

# Chapter 4: Construction Issues in Participant Selection and Orientation

## Participant Selection

A number of construction-related issues must be taken into consideration when selecting participants for the program. Many programs include members of the construction staff in the interview process to address these concerns. Others provide a “construction issues” briefing to the program manager, counselors, or others who are interviewing candidates for the program.

- **Realities of construction work:** Candidates must understand that they will generally be expected to work on a construction work site (except in instances when participants in a Construction Plus YouthBuild program go directly into a separate in-demand industry training for a field other than construction). What is necessary with any YouthBuild program training is the right attitude, not the experience level or physical stature of a candidate. Candidates should know that the work is dirty and hard and that it is subject to outdoor conditions and weather and should be asked what makes them prepared to take on this challenge. Some programs have applicants work on a small construction project for a day as part of the application or mental toughness process. Also, candidates should be informed that there are positive aspects of construction work such as learning new skills and growing strong physically and mentally. Using one’s hands, learning how to use tools, and creating a tangible product are empowering experiences.
- **Health issues:** It is crucial that potential health problems are addressed with candidates, especially concerns about asthma, heart problems, or other medical conditions that may be incompatible with construction. A medical release must be obtained from a doctor for anyone with potential health issues prior to a candidate’s arrival on site. It is highly recommended for all final candidates to take a physical and receive an eye exam. This is because there are definitive requirements for medical exams in OSHA standards related to the use of respiratory protection and use of and/or exposure to hazardous chemicals. For pregnant women, it is important to note that dust, chemicals, or accidents at a construction work site could present a serious health risk to an unborn baby. These types of health risks can create complications for the program and therefore, accommodations might need to be made. It is, however, illegal to exclude women from construction jobs because of pregnancy. It is essential that female candidates are aware of their rights and protections.



- **Drug and alcohol issues:** There must be nobody under the influence on the work site—period. Candidates with substance abuse problems are clearly a hazard to themselves and others on the site. Programs should have a written drug policy, and candidates should be informed of that policy. While it is difficult to do, programs should include questions that attempt to identify candidates with substance abuse problems. Some programs require random drug tests as part of the application or orientation process. If the program decides to do this, participants must be informed during the interview process, verbally and in writing, that they will be subjected to random drug testing. Since drug tests will not identify alcohol problems, participants should be warned during their interviews that the effects of uncontrolled use of alcohol are a safety risk and will cause a participant to be terminated from the program if discovered.
- **Age issues:** Young adults 16-17 years old may work in the construction industry, or on construction sites, but in limited capacities. DOL's Employment Standards Administration's Wage and Hour Division oversees the Fair Labor Standards Act's (FLSA) child labor provisions, which specify the hours young workers can work, the jobs they may perform, and the jobs that are designated as being too hazardous for them to perform. YouthBuild Grantees must comply with applicable Federal and State health and safety standards related to the working conditions under WIOA-funded projects and programs. These health and safety standards include “hazardous orders” governing child labor at 29 CFR part 570.

In addition, many state and federal laws require people to be a certain age in order to operate power equipment on a construction work site. The program will need to establish its age requirements with this consideration in mind. Some programs require participants to meet the state's age requirements. Others make accommodations in the work assignments for participants under age. Participants should be certified on tools prior to use; this protects participants and the program.

- **Learn more by going to DOL's YouthRules!** ([www.youthrules.gov/index.htm](http://www.youthrules.gov/index.htm)). YouthRules! is an initiative to promote positive and safe work experiences for teens by distributing information about young workers to youth, parents, employers and educators. The initiative includes a website, printed materials, outreach events, training seminars and partnering activities.
- **Women in construction:** Because women have often not been encouraged to consider construction as a field of employment, many programs actively recruit women to consider joining YouthBuild. In fact, in areas of the country with affirmative action policies for construction contracts, women are often in demand as construction workers. Interviewers should be very explicit about expectations and conditions on a work site while encouraging women to explore this career option.



#### VOICES FROM THE FIELD

##### On Selecting and Preparing Participants for the Program

*“You can’t reach everyone. You have to try with everyone, but ultimately you have to accept that not everyone will make it.”*

*“Attendance gets worse in the cold weather. We have to prep participants ahead of time to prepare them for that.”*

*“If you realize that someone isn’t working out, deal with the situation quickly so that the whole program doesn’t end up getting messed up.”*

## Mental Toughness Orientation

The program should include a construction component for the overall orientation of new participants during Mental Toughness. The following are some ideas for workshops based on what other sites have included in their orientation:

- **Team work:** Some programs include a simple hands-on project involving teamwork in their orientation program. This may be a simple community service project, or a game with building blocks, or it may be a city-wide treasure hunt in which participants have to go to City Hall and the building inspector's office to research the history of the land or the building they will be working on.
- **Construction safety:** It is never too early to begin emphasizing construction safety. Some orientation programs include simple hands-on safety training activities such as climbing ladders or lifting plywood. This is a good time to conduct a tool orientation and introduction as well. The training program should be focused on the hazards specific to the type of work that they will be doing and include demonstrations as well as information about the importance of a Job Safety Analysis, which is a procedure which helps integrate accepted safety and health principles into a particular task or job operation.
- **The construction work site:** Programs may include an introduction to the YouthBuild construction project as part of their Mental Toughness orientation program. This could include a site visit or showing pictures or slides of the site. It might include a brief talk by the project's developer on the purpose and the plans for the project, the sources of financing, and information on who will live there upon completion. It might include a brief talk by a representative from the neighborhood on the importance of the project to the surrounding community. Participants cannot perform work on the site until safety training has been completed.

It is helpful to visit a recently completed construction project or another construction work site; by visiting projects in different stages of construction, it is possible to visibly demonstrate that progress can be made.

- **Practical issues:** Mental Toughness is a good time to introduce some practical information regarding the construction component of the program. Orientation may include an introduction to the work schedule and to the construction rules, as well as key information about transportation, expectations, and requirements for proper dress on the site.
- **Interaction with residents:** Some programs include a discussion about expectations regarding interaction with residents and other passersby while working on the construction site. Include in that discussion the idea of representing the program through appropriate behavior. Participants must be informed that while they are representing the program, they need to also have respect for and an understanding of the community's role in supporting the program.
- **Distribution of participant tool belts:** Many YouthBuild programs end their orientation with a ceremony presenting participants with their tool belts, hardhats, and required safety equipment such as safety glasses, ear protection, and dust masks as a way of recognizing participant commitment in entering the YouthBuild program.

Programs should review [TEGL 14-09, Mental Toughness/Orientation Allowable Costs in a YouthBuild Program](#) in Appendix B, to ensure that grant funds are not being spent on unallowable costs prior to participant enrollment. Programs may need to use leveraged funding for the mental toughness component, depending on the planned activities and costs.