
Allegheny County MWDBE Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Public Works Conference Room
505 County Office Building, 542 Forbes Avenue
Wednesday, June 28, 2023
9:30 a.m.

Advisory Committee Members in Attendance:

Tim Stevens – Chairman, Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP)
Bhavini Patel – Community Outreach Manager, County Executive’s Office
Roxanne Sewell – President, The LJS Group
M. Gayle Moss – Chair, MBE Advisory Committee

Advisory Committee Members Absent:

James Overton – President/Principal Advisor, Overton Financial Group
Alberto Benzaquen – Commissioner, Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations

Advisory Committee County Liaison Members Present:

Mark Conner – Economic Development
Loren Ganoë – Human Services
Nancy DiNardo – Facilities Management
Jason Molinero – Public Works

Advisory Committee County Liaison Members Absent:

Kelly Stockman – Purchasing

Also Present:

Lisa Edmonds – Chief Officer, Allegheny County Department of Equity and Inclusion
Damian Wiles – Deputy Director, Department of Equity and Inclusion
Erin Johnson – Office Clerk, Department of Equity and Inclusion

Agenda

- I. **Open Meeting**
- II. **Introductions**
- III. **Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (April 26, 2023)**
- IV. **Chairperson Report**
- V. **Member Updates and Discussion on Possible Ways to Improve Small Business Relationships with County Departments**
- VI. **DEI Chief Equity and Inclusion Officer Report**
- VII. **Desired topics for next meeting**
- VIII. **Miscellaneous**
- IX. **Adjournment**

I. Open Meeting

M. Gayle Moss opened the meeting and thanked all in attendance. She asked all present to introduce themselves for attendance purposes.

II. Introductions

Tim Stevens – Chairman of the B-PEP (Black Political Empowerment Project), Co-convenor of the Coalition Against Violence, Facilitator with CEIR (Corporate Equity Inclusion Roundtable)

Mark Conner – Business Development Coordinator with the Department of Economic Development

Bhavini Patel – Community Outreach Manager for the County Executive

Loren Ganoë – Deputy Director of Administration for the Department of Human Services

Nancy DiNardo – Deputy Director of Administration for Facilities Management

Roxanne Sewell – President of the The LJS Group

Jason Molinero – Deputy Director of Department of Public Works

Lisa Edmonds – Chief Equity and Inclusion Officer of the Department of Equity and Inclusion

M. Gayle Moss – Chair of the MWDBE Advisory Committee

Damian Wiles – Deputy Director of the Department of Equity and Inclusion

Erin Johnson – Office Clerk with the Department of Equity and Inclusion

III. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (April 26, 2023)

M. Gayle Moss asked the committee to review the previous meeting minutes, and voice any additions, corrections, or questions they had. The committee had nothing to edit. Gayle asked if there was a motion to approve the previous meeting minutes. Nancy DiNardo made a motion to approve, and Loren Ganoë seconded the motion. All present were in favor, and the previous meeting minutes were approved.

IV. Chairperson Report

M. Gayle Moss informed all present that County Council has been in contact regarding recommended candidates to fill vacant committee seats. She advised that if the candidates are approved, vacant seats on the committee will remain and reminded members to submit recommended candidates for review and consideration. It was determined that current member terms and number of open seats are in need of verification.

Tim Stevens asked for clarification on what the process entails regarding appointments to the committee by County Council. Lisa advised that once the committee approves a candidate for consideration, their resume is passed on to the County Executive for review. If appointment is approved, the candidate is then sworn onto the committee by County Council.

Roxanne Sewell...

It was verified that a previously recommended candidate, Dr. Rikell Ford, is ineligible to move further in the process as a potential committee member as they are a county employee.

Discussion ensued regarding potential changes the 2023 General Election will bring to the county management structure.

V. Member Updates and Discussion on Possible Ways to Improve Small Business Relationships with County Departments

During the previous meeting there was discussion of a recommendation to be put forward to the County Executive in an effort to have DEI involved in the formation process of publicly bid contract proposals. As requested by the committee, Lisa Edmonds has written a draft of this recommendation for review.

All committee members were in favor of having DEI involved earlier in the contract drafting stage in an effort to give more MWDBEs the opportunity to be aware of a contract bid once it is public and to meet the county's MWDBE

goals.

a. **Mark Conner – Business Development Coordinator, Department of Economic Development, Allegheny County**

Mark asked to clarify whether primes have to show that they searched for MWDBEs to participate in work for contracts they are bidding on. Lisa advised that one of the elements of DEI's contract compliance is verifying whether a prime vendor has contacted MWDBEs in an attempt to meet the 13% MBE and 2% WBE participation goals in their bid proposal.

Lisa explained that for any projects funded through US DOT, prime vendors can utilize the Pennsylvania Unified Certification Program (PA UCP) database of DBEs. For any projects not funded through US DOT, a number of various certifications for MWDBEs can be accepted: PA UCP, Department of General Services, National/Eastern Minority Supplier Development Council, Women Business Enterprise., etc. It is the primes responsibility, as part of their good faith effort, to utilize the appropriate databases depending on the scope of work and contact certified firms. If they need assistance they may contact DEI, which can provide a list or show them how to navigate the database. To view contract opportunities, Allegheny County has the online procurement portal, Bonfire.

Mark noted that many businesses do not utilize the databases developed to find MWDBEs and mentioned that in future communications, county departments should utilize clear marketing of them, along with Bonfire, in an effort to encourage firms to be able to find appropriate MWDBEs and bid on contracts. He also mentioned that the Department of Economic Development sends project proposals out to organizations such as Riverside Center for Innovation, African American Chamber of Commerce, and E3 Alliance Pittsburgh, etc., and these organizations then forward project proposals as an email blast to their network members. Combined with the utilization of database information, it is a good beginning to reaching a larger pool of firms to receive more bid responses to county projects.

Mark made note that small businesses also have trouble bidding on larger project bids due to their low working capital. He informed the committee that he has been working alongside Juan Garrett of Riverside Center for Innovation with a few local banks to improve larger line-of-credit options for MWDBEs.

Mark also asked if there can be more conversation between departments. He often has no idea what projects other departments are undertaking, and as a representative of the Economic Department, he would like to have the knowledge of these projects as he is going out to communities

and having discussions with citizens.

b. **Nancy DiNardo – Deputy Director, Facilities Management, Allegheny County**

Nancy stated that she was unsure what this recommendation would change from the current process and mentioned recently working with DEI for a pre-bid for project management software. Lisa clarified that her department currently attends pre-bid and pre-construction meetings to give information to contractors. The recommendation being reviewed today would engage DEI in the planning stages of contract proposal to better understand the scope of work to be bid on in an effort to determine what areas of the contract MWDBEs would be available to work on.

Nancy stated that DEI excels in encouraging primes to search out multiple MWDBEs to raise participation rates, and to expand their search to ones they may not have worked with before so there is more opportunity for other subs to do the appropriate work. She advised that there could be more collaboration between the various county departments to reach a larger pool of contractors to receive more bids.

c. **Loren Ganoë – Deputy Director, Office of Administration, Department of Human Services, Allegheny County**

Loren stated that Bonfire has been implemented for the past few months for DHS contracting.

Regarding the recommendation for periodic meetings that Tim Stevens makes (section k of item V), Loren noted that attendees for those meetings need to be decision-makers of their department.

d. **Jason Molinero – Deputy Director, Public Works, Allegheny County**

Public Works currently does not utilize Bonfire, but they will be implementing it in the fall of this year.

e. **M. Gayle Moss – Chairperson, MWDBE Advisory Committee**

Previously the committee recommended that the county have a central hub for contracts, and the Bonfire portal is the response to that recommendation.

f. **Roxanne Sewell – President, The LJS Group**

Roxanne discussed the B2GNow online database, noting that it is difficult and unintuitive to use from the business owner side, and stated that small business owners shouldn't have to learn to use a website in order to find out what contracting opportunities are open, and was originally under the impression that having a DBE certification would bring in more work for her business.

Lisa clarified that having DBE certification does not guarantee work. In addition, it would benefit small businesses to determine who they want to do business with for the type of work they offer, as well as staying up to date with the advances in technology to remain competitive.

g. **Tim Stevens – Chairman/CEO, Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP)**

Tim asked what the process is when DEI makes a recommendation to award/not award a contract. Lisa advised that though it hasn't happened often, when a bid or proposal did meet MWDBE participation criteria, DEI advises the Purchasing Department to not award the contract and move to the next lowest bidder. Alternatively, Purchasing could throw out the proposal and put it out for re-bid. However, it was noted that there are occurrences when there is only a single bidder. Roxanne asked if there is sufficient outreach in attempts to prompt more contractors into bidding on county projects that are open for bids.

Tim asked to have a recommendation that comes out of this discussion that asks all county departments to collaborate regarding projects and to discuss how they can work together to include MWDBEs in projects.

“All departments in Allegheny County meet and discuss periodically (at least every six months) what they are doing to increase MWDBE participation when working with the county, with the first meeting to take place by September 2023.”

The committee agreed to have DEI share the recommendation via email by Wednesday, July 5, 2023, for review and comment with a deadline of Friday, July 7, 2023 for members to respond. The recommended edits will be forwarded to Gayle for review.

VI. DEI Chief Equity and Inclusion Officer Report

Lisa Edmonds noted that she is often contacted by MWDBEs about doing business with Allegheny County. Since Purchasing is the department that handles procurements and Bonfire, she emails Frank Alessio and Kelly Stockman, copying the business owner, to pass on the requested information.

Lisa mentioned that the 13% MBE and 2% WBE participation goals implemented during the initiation of the MBE program were based on population. Such goals are regularly changed within the MWDBE industry based on results of a disparity study. The PA Department of General Services previously performed a disparity study and are in planning stages to perform another. The City of Pittsburgh is also planning to perform a disparity study.

Nancy DiNardo asked who could recommend changes to the MWDBE

language of the county ordinance if a disparity study were conducted, and who would authorize said changes. Lisa advised it would most likely be county administration and County Council that could recommend and impose any changes to the ordinance.

VII. Desired topics for next meeting

In an effort to facilitate more productive meetings, potentially only two departments would discuss their procurement process and deliberate over potential improvements with the committee members, so the meetings don't go over the scheduled time.

VIII. Miscellaneous

In conclusion, DEI will share both committee recommendations by Wednesday, July 5, 2023, for review and comment, with a response deadline of Friday, July 7, 2023, before they are sent to Gayle for final review.

a. Recommendation One

DEI should be included in the planning stages of projects which would provide the department with a better understanding of the scope of work and what areas lend to MWDBE participation.

b. Recommendation Two

All departments in Allegheny County meet and discuss periodically (at least every six months) what they are doing to increase MWDBE participation when working with the county, with the first meeting to take place by September 2023.

IX. Adjournment

M. Gayle Moss asked if there was a motion to adjourn today's meeting. Tim Stevens made a motion for adjournment; Mark Connor seconded the motion. Meeting was adjourned.