



# **CONSTRUCTION DIVERSITY INITIATIVE**

Diversity Research, Policy and Training for the Building Industries

## **INDUSTRY BREAKFAST & ROUNDTABLE**

**TUESDAY, AUGUST 6, 2019 | 8:30 A.M. - 11:00 A.M.**

**COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY | LOW LIBRARY ROTUNDA | 515 WEST 116<sup>TH</sup> STREET | NEW YORK CITY**

The “Construction Diversity Initiative (CDI)” is an interdisciplinary research, policy, and training initiative within Columbia University’s School of Professional Studies to produce, deploy and transfer knowledge around minority, women, veteran and related diversity stakeholders in the building industries.

Research **First...**

Our mission is to promote and sustain an economic development agenda in New York’s construction market through scholarship, pedagogy and best practice. **CDI** would be the first of its kind, and its research agenda would be oriented towards three principle domains: **(i) learning, training and development, (ii) investigating key diversity research questions and (iii) data collection and analysis.**

More specifically, in the initial year, **CDI** will seek to build the foundations for a set of frameworks, research lines, a body of knowledge and a training curriculum to promote and advance diversity across all phases of the development, design, and construction process, specifically as it relates to institutional, transportation, infrastructure and emerging technologies.

**Capacity** as a Strategic Necessity...

The New York metropolitan area is currently undergoing one of the largest construction expansions in recent history. Over \$200 billion in construction activity is planned in the next five years alone with infrastructure projects sponsored by the public and private sector expected to last well beyond 2030. In aggregate, this will represent the region’s largest building initiative in history, with first and second order effects on our future workforce, community and the equity of our economic development.

Not surprisingly, New York State (“NYS”) and New York City (“NYC”) have made Minority and Woman-Owned Business Enterprise (“M/WBE”) participation a leading priority in their procurement and economic development strategies. Columbia University was the earliest adopter of high diversity goals. With its Minority, Women and Locally-owned business goal of 35 percent established in 2008, it changed the game for private entities. At the same time, the University also established a workforce goal of 40 percent, which it has achieved each year since its establishment. In his 2014 State of the State address, Governor Andrew Cuomo set NYS procurement goals for M/WBE utilization at 30 percent, the nation’s highest governmental goal. The following year, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced the OneNYC plan with a ten-year goal of reaching \$16 billion in expenditures with M/WBE, hoping for similar utilization benchmarks. Today, New York State leads the nation having awarded \$2.5 billion in state contracts to MWBEs, representing 26.82 percent MWBE utilization in FY 2017-2018.

These efforts have not gone without substantial debate, legislative opposition, as well as legal challenges. M/WBEs will account for a significant and increasing part of the construction project delivery and supply chain network. And while there might be a sincere desire by most stakeholders to see these programs succeed in their intended purpose, the lack of robust scholarship, data, capacity building efforts and evidence-based analysis hinders progress.

Policy, Programming, & **Progress...**

A cross-sectional, independent, and longitudinal research agenda can begin informing the policy-making process and support current capacity building strategies. This agenda will also ensure that we are deploying effective and evidence-based capability development and training programs intended to build the sustainable capacities, competencies and access of all diverse stakeholders in construction. A further course will be to challenge both government and private entities to implement policies that reduce barriers for MWBEs like non-assent Project Labor Agreements (PLAs), Owner Controlled Insurance Programs (OCIPs), a portfolio of contracts that don’t require bonding and partnering with Community Development Funding Institutions (CDFIs) to offer mobilization loans on contracts, all of which Columbia University has done.

Leila Janah noted that “talent is evenly distributed; opportunity is not”. But perhaps it is that rarely is talent or opportunity evenly accessible to all. Access and capacity building would level the landscape towards a construction industry more representative of our market population and stakeholder universe. Given the recent updates on the Re-Authorization of Article 15-A legislation, it is the perfect time to spearhead an initiative that can meaningfully contribute to evidence-based policy making through research, dialogue and programming.

Closing the **Gap...**

This gap is a significant barrier to the agenda’s effectiveness and immediate impact on the industry, the diverse communities it serves and our development initiatives. An opportunity exists to shape New York M/WBE programs in ways that can foster meaningful and sustained change, and just as important, private, NYS and NYC programs can continue setting the example for a national M/WBE agenda. Strengthening these programs through independent research and evidence-based analysis and training should be an important and prominent policy and industry-wide objective no matter where one falls on the policy line.

HOST



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REMARKS



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