

PUBLIC WORKS 101

Question: What is “public works”?

Answer: “Public works” is the name given to a variety of functions that keep our communities running smoothly and safely so we have safe drinking water, safe highways and bridges, beautiful and well-maintained local parks, and effective collection and recycling of trash. Public works represents the foundational building blocks of civilization — our infrastructure.

Question: What does the term “community infrastructure” mean?

Answer: Community infrastructure refers to the resources that are most essential for a town or city to ensure its citizens’ economic and social well-being.

Question: Who are the people who make public works possible?

Answer: People employed in public works are local individuals who range from those who started working in the field right out of high school to those with professional certifications or advanced degrees. Public works departments in typical, mid-sized cities employ as many as 200 to 500 people from all educational backgrounds who make anywhere from \$23,000 to \$156,000 a year.

Question: What do public works functions include?

Answer: Public works functions include:

- Water distribution and treatment – everything from safe, clean drinking water to treatment of wastewater
- Solid waste management – collecting, processing, and disposing of recyclables, yard waste, and trash
- Engineering and technology – design of buildings, water and sewer systems, roads and bridges, etc.
- Facilities – managing and maintaining government offices, power plants, water treatment facilities, equipment, and fleet facilities
- Streets – repairing street surfaces, placing road signs, managing street cleaning, and implementing deicing and snow removal
- Traffic and transportation – designing roadways and operating mass transportation systems
- Construction management – overseeing all phases of construction on public structures, such as government offices, libraries, police stations, recreation centers, etc.
- Fleet services – repairing and maintaining cars, light and heavy trucks, and all municipal vehicles and equipment
- Parks and grounds – maintaining public parks and other green spaces available for public use
- Emergency management – coordinating with other first responders to emergency events to place barricades, remove debris, provide and operate heavy equipment

Instructions: You can use *this information in several ways:*

- As “talking points” — sample answers to questions you might be asked at a career fair or other school/community function
- As a guide for creating your own short presentation about public works and APWA outreach programs for your chapter’s speakers bureau
- As a stand-alone handout or page on your chapter’s website; titles might range from “About Public Works” to “Frequently Asked Questions”

Italicized information indicates areas to customize based on local information.

You can also use the template provided on the *Handouts and Resources CD-ROM*, entitled **Local Public Works Fact Sheet**, to craft a story of your local public works history.

Question: Why don't we hear more about the people who work in public works?

Answer: Those in public works careers are really the “behind-the-scenes” heroes of our nation. We rarely think about how we get clean drinking water, safe roads and bridges, and well-maintained parks and city buildings. These public works professionals:

- Provide and maintain public safety, health, and vitality in a community
- Serve as environmental stewards, protecting natural resources for future generations
- Keep our economy moving on the roads, bridges, waterways, and rails that get products from supplier to customer. Public works often ensures that the power, water, manpower, and raw materials needed to produce our nation's products are where they need to be when they need to be there.

Question: Is public works solely a government function?

Answer: Public works services are provided by public entities, private enterprises, or (often) a combination of approaches on behalf of and subject to federal and state regulations. Nearly 20,000 U.S. communities provide public works services to meet the needs of their citizens; however, the level of services as well as how they are provided and by whom varies from one community to the next.

Question: Why is it so important for today's high school students to choose public works careers?

Answer: Today's public works workforce is nearing retirement: the average age range of all employees working in the public works sector of the economy is 45 to 55. In addition, our nation's infrastructure — its roads, bridges, water and waste disposal systems — are all in serious need of rebuilding. Rebuilding our nation's infrastructure requires a massive influx of trained, career-oriented youth at all levels of educational achievement. In its *2009 Infrastructure Report Card*, the American Society of Civil Engineers gave America an overall grade of “D” and estimates that the five-year investment in people, materials, and technology needed to raise that grade is \$2.2 trillion.

Question: Do you have to have a college degree to get a job in public works?

Answer: Public works jobs offer good-paying, stable, career-building opportunities to those with high school diplomas as well as those with engineering and/or advanced degrees.

Question: What is APWA?

Answer: The American Public Works Association (APWA) is an international educational and professional association of public agencies, private-sector companies, and individuals dedicated to providing high-quality public works goods and services. APWA is a 501(c) (3) charitable organization, incorporated in the state of Illinois. The Association boasts a diversified membership of approximately 29,000 and 63 chapters throughout North America.



Question: How does APWA promote a greater understanding of public works activities and career opportunities in my community?

Answer: The APWA [*name of community/chapter*] chapter has _____ members who:

- help foster knowledge about public works — its role in our community and career opportunities available — through age-appropriate educational materials and career fair participation;
- support local school-to-work programs with job shadowing and internships opportunities with public works entities;
- offer speakers and demonstrations about myriad public works topics at parent-teacher organization meetings, career educational conferences, and at community events;
- host tours of public facilities (e.g., water treatment plants, recycling centers, etc.) in the community;
- sponsor other community outreach activities, such as:



LOCAL PUBLIC WORKS FACT SHEET

for [Insert Name of Your Community/Area]

Instructions: Use this template to gather local public works information. Be sure to include information about real public works jobs and challenges in your community. Directions for completing each section of this template are in italics below; an example position description and other info to customize appear as shaded text.

About Your Local Public Works Department

(Describe the size and scope of local public works department efforts. Provide brief bio info on the director and how the department is organized.)

Local Infrastructure Condition

(Describe how roads, bridges, water and sewer systems, transportation, and fleet services “stack up” compared to the rest of the state or nation.)

Local Infrastructure Projects

(List and briefly describe current projects in the planning, design, or construction phase that involve improvements to the area infrastructure. Provide links to websites and/or contact information for those involved in these projects.)

Local Work-Based Learning Opportunities for High School Students

- Field Trips Offered:
- Internships and/or Job Shadowing Programs Offered:

Local Job Opportunities:

Contact *[where to apply]*:

Positions Currently Available:

[See Sample Fleet Administrator; provide current examples as well as a link to where updated listings can be found on the web]

SAMPLE FLEET ADMINISTRATOR



Position available with the General Services Department, Central Fleet Management Division, City of Kansas City, Missouri. Provides consolidated, centralized fleet management and maintenance services to various City departments. Services include lifecycle management, specification and design, acquisition and maintenance of all fleet. Manages more than 3,200 units and 14 fuel stations. Requires an accredited bachelor's degree in engineering, business or public administration or other appropriate disciplines and eight (8) years of experience in varied public or private sector programs, with at least four (4) years of progressively responsible administrative and supervisory experience. Experience managing a major automotive facility or large fleet maintenance or leasing operation strongly preferred.

Please send your résumé and cover letter with current salary IMMEDIATELY to: Robert E. Slavin, President; Slavin Management Consultants; 3040 Holcomb Bridge Road, Suite A-1; Norcross, Georgia 30071. Visit website: www.slavinweb.com. Email: slavin@bellsouth.net. Fax: (770) 416-0848. Phone: (770) 449-4656.

The City of Kansas City, MO, is an equal opportunity employer committed to a diverse workforce.

How Applications are Evaluated/Hiring Policies

1. Describe the basis used for evaluating applications and submission requirements, including background checks, pre-employment screening tests, residency requirements, etc.
2. Explain how and where applications need to be submitted.
3. List normal working hours/days of the week
4. State EEO policy and policy of nondiscrimination on the basis of disability.

"WHAT'S MY BEST FIT" CROSS REFERENCE CHART

Pick the statements that best describe your talents.	Speaking to Students	Speaking to Adults	Coordinating Activities Geared for Teachers, Parents, or Other Members	Working a Career Fair Booth	Coordinating Publicity and Communication	Coordinating Student Workplace Programs	Hosting Student Workplace or Professional Development Programs
I am outgoing, eager to meet new people.	X	X		X			X
I enjoy public speaking.	X	X		X			X
I have a sense of humor that appeals to kids.	X			X			X
I am highly organized and able to manage projects.			X		X	X	X
I can handle job interruptions to respond to school requests.			X		X	X	
I am able to leave work at least a few times a year for outreach activities.	X	X					
I am proficient at word processing.					X		
I have experience with, or desire to learn, media relations.					X		
I have an aptitude for teaching, explaining, or giving demonstrations.	X	X				X	X
I am well connected to others in public works departments, including decision makers.			X		X	X	