
Allegheny County MBE Advisory Sub-Committee Meeting Minutes
204 County Office Building
Friday, October 4, 2013
10:00 a.m.

Subcommittee Chair: Toni Silva

Advisory Sub-Committee Members in Attendance:

Ola Jackson – Founder/CEO – Onyx Woman Network (OWN)
Toni Silva – Supplier Relations Director, UPMC
Gregory Spencer – President/CEO, Randall Industries, LLC
Austin Davis – Executive Assistant, Office of the Allegheny County Executive

Advisory Sub-Committee Members Absent:

Roxanne Sewell – President, LJS Publishing/Talk Magazine
M. Gayle Moss – Chair, MBE Advisory Committee

Also Present:

Ruth Byrd-Smith – Director, Allegheny County Department of M/W/DBE
Lisa Edmonds – Deputy Director, Allegheny County Department of M/W/DBE
Naomi Hale – Temporary Employee, Allegheny County Department of M/W/DBE

I. Review of M/W/DBE oversight responsibilities by Department

Ms. Silva breaks down exactly what departments Ms. Byrd-Smith is accountable for through the M/W/DBE Department using a chart. There are a number of departments that report their M/W/DBE numbers to the M/W/DBE Department for contracts and Ms. Silva feels as though the M/W/DBE Department should in fact be accountable for all M/W/DBE activity. In addition, the M/W/DBE Department is not a part of the Professional Services Review Committee, which is the committee that reviews Professional Services contracts that are over \$30,000. Ms. Silva contends that Ms. Byrd-Smith should be a member of this Committee to better integrate the M/W/DBE Department, especially since the Department also deals with some professional services contracts.

II. PA Purchasing Group “BidNet”

BidNet is a free service for government agencies that provides bid notices, bid matching, and generates comprehensive reports. The M/W/DBE pays for the bid matching portion for certified M/W/DBE Allegheny County-based businesses. Purchasing is the only department that consistently utilizes the service, though it is available to any agency who wishes to use it; Public Works used it years ago, but does not anymore. Ms. Silva thinks it would be a good idea for departments to use it to post their bid notices so more M/W/DBEs can have more access to contracts. Mr. Spencer asks why the other departments do not use it; Ms. Byrd-Smith states that she has in the past requested that all bid notices and RFPs be posted, in addition to whatever other advertising that needs to occur. To date it has not been fully utilized. Ms. Silva suggests that the County Executive make using BidNet mandatory for all departments. The group concludes that each department should at least be required to give a reason for why they do not use BidNet, then action can be taken from that point.

III. Department re-branding priority – new County marketing professional

Ms. Silva declares that the M/W/DBE Department needs to be rebranded. Ida Del Rico, a marketing professional, has recently been hired by the County as a consultant and Ms. Silva recommends that the Subcommittee speak with her about what can be done with the Department’s brand. Many people do not understand what the Department does and who is accountable for what in the County regarding M/W/DBEs and, when there is a misunderstanding, the community’s anger is usually directed at Ms. Byrd-Smith because she is the only one people are aware of. However, people have a tendency to lobby complaints with her about things she has no control over, and re-branding needs to occur so the community can be educated. Ms. Silva points out that being educated on the M/W/DBE Department was beneficial to her and she believes many people in the County will also learn a lot from it.

IV. Professional Service contracts – Professional Services Review Committee and de-bundling – Robert Weston, Consultant – review processes and make recommendations

Mr. Robert Weston has been contracted by Ms. Byrd-Smith as a consultant. Ms. Silva would like Mr. Weston to assist the Subcommittee in developing the business model.

V. Review of M/W/DBE Department budget

Ms. Silva directs everyone’s attention to the County of Allegheny’s 2013 operating budget. According to the figures listed, the M/W/DBE Department is the recipient of

the second to smallest amount of County funds (\$480,170); the Chief Executive technically gets the least amount of funding (\$415,032), but has access to other funding sources. The only other department that receives an amount that is close to what the M/W/DBE receives is Budget and Finance (\$803,665), which leaves a fifty (50) percent gap between them. The M/W/DBE's budget is especially problematic because it includes the yearly salaries of six (6) employees and leaves even less money for the Department to effectively assist M/W/DBEs. Ms. Silva is recommending that the budget for the Department be increased.

VI. Discussion

Mr. Davis asks Ms. Silva to define "integration process" and Ms. Silva explains that it refers to a way to better integrate the M/W/DBE Department in County processes in other departments that, by right, should include the Department in some respect. There is more discussion about uncovering the exact issues that are affecting the Department's effectiveness so they can be solved. Ms. Silva asks if everyone agrees with her recommendations and if anyone has any recommendations of their own. No one else had any other recommendations.