



July 20, 2021

Maiea Sellers
Acting Regional Director
U.S. Economic Development Administration
915 Second Avenue, Room 1890
Seattle, WA 98174

Re: Application to the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) for the Valley Contractors Exchange "Construction Industry Workforce Initiative: Mobile Training Force"

Dear Ms. Sellers,

On behalf of the Chico Chamber of Commerce, we would like to express our support for the Valley Contractors Exchange (VCE) application to the U.S. Economic Development Administration to launch the "Construction Industry Workforce Initiative: Mobile Training Force."

The entire state of California is experiencing a dual challenge of a crisis-level housing shortage, paired with a need for thousands of additional construction workers. Nowhere is this challenge more acute than in Butte County and the surrounding communities affected by multiple large-scale wildfires.

In November 2018, the Camp Fire (FEMA DR-4407) decimated the Town of Paradise and surrounding unincorporated communities in Butte County, resulting in the loss of over 14,000 homes, including the bulk of the region's affordable housing stock. Nearly 95% of the Town of Paradise was lost in the Fire. The region was barely beginning rebuilding when the North Complex Fire burned through neighboring Berry Creek in Butte County in 2020. To date, just over 1,300 homes have been rebuilt, as General Contractors continue to be stifled by the unavailability of subcontractors to complete many of the necessary tasks.

Furthermore, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have had a significant impact on the regional workforce, which has historically relied heavily on the retail, hospitality, and tourism industries, which were among the hardest hit by lengthy Shelter-in-Place orders.

The success of the region's recovery and rebuilding hinges on the availability of an adequate construction workforce. To address this, VCE's "Construction Industry Workforce Initiative: Mobile Training Force" will literally be a mobile classroom that brings the construction industry to the potential workforce. The MTF will

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be a Ford F-250 with a lumber rack pulling a 24-foot trailer decked out as a mobile classroom. The MTF has a 4-pronged approach:

- Mobile construction introduction classes and camps at local junior high schools, high schools, continuation schools, after school programs, Boys & Girls Clubs, and other youth and at-risk population locations
- 80-hour college-accredited basic construction training done on site in the communities where the trainees live/work
- Upskilling of the current construction workforce, including concrete finishing, mechanical, electrical, and plumbing training
- Safety training for the current construction workforce, which usually must be done offsite and at a cost of hours of potentially productive work time

This project is an industry-driven effort to address the critical need to increase the current construction industry workforce. Due to the rural nature of much of the North State, it is necessary to have a mobile approach to this initiative. The project will also have a focus on equity and reaching the region's underserved communities, creating pathways to well-paying, upwardly mobile careers.

According to the Camp Fire Regional Economic Impact Analysis released earlier this year, the recovery of the regional economy is inextricably linked to the successful rebuilding of the affordable housing. The MTF will be a key component in filling the region's much-needed construction industry positions and ensuring continued building in the region.

The Chico Chamber is in support of this worthwhile effort and to partner with the Valley Contractors Exchange to ensure the long-term success of increasing the number of construction workers. Thank you for your consideration of this very important project.

Sincerely,

Katy Thoma
President/CEO

cc: Valley Contractors Exchange

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