

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

THE MENTOR PROGRAM EXPERIENCE

Since its inception, the NYC School Construction Authority (SCA)'s mentor program has really helped the MWBE community, growing contractors that now compete within the SCA's standard capital programs. Under the leadership of Michael J. Garner, the program expanded and thrived.

Now, with Garner serving as Chief Diversity Officer of the MTA, the MTA is exploring the creation of a Small Business Development Program. Successful mentor graduates and mentor program construction managers share their support of the new program, along with hopes and concerns for its implementation.

THE EXISTING MODEL

Given the SCA program's long-standing record in delivering quality construction, involved parties consider it wise for the MTA to examine and follow the SCA model as it establishes its new Small Business Development Program.

"The SCA mentoring model is results-oriented and progressive, and the MTA is in a position to implement a similarly successful endeavor," says Sandra Wilkin, President of Bradford Construction, who was a graduate of the SCA's mentor program and now serves as a Mentor CM.

STRENGTHS

The MTA has a number of attributes that are key to the Small Business Development Program's successful implementation.

Magnitude. Across the MTA operating agencies, there are diverse project types that lend themselves well to providing opportunities to a wide range of emerging firms.

Industry Relationships. "The MTA has access to several firms who already have experience managing the SCA program, so it could benefit the MTA's program," says Milo Rivero, Ph.D., PE, President of STV.

Funding. Because the MTA has a tremendous capital program, many believe it would be admirable of them to implement a mentor program within it. "We all recognize the MTA is going to be a funded infrastructure need for a long time to come," says William S. Parrish, Jr., President and CEO of NobleStrategy, LLC, who has experience as an SCA Mentor CM. "That creates a win-win for not only the contracting community but for the MTA as well, because they get to build and increase their own talent pool of contractors, which leads to better and more efficient projects and pricing, as

well as the opportunity to increase their diversity spend and targeted goals."

Supportive Staff. "These programs only really work when you have a commitment throughout the Agency," says Bill Howell, President of Howell Industries, who collaborates with TDX to conduct training sessions for the SCA program. "With internal support at the MTA, rather than being a program in name only, it becomes a program in nature, which provides a really important opportunity to grow."

Leadership. As one of the architects of the SCA's mentor program, there is unanimous praise for Michael J. Garner's passion, experience and knowledge base, and what his presence means for the success of the MTA's new Small Business Development Program. Both mentor contractors and mentor construction managers who worked with Michael at SCA believe that he will bring the leadership necessary to guarantee the MTA program's success at a level that only happens with a champion spearheading the movement.

"I am sure that the MTA program will be successful," says Suzanne Veira, Senior Director for Business Development at the SCA. "Mike Garner will ensure that the program gets established and that



the MTA gets all the right resources and infrastructure in place to ensure that it is an effective program."

"The SCA's mentor program took on a new life under Michael Garner's leadership," says Raquel Nunez, President of Nunez Electric, a graduate from the SCA's mentor program. "The program expanded in all directions: its longevity, the amount of successfully bidding contractors, the development of loan and bonding programs. With Michael's direction at the MTA, the new program will also be a resounding success."

"Opportunities are created by people in the position to do so. Given the MTA's commitment to create opportunity for M/WBEs under Michael Garner's leadership, it will happen," says Robert Parchment, President of Parchment Plumbing and Heating, Inc., another mentor graduate of the SCA program. "I am excited and encouraged with what I have seen so far. This is a chance to create opportunity for those who historically did not have access."

CHALLENGES

Despite the inevitable success of the program, it is not without its obstacles.

"Because the MTA is embarking on a new program, there is a natural tendency

to be concerned about the uncertainties involved," says Howell, "so it's going to take an overriding commitment and know-how to be able to pull together all the pieces."

John Hagedorn, Vice President and Deputy Director of Construction Services for URS Corporation, who serves as a Mentor CM for the SCA program, indicates that one challenge is soliciting and finding contractors to be prequalified to do the MTA's sometimes-specialized work, whether it be maintenance or capital projects, in order to expand their contractor pool and implement their diversity commitment. The implementation of the Mentor training component, tailored to the agency needs and requirements, will allay any fears by the MTA or the contractors as to how to navigate the system and perform the work.

In addition, the MTA has unique safety concerns, such as right-of-way issues involving working around moving trains and energized electrical systems. These issues will require special training sessions as part of the mentor program.

"People are hungry to be successful, and the majority of the M/WBE firms that I've come into contact with are willing to go

and do what they need to do to grow their business," says Hagedorn. "The model and the program have been proven successful and effective. Whole-sale changes are not required. Tailoring the program and tweaking it to complement the nuances of working for the MTA and their procedures and protocols are the main components in order to get it off the ground."

IN CONCLUSION

"The MTA will have a tremendous positive impact on small businesses in the construction community by implementing an already successful mentor model at their agency," says Maureen Fritch, President, Fritch Construction Co., Inc., an SCA Mentor graduate. "It allows small businesses to grow and diversify their project experience."

Harvey Sands, Executive Vice President of The LiRo Group, a Mentor CM for the SCA program, sums up the general opinion by saying, "I am convinced that there is significant support for implementing the Small Business Development Program throughout the MTA on behalf of its operating agencies. I am optimistic that the MTA will move ahead with this very beneficial industry program for New York."