Foundations and Frontiers FF24

Future Workforce

About this paper

This paper is a conversation thought starter. It provides a high-level summary of the importance of defining good and agreeing how to achieve it. We invite you to respond to the questions in this paper to shape the discussion at FF24 and to ensure your voice is heard.

The Australian construction industry is increasingly unable to deliver the infrastructure projects that are needed, when they are needed and for an affordable price. The gap between the available workforce and the workforce needed is growing while productivity growth stagnates and costs increase. This is a matter of national importance that requires a coordinated national response.

The Foundations and Frontiers 24 (FF24) forum will bring together key stakeholders from across the industry with representatives from all sectors. It will provide a forum to discuss the challenges facing the industry and, more importantly, to find solutions and improved ways of working together to implement them.

It is intended that the Foundations and Frontiers forum will become an annual event similar to the COP sustainability and Davos economic summits where goals are set and progress tracked.

FF24 will focus on four areas that are considered key to any national strategy to improve the construction industry:

1. Defining good... and how to achieve it
2. Future workforce
3. Financial stability
4. Data-rich future.

Future forums may consider other focus areas as progress is made and understanding of the issues improves.
Current workforce

The construction industry is the fourth largest industry in Australia, employing almost 10 per cent of the population. Its spectrum covers a wide range of businesses from small mum and dad operations all the way through to large multinationals. Operating across diverse sectors from housing to hospitals and transport to energy transmission, it plays a critical role in the country’s infrastructure and economy.

At a time when industry productivity is at its lowest levels in 60 years, the need for the construction workforce is arguably at its peak with Infrastructure Australia estimating an additional 229,000 construction workers are needed to meet Australia’s public project pipeline demands.

At the same time just 12 per cent of the construction workforce are women, highlighting a significant underutilisation of half of the potential workforce, and more people are leaving the industry than joining it. ACA’s ‘Disrupt or Die’ noted that:

“In the eyes of the next generation of workers, construction is an industry that is stuck in the past.”

Future workforce

If the construction industry is to survive and thrive, we need to attract people into the industry, keep them in the industry for longer and ensure the ways they are working are efficient.

Attraction questions

- What can be done to make the construction industry more attractive for future generations of workers?
- What can construction do to better compete with other industries for skilled workers?
- How can we get more women working in the industry?
Retention questions

- What can we do to stop workers from leaving the industry ‘early’?
- Do roles within the industry have the flexibility that workers are seeking?
- Does the industry provide enough opportunities for career development?
- How can the industry better provide ongoing employment for workers?

Productivity questions

- What changes are required so that we can deliver the project pipeline with the resources we have?
- What is stopping the industry being more productive?
- What skills will be needed in a future, more efficient, construction industry?
- How important will human skills be?

Respond to this paper with your thoughts

If you are interested in contributing to the discussion, please upload your written response to the Foundations and Frontiers website: www.foundationsandfrontiers.com.au/movement by no later than 3 pm Friday 28 June 2024.

You do not need to attend FF24 to make a written submission.

Other ways to join the FF24 movement

In the lead-up to FF24, we’re unearthing voices from every corner of the industry. It’s an opportunity for everyone to lean in and help drive change. To do this, we need to get the conversation started. We want everyone to be heard as we work towards what will be a dynamic and powerful connection at FF24. Start the conversation now – from the ground up – and join the movement! Access our conversation starter toolkit and download our ready-made social media cards, create your own, provide a statement or send us a video with your thoughts.