NECA/IBEW Local 48 has a long history of African-American participation in the membership and the leadership of the local, as well as an active Electrical Workers’ Minority Caucus (EWMC).

Historically, they enrolled between 1 – 4 African-American apprentices annually and, though they wanted to improve on this number, it was not until they realized, in 2010, that they had not accepted any new African American apprentices, in a community that is 6% African-American, that they developed what is now known as the Wire a Light workshop.

To address this disparity in opportunity, the NECA/IBEW Electrical Training Center, IBEW Local 48, their EWMC partnered with Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc. (OTI), an organization that serves women in the trades, and Constructing Hope (CH), serving men of color, low-income individuals and people with a legal history. Together, they developed an innovative outreach activity, the Wire A Light Workshop, to introduce potential African American applicants to the electrical trade through hands-on experience and engage them in next steps designed to increase the number of African American apprentices. Realizing the women would feel more invited if there was an event held just for them, the program offered two workshops, one targeted to women and the other to men. (note: typically workshops for women attract 12-18 women and for men attract 25-35 attendees.)

Flyers were created featuring photos of African-American electricians, and inviting the community to the workshop. Flyers were
sent to African-American churches and community groups, EWMC members and distributed at OTI and CH orientations. A display ad was run in the local African-American newspaper. EWMC members discussed the event on Black-centered public radio program and OTI posted it on their FaceBook page. Social Media worked like a firestorm – lots of shares and people in the trade talking about it with their friends/networks.

The workshops were held in an area of town that, until gentri-
fication, was historically African-American, and still had a high African-American population. The workshops were designed to de-mystify the idea of working with electricity, something that is intimidating for most people, by getting attendees to wire up a simple light and a switch, and learn that they can safely and successfully work with electricity. While the workshops were targeted to African Americans, all attendees were welcome.

The NECA/IBEW Local 48 Electrical Apprenticeship led the workshops, with help from African-American apprentices and the EWMC. Oregon Tradeswomen Inc. and Constructing Hope were there (and hosted the workshops) to talk about their pre-apprenticeship programs and the service they offered to help African-American, and other men and women, prepare for and enter apprenticeship. The African American apprentices spoke briefly about their experiences and answered questions. The NECA/IBEW Local 48 Electrical Apprenticeship provided more detailed information about the career, applying for apprenticeship, qualifications, and where to build math skills.

The number of African-American apprentices quickly grew and now is at 4.3%; 21 men and 7 women. They are still not to their desired 6% goal, which is the area’s demographic representation, but making steady progress. Additionally, they have 13.25% female apprentices and 21.8% minority overall apprentices.

ROD BELISLE
Director of the NECA-IBEW
Electrical Training Center

“The NECA-IBEW Electrical Training Center is extremely committed to diversity and representing the community in which we work and live in. Oregon Tradeswomen Inc. has been a critical partner in making that a reality. They have assisted us in creating an environment that is welcoming and open to all members of the community, regardless of their background or experience with the IBEW or trades in general. They, along with Constructing Hope, have provided us a platform where we can present our trade in an inviting and welcoming environment and show the public that there is certainly a place for them at the table. We are far from done completing our goals, but we know that with OTI and CH by our side, we are well on our way to making great things happen in new and creative ways and providing opportunities for many members of our community that may otherwise be standing on the sidelines wondering how to get involved.”
ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE ELECTRICAL WORKERS MINORITY CAUCUS IN DIVERSIFYING APPRENTICESHIP

The Electrical Workers Minority Caucus (EWMC) was formed in 1974 in response to widespread discrimination in the electrical industry. This discrimination was incumbent in the building trades as a whole at that time. The EWMC since its inception has fostered diversity, inclusion, education and awareness about discrimination within the union, leadership development, equitable treatment and racial harmony both nationally and at the local level. Portland’s Gus Miller chapter provides an important vehicle for mentorship of minority apprentices and outreach to the community. http://www.ibew-ewmc.com

“I love being a tradeswoman and wouldn’t trade it for the world. If you like to build things or work with your hands this is definitely the field to do it! OTI is an awesome program and I appreciate everything OTI has done for me.”

Kennitha W. entered OTI’s pre-apprenticeship program in spring of 2012 as a 30 year old single mom with three kids, and by July was working as an Electrical Apprentice. She is now a Journey-level Electrician making $40.20 per hour plus benefits. She is a very active member and a part of the executive board of the Local 48 Gus Miller EWMC Chapter as well as Vice-President of the National EWMC Reach-out and Engage Next-gen Electrical Workers. She also recently became the Shop Steward for On Electric Group’s South Waterfront project.

She helped run the Wire A Light Workshops as a role-model and EWMC leader. She has later served as a mentor to those that pursue the apprenticeship, “The Wire a Light Workshop kind of shows people a little about what being an electrician is about. Most are just so afraid of electricity that they don’t give it a second thought. I think it gives them a little hands-on experience and hopefully shows them that this field is not impossible.”
KEY STEPS:

1. Targeted outreach with photos of the target audience.
2. Event information is sent to organizations and news media the targeted audience trusts, and posted where the desired audience will see it.
3. Postings in social media attracted many attendees.
4. Event presenters include members of the targeted audience.
5. There are several clear next steps for the attendees to take; in this case, entering pre-apprenticeship, or applying to become industry material handlers or apprentices.
6. Both the NECA/IBEW Local 48 Electrical Apprenticeship and the Pre-Apprenticeship Programs followed up with the attendees, as well as those who registered for the event but did not come, to see if they had any questions and to invite them to participate.
7. Mentoring of new apprentices was provided by the EWMC, showing the importance of internal union/apprenticeship committees with a diversity purpose.

CLINT VALITON
Vice President,
On Electric Group,
an MDU Resources Group, Inc. Company

“It is great to be part of a team with such an inclusive culture. Everyone is focused on others’ success regardless of gender or race. It truly is about making one another better! We are fortunate to partner with OTI to continue the challenge of finding the next wave of talent in our industry!”

This briefing paper was prepared by CONNIE ASH BROOK of OREGON TRADESWOMEN, INC. on behalf of the NATIONAL CENTER FOR WOMEN’S EQUITY IN APPRENTICESHIP AND EMPLOYMENT with support from the U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR OFFICE OF APPRENTICESHIP.