

Proviso Mathematics and Science Academy

A success story for minority participation.

When zpd+a, llc. was awarded the Project Management contract for the new Mathematics and Science Academy, several goals were given for the success of the project. There were schedule, budget and functional goals that were to be expected. In addition, there was a goal set by the Board of Education to achieve 25% minority participation in construction. For a \$17 million dollar project, this was a daunting task, but we were up to the challenge. zpd+a partnered with Ujamaa Construction, an African-American construction management firm, to assist with this endeavor.

At the beginning of the project, Proviso Township High School Board President Emanuel "Chris" Welch stated that "Failure was not an Option". The school district and surrounding area eagerly anticipated the opening of the magnet school for the area. However, local pressure to make sure that local demographics were adequately represented could not be ignored. zpd+a and Ujamaa began to develop a plan to ensure that the goal was met. There would be three metrics to measure the minority participation.



- 1. Direct Participation by a Minority-Owned Subcontractor**
- 2. Partial participation by a minority subcontractor or supplier in conjunction with a majority owned subcontractor.**
- 3. Direct labor participation by minority based workforces on the part of each subcontractor.**

As the architect completed the drawings for bid zpd+a and Ujamaa conducted sub-contractor outreach through several local minority based organizations to inform and educate their members about the upcoming opportunity. Extensive networks were engaged to ensure minority subcontractors would attend pre-bid meetings and eventually submit bids.

The first step was to identify the qualified subcontractors with some capacity to bid individual trade packages. Although many qualified subcontractors were identified, most had not previously completed a single job of this size and scope. The project team focus shifted to partnering qualified minority contractors with majority firms in an effort to have minority participation represented within each trade. We conducted meetings with prospective bidders from both majority and minority company's to ensure that each were open to the joint venture partnership and that each would honor the commitment to each other and the project as a whole.

Once the documents were out for public bid, the project team made every effort within the confines of the law to assist sub-contractors. The project team provided the proper follow up with bidders reminding them of prebid meetings as well as providing sets of drawings at the site for contractors to pick up. We assisted contractors with specific bidding requirements (bid bonds, insurance, and bid forms). We helped contractors find bonding and insurance agents. We placed drawing sets in plan rooms, local minority contractor's organizations and made sure we followed up consistently.

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Our efforts proved to be successful and we had a strong turnout in qualified bidders for each bid package that was published. Although the selected lowest qualified bidder was not always a minority firm, the process was transparent to those involved. We wanted to make sure that all bidders who put forth the effort to submit a bid knew that they had an equal chance to win the work. It was critical for all involved to understand that our efforts were not merely devised to placate the School Board. This worked for both sides. We did not want a “shell” minority company to come in and think they could usurp the work without any scrutiny. We met with each of the lowest responsible bidders and asked to see and review their credentials or the details of their proposed partnership. The purpose of this pre-approval meeting was to ensure what the project team recommended to the School Board was reality. We believed that this process would work and based on the results of the trade sub-contractor participation the project team achieved the goals set by Proviso Township High School District 209.



Through multiple bid packages, bid dates and awards, the successful trade teams were selected to complete the project. The next step was to track the efforts of the team and measure the success. We documented each subcontractor, sub-subcontractor, supplier and individuals on the job site. We were able to report to the Board of Education bi-monthly with dollar amounts, pictures and executive summary documenting the efforts.

At the end of the project zpd+a and Ujamaa totaled the efforts. In direct subcontractor, supplier and sub-subcontractor participation we had 24.3% of the total project dedicated to minority owned businesses. Throughout the project we were able to achieve participation by minority workforces of 38.7%.



Along the way there were many involved in the project and part of the team that said it could not be done. At times, the project presented challenges but our project team never lost sight of the end goal. In the end our perseverance paid off and we met the Board of Education's goal. There have not been awards, or praise for these efforts. We have not asked for them, nor do we necessarily want them. We know that can overcome obstacles to meet these goals for issues such as minority participation that were and are so important to communities such as this one.