



4145 NE Cully Blvd. Portland, OR 97218  
www.verdenw.org

**Date:** April 25, 2023  
**To:** Joint Committee on Transportation  
**From:** Indi Namkoong, Transportation Justice Coordinator for Verde  
**Re:** **Statistics and data supporting benefits of project labor agreements, community benefits agreements**

Co-chairs McLain and Frederick, Vice Chairs Boquist and Boshart-Davis, and committee members,

Thank you for this opportunity to provide more information about our organization and the research that underpins our organizational support for Project Labor Agreements. This letter is in response to a question from Representative Jeff Helfrich during an April 20 Joint Committee on Transportation informational meeting. Representative Helfrich asked for statistics and information about the benefits of including Project Labor Agreements (PLAs), Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs), and other labor standards in legislation to build infrastructure. Our experience agrees with the data: **these are valuable tools that can help to prioritize local and minority labor and contracting, strengthen apprenticeship programs that open doors for people of color to enter well-paid careers in the industry, and keep payroll dollars circulating in local communities.**

Verde is an environmental justice organization based in the Cully neighborhood of Northeast Portland, where we do much of our work. Since 2005, Verde has brought environmental investments to low-income communities and ensured those assets provided direct benefits to low-income people and people of color. Best labor practices are a key strategy for securing those benefits and building a workforce that reflects our communities. Verde Builds, our social enterprise and a licensed general contractor, typically exceeds 70% utilization of minority- and women-owned contractors on our projects. In 2018, we helped to create the [Portland Clean Energy Fund](#), which now invests millions each year in workforce and contractor development projects that create green job opportunities for frontline communities. In 2021, we worked to pass [HB 2021B, 100% Clean Energy For All](#) with strong labor standards that encouraged PLAs, utilized apprenticeship programs, and committed 15% of clean energy project work hours to be performed by BIPOC, women, veterans, or people with disabilities.

Our experience is reinforced by a body of research documenting the benefits these tools can create when well-designed, particularly for the Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color and low-income communities we come from and work with. I have included annotated links to a selection of helpful analyses below.

**[Project Labor Agreements in New York State II: In the Public Interest and of Proven Value](#)**

This Cornell University study of PLAs in New York State found that **“PLAs are preserving work and jobs... reducing pressure on public support services, providing “bottom-up” economic stimulus**



4145 NE Cully Blvd. Portland, OR 97218  
www.verdenw.org

**through fair labor standards, advancing industry training and skills, opening avenues for workforce development and increasing opportunities for women and minority-owned businesses.”** It also notes that PLAs are compatible with competition between union and non-union bidders, as “there are no credible studies demonstrating that a PLA in the bid specifications is itself responsible for a decrease in the number of bidders... awards are frequently made to both union and non-union companies.”

### **Labor Agreements as a Solution for Increasing Job Opportunities for African Americans and Females in the Construction Trades in Oregon**

**PLAs and CBAs are tools; it matters how we use them. They offer space to negotiate priorities and tailor conditions to the needs of the project, the workforce, and the community.** This 2015 report from the Oregon Commission on Black Affairs and the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries assesses the outcomes of several construction projects in the Portland Metro region that used PLAs and/or CBAs and offers recommendations to maximize opportunities for minority workers through these agreements, including pre-apprenticeship programs and clear and enforceable equity goals.

### **Constructing a Diverse Workforce**

This 2021 report from the University of Oregon found that BIPOC and women workers face many structural barriers to careers in the construction trades, union membership aside. However, it also found that **participation in a union apprenticeship program improved wages, retention, and graduation rates for apprentices across the board as compared to non-union apprenticeship programs. These improvements in outcomes were particularly steep for BIPOC and women.**

On behalf of the constituents Verde serves and advocates with statewide, we feel that PLAs and CBAs are important negotiating tools that can maximize the benefits public investments bring to our communities. It's true that we have a long way yet to go in terms of a truly diverse and equitable workforce in the trades. **However, the strategies that have been proven to do the most to get us there—support for pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs, clear goals for project participation by BIPOC, women, and apprentices, and provisions that support minority- and women-owned businesses in competing for public contracts—can most effectively be negotiated and enforced through PLAs and CBAs on large public projects like the Interstate Bridge Replacement.** If you have further questions, I would be happy to provide additional information or make myself available for further discussion. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kind regards,

Indi Namkoong  
Transportation Justice Coordinator, Verde  
[indinamkoong@verdenw.org](mailto:indinamkoong@verdenw.org)