

## **New group works to help contractors hit minority participation goals**

***Metropolitan Contractor Improvement Partnership will link companies with new job opportunities***

BY [LIBBY TUCKER](#)

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A handful of Portland's largest builders and public agencies have formed a new nonprofit to provide independent reviews of minority participation on large construction projects throughout the region.

The Metropolitan Contractor Improvement Partnership will use computer software to calculate the amount of work available to minority firms on a list of projects from participating companies and agencies. Then the group will directly link minority firms to the jobs, helping companies meet their minority hiring goals and disadvantaged firms find work.

"Right now the larger Portland metropolitan construction community doesn't have (minority) capacity in all categories of commercial and institutional building," Bart Eberwein, vice president of Hoffman Construction Co., said "So there's a real opportunity to help grow some businesses. Firms will grow by doing some small projects under the wing of a large contractor."

Over the next few years the nonprofit will focus on recruiting minority contractors to a list of key projects, including Legacy Emanuel's new children's tower in North Portland, the East County Justice Center in Gresham, and select projects at Concordia University.

Supporters of the new nonprofit include industry giants Stacy and Witbeck and Hoffman Construction, the Portland Development Commission, TriMet, Legacy Emanuel Hospital and the National Association of Minority Contractors in Oregon.

Using the same software that Stacy and Witbeck has used to meet its minority contracting goals on light-rail projects for TriMet, the Metropolitan Contractor Improvement Partnership will work with project owners to break down a project into bite-sized contracts. The program will then match potential contractors with opportunities identified in the analysis, depending on the skills and availability of the firms.

During the next few months, the partnership's board of directors will choose 20 minority firms that already possess the skills and motivation to grow their businesses to participate in the program. The hope is to bridge the gap between firms that have completed training programs such as the Port of Portland's mentor-protégé program, and are submitting bids but still aren't finding work, said Tony Jones, the partnership's new executive director and a business lender at the community development bank, ShoreBank Enterprise Cascadia.

"The best kind of program is one that's connected to jobs," Jones said. "Minority firms feel like they've learned the best when a project manager opens their book or their mind and says, 'Here.'"

The Portland Development Commission says the new program will help the agency meet its workplace diversity goal of 20 percent of minority, women and emerging small business participation on all projects that receive PDC funding. The agency already has room in its budget for technical assistance with

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minority contracting and the commission has thrown its support behind the program, said John Jackley, director of the PDC's communications and business equity department.

"It gives public agencies their own credible source to work with the general contractor on setting goals for minority participation," Jackley said. "This will be the starting point for discussions with contractors. It gives us an independent estimate of what the capacity is."

With a proposed \$325 million expansion of the River District urban renewal area and a \$170 million expansion of the Lents Town Center renewal budget, the PDC is looking at "a lot of opportunity for contracting and for women and minority workforce utilization," he said.

The new nonprofit held its first official board meeting earlier this month and plans to kick off its program next month.