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## JetBlue's Commitment to Affirmative Action and Labor Force Diversity Pays Off

Daily flights from JetBlue's Terminal 5 at JFK International Airport are routine since the new terminal opened for business over a year and a half ago. But it wasn't until recently that the full story about the men and women who built this \$500+ million project came to light.

The project generated over \$115 million in contracts to M/WBE firms, or 20.3 percent of the total construction cost. The labor force was made up of 38 percent minority skilled workers and 46 percent minority laborers. In addition, 5 percent of the total workforce was made up of women. It's a result that the program implementer, the Regional Alliance for Small Contractors, says can be replicated all across the nation.

To comply with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey's good faith Minority and Women Labor Force policy goals, JetBlue Airways engaged the Regional Alliance right from the get go to develop and implement a business and employment utilization program. The Regional Alliance submitted its final report to JetBlue in March of this year documenting the results, which exceeded the Port Authority's goals.

"On all our projects, there are different levels of commitment," says Lash Green, the Port Authority's Director of the Office of Business and Job Opportunities. "What JetBlue did by bringing in the Regional Alliance was an extra step. We've seen a lot of committed organizations, but they don't necessarily go out and hire a consultant to make it a reality," he adds.

"It was something we wanted to do," says Richard Smyth, JetBlue's vice president for corporate real estate. "The results were good for JetBlue, and good for the project." Smyth notes

that the Port Authority "didn't just give goals and walk away." The Port Authority assigned a team to work with JetBlue throughout the project. In addition, construction manager Turner Construction "had a proactive attitude," and worked hard to get the right contractors on the job, he says.

The goals of the Affirmative Action and Labor Force Diversity Program were three-fold: to attract M/WBE firms to bid, to ensure minorities and women were hired as part of the labor force and to help train minorities and women for continued success.

To attract M/WBE firms, JetBlue and the Regional Alliance monitored contract documents and solicitation of bid documents to ensure M/WBE goals were included, helped identify M/WBE firms to bid, ensured each bid package included M/WBE contractors and/or suppliers, reviewed utilization plans and coordinated plan approval by the Port Authority's Affirmative Action Coordinator.

To ensure minorities and women were hired as part of the labor force, the team partnered with organizations like Non-Traditional Employment for Women, the Association of Minority Enterprises of New York, Airport Services Development Office, and the Jamaica Business Resource Center, reviewed EEO requirements conducted at pre-construction meetings, reviewed certified payrolls for compliance with prevailing wage laws, required Monthly Employment Utilization Reports (MEUR) from contractors, developed a process to hire walk-in applicants, made on-site visits and held brown bag lunch meetings to maintain communication with females working on the project.

In addition to working closely on the job with JetBlue, the Regional Alliance has over 50 classes it offers emerging small M/WBES to gain business skills necessary to succeed.

"JetBlue really took it seriously," says Earle Walker, executive director of the Regional Alliance. "Everything was looked at; nothing was swept under the rug. It was because of the leadership of JetBlue and the Port Authority that we exceeded our goals."

Green says the program is called out as a Port Authority best practice, and he encourages other project team leaders to pursue the same strategy or to propose one better.

The Regional Alliance is so proud of its accomplishments at JetBlue that it has sent its final report on the program to President Obama to offer it as a strong public-private business model to create business and job opportunities in local communities.



JetBlue's Richard Smyth (left), says one of the main reasons for the program's success was on-site, day-to-day management by Cassandra Hill (center). Earle Walker, The Regional Alliance (right) agrees. Credit: Photo courtesy of Grant Aviation Consulting, Inc. © 2010