

GROWING THE ENGINEERING WORKFORCE

Engineering firms need access to a pool of talented, highly skilled workers. ACEC supports policies that help engineering firms recruit and retain employees, including legislation to expand the number of engineering students and employment-based visas and green cards that enable firms to hire global talent when qualified Americans are not available.

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that the engineering workforce is already at full employment and employment in architecture and engineering occupations is projected to grow six percent from 2020 to 2030, which is insufficient to meet demand. ACEC's analysis of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) finds that we will need an additional 82,000 engineers and other professionals to deliver the projects funded under the new program. The National Science Foundation reports that a significant portion of the existing engineering workforce is nearing retirement age, and NSF research has also highlighted that current STEM education programs are not sufficiently reaching women and underrepresented minorities to meet the needs of a growing economy.

ACEC's Workforce Agenda for 2022:

- **Invest in STEM Education** – New resources for STEM education are essential over the long term to meeting the engineering industry's need for talent. Provisions included in House and Senate-passed competitiveness legislation (America COMPETES Act and USICA) seek to improve the alignment of undergraduate and graduate STEM education with workforce needs, as well as grow the overall number of students pursuing STEM degrees.
- **Lift the Cap on H-1B Visas** – The American Society for Engineering Education reports that in 2019 over half of engineering master's and doctoral degrees awarded by U.S. universities were earned by international students. H-1B visas are one tool engineering firms can use to tap into this important part of the talent pool but demand for these visas far outweighs the supply: for fiscal year 2023, there were 483,000 registrations for the 85,000 H-1B visas available in the lottery.
- **Recapture Unused Employment-Based Green Cards** – There are also 140,000 employment-based green cards available each fiscal year in addition to family green cards and those for countries with low immigration to the U.S. However, hundreds of thousands of green cards have gone unused over the past 20 years because they were not processed by the end of the applicable fiscal year. Legislation to recapture these green cards – such as H.R. 7374 introduced by Congresswomen Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) and S. 2828 authored by Senator Thom Tillis (R-NC) – would help address both the backlog of people waiting for work authorization and the engineering industry's workforce needs.

Request:

- ✓ Pass HR 4521/S 1260 to enact the STEM education provisions in America COMPETES Act/USICA.
- ✓ Increase the number of H-1B visas.
- ✓ Pass legislation to recapture unused employment-based green cards.