

Building Strong Transportation Partnerships

By Thornton J. Williams, Williams McMillian P.A.

The axiom that two heads are better than one really is true when it comes to building strong collaborative partnerships. Building strong partnerships with like-minded groups ensures the cross-sectional support and knowledge-based sharing necessary for strong, high-quality projects. Diverse stakeholders can provide the mechanism for designing comprehensive strategies and utilizing multidimensional resources needed to produce lasting change.

Partnerships, such as those between public and private organizations are an important feature of the modern governance landscape. Over the past several years, activities traditionally associated with governments have evolved to include participation by the private sector. In fact, the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) encourages the consideration of public-private partnerships (P3s) in the development of transportation improvements, finding that the partnering of the public and private sector can bring creativity, efficiency, and capital to address complex transportation problems facing state and local governments. Florida has a long history of partnering with the private sector and has outsourced 80% of engineering work, 80% of maintenance, and 100% of construction.

In turn, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) is now accepting applications from public and private entities interested in developing transportation projects in the state. Through the State Infrastructure Bank Program, the state provides loans and other financial assistance for projects that will contribute to the future of transportation in Florida.

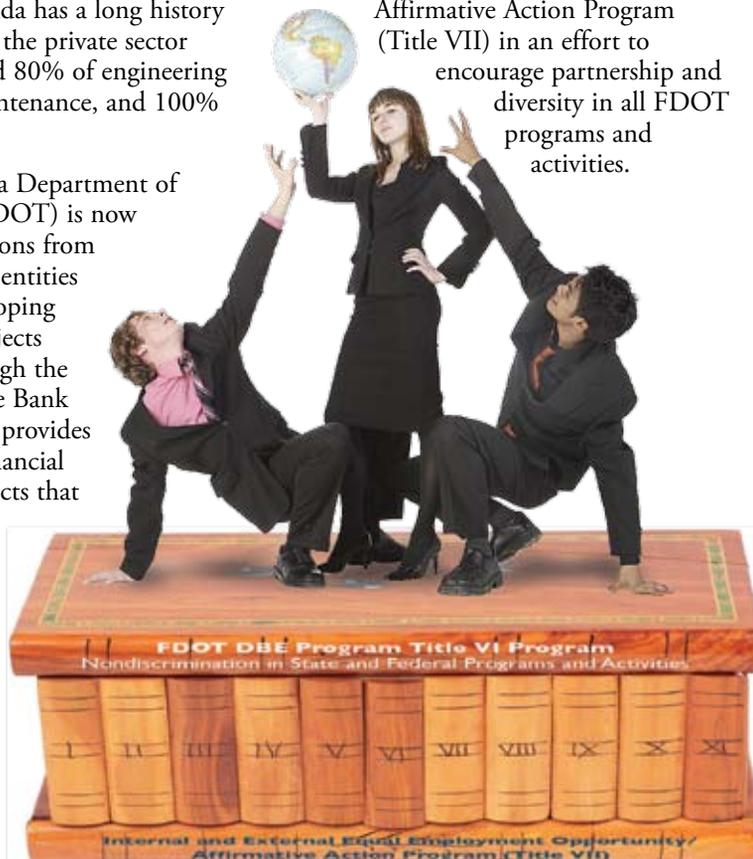
Likewise, one of the most significant partnering relationships that have occurred over the last 20

years is the increased transportation partnerships between majority firms and Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBEs), Minority Business Enterprises (MBEs) and Women and Minority Business Enterprises (WMBEs). In fact, the main purpose of the DBE, MBE and WMBE designations is to partner with larger firms to gain access to the resources that most of these smaller minority businesses do not have access to. For example, the U.S. DOT's DBE program was created by Congress to level the playing field and provide small businesses with a fair chance to compete for U.S. DOT assisted contracts. In turn, FHWA's Florida Division encourages and supports collaborative partnerships between FHWA, FDOT, prime contractors, DBEs, industry associations and the public.

Similarly, the FDOT operates a race and gender neutral DBE program. The FDOT's Equal Opportunity Office was created specifically to administer the department's DBE Program, Title VI Program (Nondiscrimination in State and Federal Programs and Activities), and Internal and External Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action Program (Title VII) in an effort to encourage partnership and diversity in all FDOT programs and activities.

While DBE contract goals are not set on projects, prime contractors are expected to use DBEs and other small businesses as much and as often as possible on FHWA funded projects. For federal fiscal year 2010 the goal was set at 8.18% utilizing the methodologies described in 49 CFR Part 26. To date, these partnerships have been very successful.

It's no surprise to anyone that the world is changing. With the expansion of differing types of partnerships, the traditional partnership lines are being blurred and reconfigured every day. Undoubtedly, we can begin to see a progressive movement from government only contracts to public/private partnerships, from utilization of majority firms only to that of majority/minority partnerships, to potentially minority/minority partnerships. Hopefully the horizon will continue to expand to include partnerships spearheaded by minority firms as prime subcontractors hiring minority firms as subcontractors also. The possibilities really are endless with the evolution of collaborative partnerships. ■



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