



## CASE STUDY

# BUILDING APPRENTICESHIP PATHWAYS FOR WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION:

## UpSkill Houston

**Industry-driven:** In 2014 the Greater Houston Partnership, with support of its 1,200 business members, launched UpSkill Houston.<sup>6</sup> The initiative serves as a backbone to convene representatives from businesses, industry associations, education providers, workforce agencies, and community-based organizations to address the skills gap in the region's in-demand industries including healthcare, construction, port and maritime, energy, and petrochemical manufacturing. The focus is on careers and occupations that require education beyond a high school diploma and less than a four-year college degree.

**Aligned with workforce, education, and human services systems:** Over the past five years, UpSkill Houston has followed a formulaic, but adaptable, model to build out industry councils in the region's key industries. Staff housed at the Greater Houston Partnership initially bring together industry partners from small, mid-size, and large companies to identify the demand for critical occupations, the skills and competency needs, and the training challenges. Later, education providers, representatives from the workforce system, and other community partners like United Way of Greater Houston are brought into the council as the conversations with industry partners progress. In one program targeting women's access to construction careers, United Way partnered with the local workforce board to recruit and screen participants with barriers to employment who, with support from services provided by the workforce development system and community organizations, can be successful in

member companies' training programs. The partnership has also connected local companies' incumbent workers with opportunities to work with K-12 and community college students as classroom instructors.



**Locally-based:** The

Greater Houston Partnership serves as the hub of the industry relationships that make this partnership work. Staff have built long-term relationships with community organizations like United Way of Greater Houston and the workforce board which enables the Partnership to direct businesses towards organizations that can best support their workforce needs, meaning the business partner has a reliable recommendation on which to build a relationship and support efficient workforce planning.

**Expanding work-based learning:** In 2017, S&B Engineers and Constructors launched a twelve-week hire and then learn program to enable more women and workers living within the Houston area to enter their workforce development programs. These efforts came out of a desire to broaden the pipeline and diversity of craft workers who could succeed in the construction workforce and to reduce expenses the company incurred supporting workers brought in from other regions of the state and country to meet the workforce needs.

United Way THRIVE partners provide financial literacy and employability skills training, partnering with the local workforce board to recruit participants in the program. S&B provides skills education to prepare workers for several

occupations including pipefitting and welding. S&B recently opened a new craft education and skills enhancement center dedicated to preparing workers for middle-skill jobs, and the company partnered with other UpSkill Houston employer partners to identify incoming and incumbent workers from their companies to participate in training at the S&B site. United Way has also worked with TDIndustries, a mechanical contractor, to replicate the women in construction program for their workforce.



*Participants in S&B Engineers and Constructors program learn from industry experts.*