

Worker Benefits of Multiskilling

What a capability-centered contractor can offer the individual worker

This handout is for workers and apprentices in the construction trades. It describes what the research found about how employers develop, verify, deploy, and advance workforce capability, and what that means for the person doing the work.

A capability-centered contractor can give workers both investment and choice. Workers can build a strong primary craft, pursue selected additional capabilities, demonstrate what they can do, have that achievement recognized, and connect it to real assignments, compensation, responsibility, and advancement.

THE ANCHOR MESSAGE

Multiskilling is not about asking one worker to do everything. It is about helping workers build selected, verified capabilities that fit their interests and the work ahead. Done well, it preserves craft depth while giving workers more ways to earn, remain employed, advance, lead, and shape the direction of their careers.

The pages that follow set out where employer and worker interests meet, how capability is built and verified, the benefits workers gain, and what participants said in their own words.

Employer and Worker Pointed the Same Direction

INVEST IN THE PERSON.
VERIFY WHAT THEY CAN DO.
MATCH CAPABILITY TO REAL WORK.
MAKE THE PATHWAY VISIBLE.

This framing does not compare labor models. It describes what the participating employers were doing: investing in people, organizing multiple learning resources, verifying readiness, documenting achievement, matching capability to work, and creating visible pathways for growth.

WHAT THE CONTRACTOR NEEDS

- Crews that can keep working as the scope of work changes
- Confidence that a worker is ready before work starts
- Coverage across trades, phases, regions, and seasons
- Field leaders and instructors developed from within
- Skilled people who stay

WHAT THE WORKER GETS

- More annual hours and fewer gaps between assignments
- Training, coaching, and documentation of achievement
- Access to more projects, phases, and higher-skilled work
- A route into coaching, crew leadership, and beyond
- More opportunities for the direction of their career

1. Breadth follows depth, and it is a choice.

Multiskilling in the participating organizations preserved craft depth. Workers built a strong primary craft first, then added selected capabilities that fit their interests and the work ahead. Breadth was a meaningful choice, not a requirement imposed without purpose.

2. Investment and choice run together.

The employer supplies the instruction, the coaching, the assessment, and the assignment. The worker decides which capabilities to pursue and how far to take them. Neither side gets the benefit without the other.

3. Workers should know what they are signing up for.

Workers should understand what they can learn, what ready performance looks like, who will coach and assess them, how achievement will be documented, and what that achievement can support.

How Capability Is Built, Verified, and Used

Coursework creates an opportunity to learn.

Capability assurance makes the learning visible, verified, current, and usable.

1. Good coursework remains foundational.

Structured instruction explains principles, procedures, calculations, standards, technical requirements, and expectations. Established curricula, apprenticeship education, association programs, community colleges, company courses, and digital learning all contribute to a worker's development. The participating employers were not replacing established education. They were building on it, connecting broad trade preparation to company standards, current work methods, tools, technologies, safety practices, quality expectations, and upcoming project needs.

2. The strongest systems use blended learning.

They did not expect one learning modality to accomplish everything. They intentionally combined:

- Structured coursework and digital learning
- Instructor demonstration
- Coached practice and repetition
- Shop or fabrication experience
- Mock-ups and simulation
- Equipment practice
- Field application
- Feedback, review, and refresh

3. Capability assurance verifies the result.

Verified capability is current, documented, role-appropriate evidence that the worker can perform defined work to the required technical standard, safety standard, quality standard, and productive level that the project requires. Capability assurance connects standards, instruction, practice, demonstration, assessment, records, authorization, assignment, supervision, review, and refresh.

4. Verified capability leads somewhere.

Verification is not the endpoint. Its value becomes visible when employers connect achievement to:

- Real project assignments
- Additional responsibility
- Wage progression or compensation
- Recognition
- Longer or additional work opportunities
- Promotion
- Coaching and instruction
- Leadership

THE COMPLETE CHAIN

Coursework and curriculum › Blended learning and practice › Verified capability ›
Documented achievement › Real assignments and career opportunity

Eight Benefits to the Worker

1. More ways to earn.

The financial story is broader than hourly wage alone. Verified additional capability creates value through a higher wage rate or skill classification, more annual hours, overtime or premium assignments, access to more projects or project phases, promotion, and greater responsibility.

A national industrial contractor created a pathway for workers in scaffolding, painting, and insulation to move into pipefitting. The pathway addressed an employer need while creating access to higher-skilled work, greater continuity, and more career options. Workers were actively seeking the opportunity. Moving from a lower-paid or physically demanding role into a more advanced craft creates access to a higher wage rate and additional earning opportunities.

2. More hours and longer assignments.

This is the clearest immediate worker benefit. A worker who can contribute during more project phases can arrive earlier, stay later, move as the work changes, support an adjacent qualified scope, remain with the same crew, or transfer to another assignment within the employer. Participants valued continuity as one activity ended and another began, and connected that continuity with more annual hours and greater household stability.

3. Less need to travel for the next job.

When a contractor can redeploy a worker locally across phases, scopes, or projects, that reduces the need to travel elsewhere in search of the next available assignment.

4. More control over career direction.

Workers choose how to grow. The options form a branching career architecture, not one mandatory ladder:

- Deepen the primary craft
- Add one complementary skill
- Learn equipment operation
- Pursue advanced leadership or ownership
- Move toward another technical area
- Become a coach or assessor
- Enter crew or field leadership

Breadth follows depth, and it should be a meaningful choice, not a requirement imposed without purpose.

5. Achievement becomes visible and usable.

A worker's capability should not depend only on a supervisor remembering what that person once did. Strong systems document practical assessments, task sign-offs, credentials, equipment qualifications, relevant experience, employer authorizations, renewal dates, and conditions of use or supervision. That makes achievement more visible and portable within the employer's system, supporting assignments, recognition, refresh, and advancement.

6. A career that can evolve over time.

The soft-craft pathway shows how workers move from highly demanding work into another technical pathway as their abilities, interests, and career needs change. Physical career sustainability is a real opportunity in a system that keeps opening new routes.

7. Pride, belonging, ownership, and purpose.

Participants described several sources of fulfillment in this work:

- Visible skill progression
- Practical sign-offs and credentials
- Recognition ceremonies
- Remaining with the same crew
- Coach matching and mentorship
- Greater project ownership
- Being trusted with more responsibility
- Helping another worker develop

These are credible dimensions of pride, belonging, agency, and purpose.

8. The opportunity to give back.

A particularly strong long-term benefit is the learner-to-coach cycle. Workers who reach craft capability become coaches, instructors, assessors, and leaders. That gives an experienced worker another form of advancement while helping preserve and transfer the craft.

Workers should understand what they can learn, what ready performance looks like, who will coach and assess them, how achievement will be documented, and what that achievement can support.

Financial Opportunity, Hours, and Employment Continuity

“The more that you know, the better it is.”

The field rigger also explained that broader capability meant, “If I need to move something ... I can do it myself.”

FIELD RIGGER

“Never got laid off, always had work.”

This worker entered through plumbing, later developed pipefitting and welding capability, moved into specialized process work, and occasionally helped adjacent scopes.

LEADER OF A CALIFORNIA-BASED MECHANICAL CONTRACTOR

“It's not a job, it's a career.”

A regional mechanical contractor described going to extraordinary lengths to keep strong workers busy and able to provide for their families.

REGIONAL MECHANICAL CONTRACTOR

Workers who could perform selected electrical, structural, welding, and fabrication activities were “tremendously more valuable.”

ELECTRICAL CONTRACTOR

“If we had to lay them off during a slow period then they might not come back when we do have the work.”

A marine and heavy civil contractor said multiskilling improves a worker's utilization rate and retention across the course of a year and the seasonality of construction. A multiskilled worker can work year round.

LEADER OF A CONNECTICUT-BASED MARINE AND HEAVY CIVIL CONTRACTOR

Following the Work Instead of Waiting for It

When work winds down in one trade and ramps up in another, a qualified worker has an opportunity to add value in the new area and continue working rather than potentially being laid off.

TRAINING LEADER, NATIONAL INDUSTRIAL CONTRACTOR

A participating contractor created a path from scaffolding, painting, and insulation into pipefitting. The employer described strong worker demand for the opportunity and connected it to higher-skilled work, continued employment, and loyalty.

NATIONAL INDUSTRIAL CONTRACTOR

On one steel project, rain could stop welding, but it did not necessarily stop the worker. Qualified welders with broader capability could move into bolting, alignment, or other steel-erection work until welding resumed.

STEEL ERECTION PROJECT

When one utility crew's work slowed, a heavy civil contractor moved qualified workers to support grading work. The example illustrates how broader capability can help workers follow the available work rather than being limited to one assignment.

HEAVY CIVIL CONTRACTOR

At one industrial contractor, selected crews could erect the access, remove and replace piping, complete the weld, pressure-test the system, and apply the required coating. The example shows that multitasking can give workers a broader understanding of how an entire repair or installation comes together.

INDUSTRIAL CONTRACTOR

Career Choice, Mobility, and Advancement

“That's how I became a foreman.”

The electrical foreman preferred developing well-rounded electricians rather than pigeonholing people, and explained his own path in those terms.

ELECTRICAL FOREMAN

“Learn more, earn more.”

One contractor used this internal message. Workers were encouraged to pursue knowledge because it could support career and earnings growth.

PARTICIPATING CONTRACTOR

Workers were “knocking down our doors” for access to higher-skilled work.

At one contractor, workers in scaffolding, painting, and insulation were actively seeking the opportunity to move into pipefitting.

TRAINING LEADER

A heavy civil contractor emphasized that younger workers may not yet know which trade best fits them and need exposure to different kinds of work so they can discover their strengths and retain control over the direction of their careers.

HEAVY CIVIL CONTRACTOR

A multidecade employee described progressing from field craft work through labor leadership and general-superintendent responsibility into an ownership role.

MULTIDECADE EMPLOYEE

A regional interiors contractor reported that nearly all field leaders were developed internally. Workers could progress from entry preparation to craft capability, coaching, crew leadership, field leadership, and advanced development.

REGIONAL INTERIORS CONTRACTOR

Pride, Ownership, Engagement, and Satisfaction

“Letting our younger employees experience multiple trades makes them better employees, gives them exposure to move into other work, you get better safety because they understand the other work around them, improves quality.”

MARITIME AND HEAVY CIVIL CONTRACTOR IN NEW ENGLAND

A field carpenter called multiskilling “critical.”

The worker connected it to staying employed longer, feeling ownership of the project, remaining with the same crew, and reducing the need to retrain new people as scopes changed.

FIELD CARPENTER

“If a worker sees something not right ... they speak up.”

A field rigger said broader knowledge also supported peer-checking.

FIELD RIGGER

A plumbing field leader and a fire-protection crew said that repetitive assignment could reduce attention, while task variety could keep workers more engaged.

PLUMBING FIELD LEADER • FIRE-PROTECTION CREW

One contractor said broader capability changes a worker's perspective. A worker who understands both the current task and the next step is more likely to think about the completed product, not simply where one individual assignment ends.

PARTICIPATING CONTRACTOR

Practical assessments, sign-offs, credentials, recognition events, and progression standards made achievement visible. One contractor used recognition ceremonies to mark skill advancement.

ACROSS PARTICIPATING EMPLOYERS

For some workers, breadth is part of discovering where they fit best. Participating contractors described exposing newer workers to several kinds of work, observing their strengths, and then helping them deepen the craft or specialty that best matched their ability and interests.

ACROSS PARTICIPATING EMPLOYERS

Learning, Mentorship, and Giving Back

“You want to work for a company who is willing to invest in you.”

CRAFT WORKER

“Most of our people want to cross train.”

One instructor said many workers wanted broad knowledge and that demand sometimes exceeded the number of people the company could release from the field.

INSTRUCTOR

After workers reached craft capability at one contractor, many returned as coaches. Participants described coaching as a meaningful way to lead, contribute, and give back.

PARTICIPATING CONTRACTOR

A regional contractor used field practitioners to develop and update classes. Teaching transferred current field knowledge while developing the instructor's communication, coaching, confidence, and leadership.

REGIONAL CONTRACTOR

WHAT IT COMES DOWN TO

A capability-centered contractor can give workers both investment and choice. Build a strong primary craft, pursue selected additional capabilities, demonstrate what you can do, have that achievement recognized, and connect it to real assignments, compensation, responsibility, and advancement.

About the Series

This document is based on the six reports in Volume 1 of *Multiskilling in the U.S. Construction Industry: A Multi-Year Nationwide Research Series*. It summarizes findings across those reports. The full reports contain the methods, sample details, and limitations behind every result shown here.

Volume 1 includes the largest field-collected dataset assembled to date on multiskilling as practiced on active U.S. construction projects, along with controlled field trials, detailed project records, evidence on employer workforce capability systems, a review of peer-reviewed literature, and contractor safety context. The research was conducted by the Simplar Foundation with researchers at the University of Kansas, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and Arizona State University.

All reports and related resources: simplarfoundation.org/multiskilling

REPORTS IN VOLUME 1

- 01** Work-Time Utilization and Staffing Level Impacts in Construction Crews
- 02** Productivity in Multi-Trade Construction Workflows
- 03** Schedule Duration and Labor-Curve Outcomes
- 04** How Construction Employers Develop, Verify, and Sustain Workforce Capability
- 05** A Comprehensive Review of Prior Evidence
- 06** Contractor Safety Context

