

RETENTION &

WOMEN'S COMMITTEES

“Women make up about 11 to 13 per cent of the construction workforce in Canada and the United States, yet only **3 to 5 per cent** of on-site, trades roles.”

— Institute for Women's Policy Research (U.S., 2024) & CAWIC Women in Construction Research (Canada, 2024)

Introducing today's speakers



Samara Sampson

Local 285 Organizer
IA Women's Committee



Natasha Scott Lawson

Local 19 Outreach
Organizer*
IA Women's Committee



McKenzie Quinn

Local 24 JATC Instructor
Recruitment & Retention Council

Agenda



01

Why are Women's Committees Important?

Fast facts, trade women's personal accounts, the struggles faced and the



02

What Women's Committees Do

The value that having a committee (big or small) can bring.



03

How to Start a Committee

The basic structure to help guide leadership and sisters in starting their Local WC.



04

Resources, Support & Outreach

Resources available, where to find them, where to start and how to support.



05

Trades Women Build Nations

The overall impact TWBN has brought to SMART Sisters



Questions?

The FAQs

“Don’t Women’s Committees divide the local?”

“Is it worth it, or just a PR move?”

“But there is no men’s group/committee?”

“We don’t have enough women for a committee.”

“Feminism is sexist.”

“Men get bullied too; we all go through it.”

“We already treat everyone equally.”

The Why

Recruitment & Retention

44% of tradeswomen have considered leaving.

47% cite lack of respect or discrimination as the reason for leaving.

Over **90%** of women in a Canadian skilled-trades survey reported experiencing at least one form of sexual or gender-based harassment on the job.

Women in trades face higher barriers to entry, including employer-sponsorship discrimination at **25%**.

Approximately 23.6 % of U.S. tradeswomen report always or frequently facing sexual harassment at work.

42% of tradeswomen report unequal treatment from supervisors compared to male coworkers.



Sources: Institute for Women's Policy Research (2021); Next Gen Men Skilled Trades Survey (Canada, 2024); Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (2023);IWPR, "A Future Worth Building," 2021.

From the **Field**

"It doesn't pay to report certain things. If you complain you will be labeled and maybe laid off. I was scared to say anything."

"I often felt unsafe. I didn't feel protected by my crew or my foreman."

"Some men made it very clear they didn't want me there. I was scared to be alone in certain areas of the site."

"The harassment escalated to the point where I was scared to go to work."

"Working alone in a basement, a laborer stood blocking the stairs, asking personal questions. When I asked to get by, he got mad and said, 'I'm talking to you.'"

"After he screamed, threw things, and let go of a retractable cord that went zooming past my face, the supervisor told me 'I will separate you, let us know if you want him fired, your call.'"

"They would shout things at me from above or drop things close by. I knew it was on purpose. It scared me."

"There were days I thought someone might hurt me. That is not how a workplace should feel."



Sources: IWPR A Future Worth Building and Tradeswomen Speak, Frontiers in Public Health studies on women in the trades, and Good, Bad, and Ugly: Tradeswomen Tell Their Survival Stories.



Outi Hicks

Outi Hicks was thirty-two years old.
An apprentice carpenter. A mother of
three. A woman **who deserved safety**.

Outi never made it home; she was
murdered on the job.



Amber Czech

Amber Czech was twenty years old.
A welder. A daughter. A woman who
deserved safety.

Amber never made it home; she was
murdered on the job.



Safety Matters®

WC are Solutions Built for the Future

Quick Math

Safety incidents = liability

Hostile work sites = high turnover

Turnover = loss of investment

Workforce shortages = fewer bids, fewer hours, weaker contracts

Women = the largest untapped labor pool

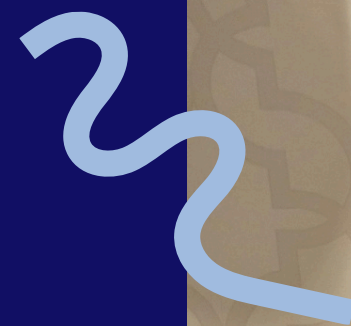
+ Women's Committee

- Support retention
- Safety advocacy
- Mentorship
- Pipeline building and recruitment increase
- Community or SMART Army involvement
- Parental and benefits resources
- Conflict navigation and support

What Women's Committees Do

- Connect sisters across jobsites so they aren't isolated
- Build shared understanding even when paths and trades differ
- Strengthen retention by giving members support early
- Support recruitment. If you can see it, you can be it.
- Use peer mentorship to support members as they navigate jobsite challenges.
- Even in small locals, one or two connected sisters can change their experience, & for every woman who comes after





What Women's Committees Need

Visible support from local leadership

Visibility, outreach tools, and community networks

Access to meeting space and hybrid options

A clear mandate and connection to union structure

Training for the chair and core members so mentorship and support are consistent and effective

How Local WC's Help

32.6% of tradeswomen said women's committees, tradeswomen's organizations or affinity groups were very important to staying in their trade.

Participation in a women's committee is linked to higher social support

National skilled-trades strategies identify women's peer networks, committees and mentorship programs as critical retention supports.

Studies consistently show women leave the trades due to isolation, harassment and lack of support, and women's committees are recommended tools to address these issues.



Source: Institute for Women's Policy Research "Tradeswomen Retention & Advancement Survey" 2021 (32.6% and causes of leaving); Smith, University of Washington "Social Support and Job Satisfaction Among Women in Construction Craft Occupations" 2018 (women's committee and social support finding); Canadian Apprenticeship Forum "Supporting Women in the Trades National Strategy" 2022 (peer networks, committees and mentorship identified as critical retention supports).

How To:

1. Leadership endorsement & clear purpose
2. Know your members and recruit a core team
3. Set structure: meetings, roles, budget, space
4. Define goals and align them with union priorities
5. Build visibility, outreach, mentorship & community ties
6. Connect to union committees and report regularly
7. Review progress, adapt and share best practices



Example - Local 19



LONG-TERM RETENTION

REPRESENTATION

ENGAGEMENT

SISTERHOOD

CONNECTION

PROGRESS

OUTREACH



Resources & Next Steps

Foundational Guides:

A Guide to Organizing Women's Committees: Everything You Need to Know to Make a Difference! (Berger-Marks Foundation / Cornell ILR)

USW Guide for Women's Committees (United Steelworkers)

Guide to Creating Bylaws for Women's Committees in Union Locals

Guide to Creating Women's Committees in SMART Locals



Meeting & Governance Skills

Basic Tips on Running a Union Meeting (United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America)

Make Sure Union Meetings Don't Resemble the Work Meetings You Hate (Labor Notes)

Tradeswomen Networks & Advocacy:

Chicago Women in Trades (CWIT) Resources

Central Ohio Women in the Trades (COWIT) – Starting a Women's Committee

Women's Committees: A Key to Recruiting and Retaining Women Apprentices (Institute for Women's Policy Research)

Tradeswomen Build Nations (NABTU) Initiatives



Chicago TWBN 2017 ~ 120



Chicago TWBN 2025 ~ 600

Trades Women Build Nations

2025 hosted 6,000 tradeswomen, allies, and industry partners.

What **SMART** sisters are saying:

"A platform for reaching other ladies in my local"

"Help bring correct sizes of clothing and ppe for women"

"A yearly smart womens meet up"

"More leadership skills workshops and resources"

"More mental health resources"

"Guidance and knowhow of how to handle harassment and discrimination issues"

"Support or how to resources to find local resources, groups and networks that could benefit our local committee."



**SCAN HERE FOR TODAY'S RESOURCES, TO
STAY CONNECTED, TO CONTINUE THIS
CONVERSATION, OR TO CONNECT A SISTER
WITH US FOR COMMITTEE SUPPORT AND
MORE INFORMATION.**



THANK YOU

