White House's recent [Year of Evidence for Action](#) Summit highlighted leading practices from Federal Agencies to generate and use research-backed knowledge to advance better, more equitable outcomes for all of America. As a lead up to the Summit, the White House Evidence Team solicited examples of evidence in action from invitees.

King County submitted [15 examples of our equity- and evidence-driven work](#) to the White House. These 15 examples are just a few highlights of the equity- and evidence-driven work King County employees do every day.

"King County has a strong commitment to equity- and data-informed decisions, and to using and building evidence about how our actions, processes, and investments contribute to better outcomes for the people and communities we serve," said Carrie S. Cihak, King County Evidence and Impact Officer. King County's [Priority Hire Program](#) is a workforce and economic development strategy providing training and family wage employment opportunities in the construction industry on King County public works construction projects of \$5 million or more. The Priority Hire program provides access for people interested in pursuing career opportunities in the construction industry who reside in economically distressed areas of the King County region. With the goal of championing greater workforce diversity in the trades, King County's Priority Hire Program has addressed a widening gap between the demand for construction labor and the supply of skilled trade workers in our regional labor market.

Evidence has been foundational to the development and implementation of the Priority Hire Program.

"The Priority Hire Program is an example of how the county used research-based evidence to identify zip codes and prioritize individuals from vulnerable and underserved populations for paid training and family wage employment opportunities on County construction projects," Hanks said.

In addition, the Priority Hire Program is an important component of King County's [Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan](#) and supports a more diverse and trained workforce that is necessary for the region to continue to prosper. From the most recent data available, 2018-2021, the Priority Hire Program has exceeded its goals for the proportion of labor hours from workers in targeted zip codes: nearly one-third of the labor hours were performed by participants who reside in Priority Hire communities. In 2021, the Priority Hire Program saw the following impressive results:

- \$4.4 million in wages earned by Priority Hire workers
- 305,583 total Washington State labor hours on projects with Priority Hire requirements
- 93,875 Priority Hire labor hours
- 45% Priority Hire apprentice participation rate, exceeding the required rate of 19%
- 27% Priority Hire journey worker participation rate, exceeding the required rate of 16%
- 577 Priority Hire workers, including 482 journey workers and 95 apprentices.

Additionally, the Priority Hire Program is clearly reaching more people every year and fulfilling its goals of increasing entry and diversity in the building trades: 45% of Priority Hire workers identify as people of

color as compared to 24% people of color in the King County construction industry overall. While the proportion of women participating in Priority Hire (13% in 2021) is higher than women represented in the nationwide construction industry (11% in 2021), more work is needed to open additional opportunities for women.

The Priority Hire Program is currently implemented through a Master Community Workforce Agreement (MCWA), which is a pre-hire collective bargaining agreement between King County and 18 construction labor unions that sets the basic terms and conditions of employment on covered public works projects. The MCWA strengthens the collaborative relationship with our labor partners and is an efficient contracting business practice that sets clear expectations on all construction projects above specified dollar thresholds.