

RECRUITMENT

Putting a Face on the New York State DOT

The New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) uses an enterprising outreach program to redefine the image of public employment and position the Department as a place where young engineers can do meaningful work. The program combines aggressive on-campus recruiting for new employees, outreach to professional partners and the public, and a sophisticated series of videos that highlight employees' commitment to excellence. The effort is designed to give a face and a name to the NYSDOT.

Recruiting and retaining good employees to the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) is serious business. The challenge before the Department is not only competing with the private sector for qualified employees, but also overcoming stereotypes too often associated with the image of “working for the government.” To meet the challenge, NYSDOT focuses its recruitment and retention efforts on streamlining hiring processes, targeting recruiting efforts, and letting people know that the Department is more than just concrete and steel.

The Art of Recruiting

The New York State DOT has 10,000 employees, including more than 2,400 engineers. The NYSDOT has an annual budget of about \$30,000 to conduct an active recruitment campaign on college campuses statewide.

The NYSDOT ensures that engineering students are well aware of career opportunities within the Department long before a recruiter steps foot on campus. A direct mail campaign alerts students to the NYSDOT's presence at scheduled campus job fairs. A special mailing targets minority and female engineering societies. Recruiters attend social events before and after job fairs because the extra effort helps maximize traffic at the booth during the fair.

Recruitment Initiatives

- A streamlined civil service employment process reduces hiring time.
- The Department uses résumés in lieu of a test to evaluate engineering applicants—it's less daunting to the applicant and saves time in the hiring process.
- A Junior Engineer information packet acquaints students with the Department, hiring procedures, and contains all application materials.
- The NYSDOT Web site posts applications and information.
- Recruiters have the authority to offer jobs to outstanding candidates well before they graduate.
- A series of videos—included on a CD-ROM in the recruitment packet—introduce the diverse faces and professions necessary to the Department's operation and vital to ensuring the safety of the traveling public.
- Adopt-a-College concept gives students a broad perspective to the NYSDOT's projects and work environment.



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The Department's Adopt-A-College concept links recruiting teams with colleges in the eleven NYSDOT regions. The teams have at least three members—a representative of the NYSDOT's personnel office to answer questions about employment and a senior NYSDOT engineer to provide a broad perspective on the Department's mission and the kind of projects students could be involved with. The team also includes a NYSDOT engineer who is recent graduate of that school who brings the experience of working as a young engineer for the state.

In addition to job fairs, NYSDOT regional representatives often meet with university professors to brief them on construction projects in the region, and they frequently serve as guest lecturers about projects in the area. Engineering students and faculty also visit project sites, which are effective laboratories for teaching about the real-world challenges and rewards of the transportation professional.

Recruiters also look beyond New York schools, especially to minority institutions. One

recruiter is a graduate of the University of Puerto Rico and she maintains close ties with the school. She's effective because she's bilingual, which puts students at ease when they have questions or are looking for information.

The NYSDOT has also increased participation at professional society conventions. Many of these societies conduct workshop and professional development activities for their student chapters. Recruiters know that a presentation at a one-day workshop with the Society of Hispanic Engineers will increase interest at a job fair booth the next day.

Engineering students can also take advantage of NYSDOT college internships. It's an opportunity to earn money and at the same time get first-hand experience with the Department. It's also a time when the Department can learn more about the students' capabilities and interests.

Once graduates become NYSDOT employees, they spend their first year in an engineering rotation program that allows them to work in

various engineering disciplines such as traffic, construction, and design. Each region operates its own program so the experiences vary and new engineers can find themselves involved in major projects that can keep them busy longer than the normal rotation period.

Refocusing the Discussion

According to Greg Montague, NYSDOT Director of Personnel, "We understand that we can't compete with many private sector firms on the basis of salary. So, we focus our discussions with students on the benefits, and there are many. Under our Engineer Progression Plan, Junior Engineers start at about \$33,000, but after one year, they're promoted to a Civil Engineer 1 and get a pay raise of about \$12,000. There is progression to a Civil Engineer 2. We can almost assure applicants that by their fourth year, they will have gained most, if not all of the experience requirements for admission to the Professional Engineering exam." There are numerous opportunities for promotion to mid-level and upper-level engineering management positions.

The most important attraction for new engineers, however, is the scope of projects they can work on early in their careers. Continues Greg Montague, "There are some exciting large-scale, complex engineering projects in New York and the state uses cutting-edge technology to plan and execute them. It's a real incentive to come to work for us."

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A Family Tradition in Transportation

I'm very proud to be a third-generation engineer with the New York State Department of Transportation. My grandfather was a canal engineer near Albany. I grew up watching my father leave early to work on construction projects when the Interstate system was being built.

My father is retired, but to this day he wants to drive through detour areas to see what the crews are doing—what kind of technology or new procedures they're using.

I think my father was very pleased when I became a Regional Director for the NYSDOT. I was never pressured to follow in the family engineering tradition. But I saw that their work was important, that it made people's lives better, and I'm sure that had something to do with my career decision.

Every so often I'll meet someone who's worked with my grandfather, with my father, and now with me, which I think they find quite frightening. I don't know that either of my sons will continue the tradition, but it's their choice. I do know that when we drive somewhere, they think it's cool that I designed the highway or helped build that bridge.

One of the real pleasures of my current job is that I am part of the NYSDOT's recruitment effort. I enjoy getting to know the young people and introducing them to the types of projects we build. We're able to offer them the opportunity to work on some massive projects. Sure, the money is important, but not as much as the experience they get and the opportunity to serve the public.

Bob Dennison
Director
NYSDOT Region 8