

INDIANA CONSTRUCTION ROUNDTABLE

BUILDING FUTURES IN INDIANA

The Indiana Construction Roundtable (ICR) was created in 1994, and is comprised of employers, associations and industry representatives who work on solutions for key issues facing the construction industry throughout the state. One of the longstanding concerns was the shortage of skilled craft professionals, and with upcoming construction and infrastructure projects on the horizon, this problem became a focal point for the organization.

Chris Price, executive director of the ICR, worked with state and national associations to gather employment and project statistics to better identify and understand Indiana's workforce shortage. The data indicated that 61,000 craft professionals would be needed by 2017 in order to rebuild aging infrastructure and keep up with the state's economy. Due to this enormous need, ICR pulled together leaders to lock down funding and engage owners, contractors and educators to help spread the message about career opportunities in construction.

"The workforce shortage is an economic development issue for the state," Price says. "Indiana has compiled a large backlog of building and infrastructure needs since moving out of the great recession. This means years of potential to expand our economy, but if we are not able to build the facilities future employers need, we will not be able to attract the businesses our state desires."

HOW IT ALL STARTED

In 2014, ICR and Indiana's workforce development committee called a meeting to address the growing skills gap within the construction industry. After reviewing the data Chris Price had presented about the severe impending shortage, a taskforce was created to identify workforce solutions, possible funding mechanisms and an implementation plan. Following this meeting, Bob Taylor, President of the Indiana Association of Public School Superintendents, connected ICR with legislatures that were willing to help fund the recruitment initiative. Temporary funding was established for \$1 million dollars annually for two years with detailed metrics that would need to be met to show the validity for future funding. These metrics needed to prove that through such funding there would be an increase in construction-related career and technical education programs, apprenticeship programs and job placement.

The taskforce established a 501(c)(3) education foundation, the Indiana Construction Roundtable Foundation (ICRF), to meet these goals and spearhead the recruitment initiative. The ICRF included individuals from ICR, a member of the Department of Workforce Development, three school superintendents and various contractors and owners. The group's main focus was to develop an educational campaign that would begin by promoting construction opportunities to middle and high school students. Chris Price was appointed president of the foundation, and he immediately began researching existing recruitment initiatives that would meet their needs and connect them

with any national efforts recruiting into the construction industry. In June 2015, an initial conference call was made with Build Your Future (BYF) to discuss the foundation's vision for the program. With this in mind, BYF developed a customized partnership proposal that would assist in developing a promotional plan, provide customized marketing materials and focus on helping ICRF reach its goals through a comprehensive strategy.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

With the importance that was put onto this project, the money committed and the metrics that needed to be met, it was crucial to have someone dedicated to overseeing the daily operations of this initiative. Once BYF was approved, the foundation hired Ali Brown as executive director of the initiative. Price and Brown took a trip to NCCER's headquarters to discuss timelines, customized needs and best practices that would help achieve the goals tied to the grant. After spending two days learning about ICRF, discovering what was needed and developing a plan, Build Your Future Indiana was founded.

Brown worked alongside the BYF team to develop the website, indiana.byf.org, and customize promotional materials such as trading cards, posters, brochures, wristbands, sunglasses, stickers, cups, carpenter pencils, lanyards and bookmarks. Along with these materials, customized presentations, videos and career day resources were also made to promote construction careers in schools, meetings, conferences and career days across the state. Brown worked with a media buyer to push out customized videos and social media advertisements that have reached approximately 1.1 million viewers and aired over 30,000 times on cable television. To reach even more individuals, Build Your Future Indiana collaborated with a local advertising company that published an informative magazine featuring craft professional profiles, salaries and training center locations. Build Your Future Indiana sent 1,080 packets to schools across the state with educational information and samples of the marketing materials to assist in recruiting individuals into construction-related programs. The same packets were also mailed to over 4,000 construction industry professionals across the state.

"The partnership between Build Your Future and the Indiana Construction Roundtable Foundation is yielding great results in Indiana," said Ali Brown. "We are able to meet a need in the construction industry by connecting schools with student-friendly promotional materials and industry representatives. The results so far have been amazing and we are only getting started."

To have an even greater impact, the foundation utilized part of the \$1 million in state funding to develop an ambassador program which consists of skilled craft professionals who visit local high schools to present their stories, discuss the value of construction and leave educational material about the various career paths and earning potential. To get the most effective speakers, Brown interviewed interested craft professionals to guarantee they matched the criteria needed to engage and relate to students. Brown checked that each ambassador had a story that would appeal to the younger generation, demographics that related to the target audience, felt comfortable speaking in front of a large group and passed a background check. ICRF developed a committee to help Brown

schedule school presentations and reach out to inquiring industry members about the program. Since January 2016, over 80 craft professionals have been trained, 52 school presentations have occurred and 20,000 individuals including students, teachers, parents, guidance counselors and other influencers have been reached.

“When you are a high school student, it’s pretty powerful to hear from someone who went to the same high school and hear his or her story of success,” Price says. “For years we had similar programs, but usually ended up sending company CEOs to high schools to represent the industry. While these individuals were eager to help, and certainly through the years likely influenced a number of students, we needed a more effective messenger if we wanted to reach potential young craft professionals. Our new ambassadors are more relatable and therefore we think more effective.”

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

“We have met or exceeded all of our goals so far,” said Price, “but we are just beginning. It took years for negative images of working in construction to develop. We are just now getting the truth out to change that perception. It will take time, but we are on the right track.”

ICRF has an agreement to work with Grand Park’s sports complex, which reaches 1.6 million student athletes per year. This facility will have generous signage for any visitor to learn about various craft professions, view construction career paths and address concerns related to the industry.

Build Your Future Indiana will continue to make an impact through commercial views, news articles and live appearances on television shows. Brown has been working with a new media buyer and television commercials are due to air on the evening news, in digital advertisements and appear on Pandora. ICRF will continue to invest in building a pipeline of craft professionals to benefit the state’s economy, address the workforce shortage and improve their residents’ overall quality of life.

In the words of Price, “This program is not only about a workforce shortage. It’s about helping people, changing lives and building futures.”