



Women in Construction Lunch Report

Showcasing best practice and building collaboration

29 January 2026

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Acknowledgement of Country

The Government of South Australia acknowledges Aboriginal peoples as the state's first peoples and nations and recognise them as the traditional owners, occupants and ongoing custodians of the lands and waters in South Australia. We further pay our respects to their Elders past and present and recognise the vital role they play in supporting their communities.

We further acknowledge and respect the leadership and profound commitment of Aboriginal women in improving the lives of their communities, and those of the broader South Australian community, through their tireless advocacy. Aboriginal women leaders play an important role in advancing the interests of girls and women through generously sharing wisdom and culture and through their continued advocacy over years, decades and lifetimes.



1 Executive summary

Construction is the third largest industry in South Australia and a significant contributor to the state's economy. It is also an industry experiencing significant skill shortages in trade and technical roles.

Construction is also a male-dominated industry, with women making up as little as 4% of trade roles in South Australia. The *South Australian Economic Statement* highlights the importance of social inclusion and diversity for a successful economy.

In July 2024 more than 100 stakeholders across male-dominated industries came together for the Driving Women's Participation in South Australian Industries Forum, to identify barriers and challenges for women in these industries. The outcomes of this forum have led to further work within a number of industries to progress the increase in recruitment and retention of women with an initial focus on construction.

In October 2025 the Minister for Women met with key construction stakeholders to discuss how the industry can work collaboratively and strengthen the work already being undertaken.

To further support this work, on 29 January 2026 the Minister for Women hosted the Women in Construction Lunch, which showcased best-practice initiatives and work within the sector to support women to enter and remain in the industry.

The showcase was designed to introduce industry stakeholders to work already happening in the sector and identify opportunities for scaling and for collaborative engagement.

Key themes emerging from the event included:

- Women remain an untapped resource in the construction sector.
- The industry is aware of the barriers and challenges faced by women.
- Organisations already know what works to improve recruitment and retention.
- There is an impetus for progress and change.
- There is a need for sustainable and meaningful collaboration to systematise change.

Office for Women will continue to partner with the Department for State Development, using the findings from this event to develop actions aimed at increasing women's attraction and retention within the South Australian construction industry, in line with the implementation of the construction workforce strategy.



2 Context

On a national level, according to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA), men make up 79% of the construction industry, and women make up 21%, making it the most male-dominated industry in Australia.

According to the Department of State Development (DSD), in South Australia women make up only 12% of the construction workforce, with an estimated 4% of women being trade employees. This percentage is across an estimated 27,600 businesses in the state, with around 90,000 workers, 84% of whom work full-time.

The DSD figures indicate that the construction industry contributes \$11,747 million to the South Australian economy. As the sector grows, a further 20,000 workers will be required for major projects, with almost half of the demand driven by the residential sector.

2.1 Women's Equality Blueprint

The State Government's [Women's Equality Blueprint 2023-2026](#) includes four priority areas to help progress South Australia's vision as a fair and inclusive state, in which women and girls are empowered and can actively and equally participate in all aspects of community life. The priority areas are Safety and Security; Leadership and Participation; Economic Wellbeing; and Health.

The Leadership and Participation priority takes focus on increasing women's access to the economy, community, and public life. Increasing women's representation in leadership roles requires a focus on breaking down barriers to inclusion and improving diversity at the highest levels. Gender segregation exists both at a broader level, with some industries, such as construction, being more male-dominated, and within industries, where women are overrepresented in administrative roles and underrepresented in skilled, technical, and leadership roles.

The Economic Wellbeing priority focuses on economic security for women, including the gender pay gap. One of the causes of the gender pay gap is gender segregation in industries and roles, with male-dominated industries attracting higher average salaries than female-dominated industries.

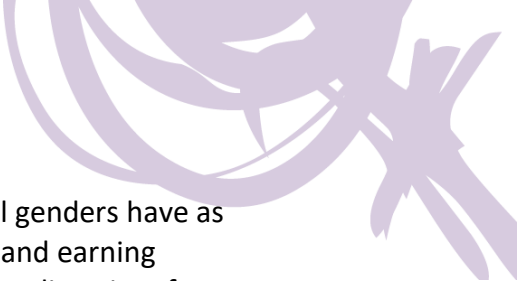
2.2 State Government plans

The [South Australian Economic Statement](#) provides a framework for growing and strengthening the state's economy. The vision for the Statement includes three key economic pillars: smart, sustainable, and inclusive.

The Department of State Development [Construction Workforce Plan](#), released in February 2026, provides a framework for building a long-term, sustainable skilled workforce within the sector. The Plan seeks to achieve three outcomes: growing the pipeline of workers; widening the pool of workers; and keeping and developing existing talent in the industry.

2.3 Summary

Building an inclusive economy requires increasing everyone's participation, both in the



economy and in broader society. This includes ensuring people of all genders have as many economic opportunities as possible, with better employment and earning outcomes. The Statement recognises that the economy benefits from diversity of experiences and perspectives. Increasing the number of women in construction enhances diversity and is vital to addressing current skills shortages.

Together, these strategies provide a foundation for breaking down barriers to women's participation in the construction industry and building a pipeline of women and girls to improve their economic opportunities and sustainably grow the industry.

3 Work to date

On 3 July 2024 the Minister for Women hosted the Driving Women's Participation in South Australian Industries Forum, focusing on the opportunities, challenges, and way forward for South Australia's key male-dominated industries. The forum was attended by nearly 100 industry leaders and key public sector agency representatives from industries including construction, as well as manufacturing, mining, defence, space, cybersecurity, and renewables.

The forum discussed the key barriers and challenges for women in these industries and identified some of the levers of change. These discussions highlighted the need for industry and government to work together, and a number of recommendations for next steps were made in the [Summary Report](#) published on the Office for Women website.

Since the forum, the Office for Women has been engaging across government and industry in many of the male-dominated industries represented.

On 13 October 2025 the Minister hosted a Construction Roundtable with key construction stakeholders to identify and develop next steps for the industry. Themes from the Roundtable included:

- The importance of focusing both on attraction and retention of women in the industry.
- Focusing on schools to encourage girls to consider careers in the industry.
- Linking employers with training and support initiatives to enable culture change.
- The need to change culture within, and perceptions of, the industry.

One of the actions of the Roundtable was to hold the Women in Construction Lunch, to provide additional opportunities to showcase best practice and allow industry stakeholders to network.



4 Event summary

The Honourable Katrine Hildyard, MP, Minister for Women hosted the Women in Construction Lunch on Thursday 29 January 2026, at the Terrace Hotel, Adelaide. The event was facilitated by the Office for Women, Department of Human Services. It showcased best practice initiatives for the recruitment and retention of women in the construction sector. The aims of the event were to:

- Share best practice initiatives and successes with other members of the sector to equip them with practices and policies that can be utilised in their workplaces.
- Foster collaboration between sector organisations through networking.

The event was emceed by Ruth Ambler, Deputy Chief Executive, Department of Human Services, and included a keynote address from the Minister for Women.

The event was attended by more than 50 people from across the sector, including businesses, peak bodies, and government.

Five presentations showcased a range of initiatives across the sector.

4.1 Presentation one: Construction Industry Training Board

Holly Willcox, Chief Executive Officer of the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), presented on the role of CITB in building a skilled, diverse and future-ready construction workforce for South Australia.

CITB has committed to its inaugural three-year training plan, providing a more strategic and long-term approach to workforce development in response to growing skills shortages and rising demand across the construction sector. The shift to triennial planning reflects the need for sustained investment, certainty for industry, and stronger alignment between training pathways and workforce demand.

One of CITB's key workforce priorities is increasing women's participation in construction, where women remain significantly underrepresented despite making up around half of the broader labour force. CITB commissioned research shows that this underrepresentation is not driven by a lack of awareness or capability, but by a combination of systemic, cultural and structural barriers that affect attraction, retention and progression.

Holly highlighted that women face persistent challenges including masculine industry norms, exclusionary practices, stereotypes, poor workplace culture, and limited access to supportive networks and progression pathways. These barriers operate across the training system, workplaces and broader industry structures, requiring coordinated and sustained action rather than isolated initiatives.

CITB emphasises that improving participation is not optional if the industry is to address long-term workforce capacity and sustainability challenges. Through its funding levers, education pathways and partnerships, CITB seeks to support industry to improve attraction and retention outcomes and to build workplaces where women can enter,



remain and progress.

Over the 2026–2028 period, CITB will invest more than \$113 million in workforce development initiatives. This includes strengthened education and pre-employment pathways, enhanced support for apprentices and employers, targeted initiatives to support underrepresented groups, and redesigned funding models that improve transitions from school to work and into sustained employment.

With an increased focus on diversity and pipeline building, CITB acknowledges that meaningful change cannot be achieved alone. It calls on industry, employers, training providers and community partners to work collectively to reshape construction in South Australia — building a more inclusive, resilient and sustainable workforce for the future.

4.2 Presentation two: Big Sister Program

Gaynor Maree, Mentor Lead, Big Sister Program for Electrical Trades Union of Australia (ETU), presented on the program.

Highlighted in the presentation was a heartfelt and moving story about a young woman who faced difficulties rebuilding her future after divorce, with two children and no job. Through entering an electrical pre-employment program, she was able to gain confidence, curiosity, build economic independence, skill ownership and pride. Today, that young woman now stands in the world differently and her name is Gaynor Maree.

The Big Sister program exists because isolation is the problem, not talent, and because the culture was not built with women in mind. Additionally, women do not leave because they do not know the work, it is because they are working and trying to change culture alone.

The Big Sister program connects women electrical apprentices with trained, experienced tradeswomen mentors in the construction sector. Through a combination of face-to-face mentoring and ongoing connection, apprentices receive peer support and guidance to navigate the systems and expectations of the industry. Engaging with employers is a critical part of the program, supporting workplaces to better retain women on the tools. There is strong encouragement for other employers to reach out and be involved in the program.

4.3 Presentation three: Born to Build and Rise

Cassandra Green, Program Manager of Born to Build, for the Master Builders Association of SA, presented on both the Born to Build Program and Rise. The programs target the industry pipeline from students potentially interested in the industry, to current employees.

The Born to Build program is an initiative of the Master Builders Association of South Australia, supported by the State Government of South Australia, focused on educating and inspiring young people, women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to explore the exciting opportunities in the building and construction industry. The program has partnered with 37 schools, engaging students and giving them an opportunity to work with tools in a safe environment.



The Born to Build program engaged in 38 career expos in 2025, speaking to people who may not have considered trades, as well as engaging with 18 sporting clubs, using the connection between sporting people and tradespeople. Through these partnerships and exposures there has been a 138% increase in engagement in the program from 2023 to 2025.

The Rise program is free for anyone currently working in the building and construction industry, on the tools or otherwise, offering mentorship and support from industry coaches. Rise recognises that while people may begin in the building and construction industry, retention is just as important. By providing guidance and support in a range of areas from personal, wellbeing or pressure challenges, women and men can feel more supported. Since July 2023, there were over 1,200 of these coaching sessions held, with 245 accessed by women.

4.4 Presentation four: National Association of Women in Construction

Rachael Sharp, SA President of National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC), presented on the work of NAWIC. It is a not-for-profit and the peak body championing the diverse collective of great people doing great work in construction.

NAWIC is led locally by a team of passionate volunteers and supported nationally by a small team of employees who all strive to help champion and empower women in the construction and related industries to reach their full potential.

NAWIC recognises the need for a fair, respectful and inclusive workplace culture and welcomes government and industry to join and support their work. NAWIC SA run a Leadership Development Program and Mentoring Program as well as host events across Professional Development, Networking, Awards and an International Women's Day lunch.

4.5 Presentation five: Building Women SA

Emma Sckrabei and Cassie Manser, co-founders of Building Women SA, presented on the work of the organisation.

Building Women SA is a fully female-led, guided and directed not-for-profit organisation focused on three pillars: education, empowerment, and employment. Its goal is to ensure that roles in the industry are the best fit for women, rather than making women fit into roles. Its pre-employment program had a 100% completion rate with 15 women starting the program and 15 finishing. The ages of the women completing the course ranged from 17-44.

Currently Building Women SA is seeking to engage with smaller organisations (tier two and three employees) to build safe and inclusive workplaces to increase retention. This will be achieved through a six-month program with a social framework and mentoring and coaching opportunities. This program recognises that smaller organisations often lack the resources of larger industry players.

Cassie and Emma highlighted a call to action for organisations to partner with Building Women SA to make systemic changes. They indicated the potential for establishing a future sponsorship model to support their programs to challenge what construction is,



what is possible and what it's like to be a woman in the industry.

The presentation also highlighted the benefits of construction industry gender employment targets, providing a tangible action enforcing change in the industry. This goes beyond what is currently possible in South Australia.

5 Themes

The key themes that emerged from the presentations were:

- Women remain an untapped resource in the construction sector.
- The industry is aware of the barriers and challenges faced by women.
- Organisations already know what works to improve recruitment and retention.
- There is an impetus for progress and change.
- There is a need for sustainable and meaningful collaboration to systematise change.

5.1 Women as an untapped resource

In an industry experiencing skills shortages, there is a need to focus on attraction and retention and build a future pipeline to ensure sustainable growth in the sector. The presentations highlighted how women, as half of South Australia's workforce, are underrepresented.

For some women and girls, work in the construction industry is not something that is considered and 'ruled out' – many are never exposed to the concept. For those who do consider it, there is an overall negative perception of the industry, sometimes driven by outdated stereotypes, sometimes driven by knowledge of ongoing issues in the sector.

Increasing interest and demand among women to work in the sector is key to building a sustainable workforce. This requires a focus on attraction and retention. Other barriers also remain and need to be addressed to ensure women who are interested can successfully maintain roles in the industry.

5.2 Understanding the barriers

It is clear from the presentations that the barriers to women's participation in the construction sector are well known and documented.

The largest barriers for women continue to be:

- **Unsafe work environments:** harassment, bullying, and other unsafe work practices continue to persist in the construction industry, and women are often unsupported or even penalised for speaking up.
- **Poor workplace culture:** stereotypes, microaggressions, and other poor workplace practices continue to demoralise women and disincentivise them from continuing to work in the industry.
- **Lack of facilities:** a lack of appropriate – or sometimes, any – toilets, and inappropriate personal protective equipment impacts on the ability of women to work on construction sites.
- **Lack of flexibility:** shifts that are incompatible with school and other caring



responsibilities, combined with a lack of understanding and support for adjusting times to work around needs.

Overlaying these barriers is a general expectation that women in construction roles need to 'fix' these problems. Women are expected to 'tough it out' or push for culture change, without any individual or structural supports.

5.3 Understanding what works

As well as knowing the challenges, the industry has a clear understanding of the ways in which these challenges can be overcome.

They key strategies include:

- **Focus on safe workplaces and culture change:** embedding zero tolerance for bad behaviour, employer incentives, training and education.
- **Building mentors and allies:** bringing leaders, particularly men, along on the journey to support and empower women in the sector.
- **Providing accessible facilities and equipment:** the installation of toilets for women, including with period products and disposal facilities, gender-appropriate personal protective equipment.
- **Increasing flexibility:** shift timing adjustments to accommodate women's caring and parenting responsibilities.

There is also an increased focus on the 'pipeline', from recruitment processes to engaging with women and girls in schools.

The presentations demonstrated many of these best practice initiatives, where organisations are working hard to support and empower women in the industry. Progress is being made, albeit in ad hoc ways.

5.4 Need for collaboration

While there are individual organisations making progress and leading the way to support and empower women in the industry, there is an opportunity to build a system of support through collaboration and coordination across the whole industry.

It is vital to harness the progress being made by individual organisations, to bring different parts of the sector together and create a system that supports and empowers women together. Industry, government, and industry peak bodies all play a role in making change.

Collaboration and systematisation are the only ways to affect sustainable change in the sector. Bringing together government, industry, leaders, volunteers, peak bodies, and passionate people in the community can build momentum and change the sector for the better.

5.5 Impetus for change

The industry is experiencing serious skills shortages. The Department of State Development's Construction Workforce Plan estimates that South Australia requires 20,000 workers to progress major projects. This demand, primarily driven by the housing



sector, requires a diverse workforce to ensure a sustainable pipeline now and into the future.

This need provides a foundation for change. There are serious risks of not having enough people to fill needed skilled and technical roles in the sector. A strong demand is a motivator that can be harnessed to progress change.

6 Feedback

After the event, Office for Women sought feedback from attendees, asking three questions:

- What was one new insight or initiative you gained from the Women in Construction lunch?
- Based on what you heard at the lunch, what is one action you might take, or already have taken, back to your organisation to support women in skilled and trade roles?
- How would you like to see Office for Women work together with your organisation to progress change?

The responses received included insights into successes and challenges, and ideas for progressing the work.

6.1 What was one new insight or initiative you gained from the Women in Construction lunch?

Key themes from the responses included:

- An appreciation for the presentations, in particular NAWIC and the Big Sister Program.
- The need for a broader range of stakeholders to be invited to learn about the initiatives and organisations presented.
- The importance of the initiatives showcased and their continuation.

6.2 Based on what you heard at the lunch, what is one action you might take, or already have taken, back to your organisation to support women in skilled and trade roles?

Key themes from the responses included:

- Organisations already actively supporting women in the industry to showcase their work and build momentum.
- The need to further share the initiatives showcased with the broader sector.
- The importance of culture change as the first step, to ensure businesses are safe before recruiting more women into the industry.



6.3 How would you like to see Office for Women work together with your organisation to progress change?

Key themes from the responses included:

- Having accessible information in one place for businesses to find initiatives and understand where the gaps are. Importantly, the feedback notes the focus should be on growing the number of women in the sector, not competing for a small pool of candidates.
- The importance of building a pipeline to ensure more women are coming into the industry.
- The need for broader and more diverse audiences in sector engagement, in particular to ensure lived experience is highlighted.
- The need for informational materials, as well as research and data, available for the sector.

7 The way forward

The work showcased by the presenters highlighted the need to expand on and systematise existing work, to ensure consistency across the entire industry. Based on the presentations at the event, Office for Women recognises that progressing this goal requires the collaboration between industry, government, and peak bodies. Office for Women recommends an increase in collaboration, information sharing, and systematising best practice in the industry.

Within the next 12 months, Office for Women will continue to partner with the Department for State Development and use the findings from this event to develop actions aimed at increasing women's attraction and retention within the SA construction industry in line with the implementation of the construction workforce strategy. This will provide a foundation for longer-term work.

7.2 Contact us

Email DHSOFWGenderEquity@sa.gov.au

Appendix 1: Speaker details



The Honourable Katrine Hildyard MP, Minister for Women



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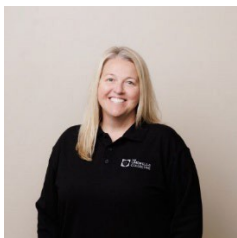


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Appendix 2: Resources, research papers and references

Resources:

Driving Women's Participation in South Australian Industries Forum: Summary Report, Office for Women, July 2024, <https://officeforwomen.sa.gov.au/womens-policy/participation>

Construction Workforce Plan, Department of State Development, February 2026, https://statedevelopment.sa.gov.au/workforce-development-and-migration/construction-workforce?mc_cid=98ac791305&mc_eid=a751cc5d53

2026-2028 Training Plan, Construction Industry Training Board, <https://citb.org.au/2026-2028-training-plan/>

Big Sister Program, <https://bigsisterprogram.com.au/>

Born to Build SA, Apprenticeships & Trade Training, <https://www.born2build.com.au/>

RISE, Master Builders Association of South Australia, <https://rise.mbasa.com.au/>

HiViZ Women Building SA Membership – Master Builders Association of South Australia, <https://mbasa.com.au/membership/types-of-members/>

National Association of Women in Construction, <https://www.nawic.com.au/>

Equal Opportunity SA, 'We're Equal', <https://www.equalopportunity.sa.gov.au/were-equal>

Research papers:

Attraction and Retention of Youth to the Building and Construction Industry, Construction Industry Training Board and University of South Australia, May 2024, https://citb.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/CITB_UniSA-Research-Summary.pdf



Building the Future Workforce and Breaking the Ground, Construction Industry Training Board and Adelaide University, February 2026, <https://citb.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/CITB-Mature-Age-and-Female-Apprentices-Studies-Summary.pdf>

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Australia's Gender Equality Scorecard: Key Results from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency's Employer Census 2024–25, November 2025, <https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/WGEA-Gender-Equality-Scorecard-2024-25.pdf>

South Australia's Construction Workforce Snapshot, Department of State Development, February 2026, <https://statedevelopment.sa.gov.au/workforce-development-and-migration/construction-workforce#snapshot>