

Survey to focus on retention in the residential and infrastructure trades

Angela Gismondi November 5, 2018



Results from a new survey that's currently underway will be used to develop strategies for improving retention and recruitment in the residential and infrastructure sectors.

The Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON) and the Ontario Residential Council of Construction Associations secured a grant from the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development to develop a study on the retention of tradespeople in residential construction. Project partners include the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario, the Ontario Skilled Trades Alliance and others who have helped push out the survey to the industry.

“Everyone agrees there is a labour supply challenge coming, if it’s not here already,” said Andrew Pariser, vice-president of RESCON.

“We said we want to understand key trends around retention in the residential and infrastructure trades. We are concerned about the number of workers that are going to retire. We are concerned about labour supply. We are concerned about training and education and we need somebody to do an independent study.”

RESCON partnered with Job Talks, an educational media initiative that conducts in-depth research and interviews with workers who are passionate about their jobs, the Job Talks website indicates.

What makes this study different from other studies is that Job Talks is an academically independent third party that will administer the survey and analyze the results. The goal is for 1,000 people in the residential and infrastructure sectors to complete it and it is expected to take 30 minutes on average.

“They are producing evidence-based academic research outside of influencing control of the construction sector,” said Pariser.

“It will be by far the most comprehensive study. I know they say 30 minutes is lengthy but we’ve taken the view that it needs to be academically sound.

“Just like you can’t rush building a house or a condo or a road, a bridge, you have to do things properly, you have to follow the proper steps.”

The survey will go beyond the residential sector and include the infrastructure trades that support it, Pariser noted, including earth moving, heavy construction, carpentry, site servicing, roads, sewers, watermains and utilities.

A governance committee was formed to help get the survey completed by workers. Job Talks is asking that the survey be circulated among Ontario construction industry employers, trainers and other relevant stakeholders.

“We have representatives from all the major trades in both residential and infrastructure. We’ve asked them to go to their members and reach out, we’ve also reached out to some of the unions to do the same,” said Pariser.

“Our main focus is on construction workers and the easy way to define that is do you own a pair of safety boots and do you wear them on a regular basis? The focus is really onsite.

“We are looking for a limited number of health and safety people who are onsite and a limited number of management positions that support the onsite construction, but the meat and potatoes of the people we’re looking to get information from are the construction workers that do the actual construction.”

Pariser encouraged everybody to take part in the survey, stating labour supply is a concern now and its only going to grow in its magnitude.

“It’s exciting to help shape the future of the industry but beyond that...when we recognize a challenge facing the industry, whatever it is, we have an obligation to do something about it,” said Pariser.

Parallel to the survey, a video series is also being done.

“We started with a project on retention and we quickly figured out that as great as it is to have a study on how do you keep people happy and how do you keep people in the job, its hard to do that without looking at recruitment,” Pariser said.

Jon Callegher, executive director of Job Talks, said the survey includes multiple choice and open-ended questions that were created with the help of focus groups and meetings with stakeholders

“This survey is different from anything that’s been done — we get into their thoughts and their feelings about the trades and how they think other people see them,” explained Callegher, adding the questions focus on career choice, personality, pros and cons and the future of the industry.

“The questions are around understanding construction workers in regard to how they feel about the work and how happy they are in their jobs and to help to identify those who are not in the trades see what things they might have in common with people who do work in the construction industry.”