

## March 15 NEO Roundtable – Diversity: Perspective and Partnership

Cogence DEI Committee – explained by Madison Morgan, including its mission statement

Survey results – explained by Aaron Lobas

Panel Q&A

### What are the barriers to starting a Diverse Company?

Madison: need one full year before you can apply for certifications. This hinders early growth

Dan: he expected the city to automatically give him more work since he had worked there. But this was not true. Not because of race, but because he lacked experience. He was raised to transcend race as a barrier.

- Relationships are more important than fulfilling requirements

Fatima: lack of capital. Diverse contractors often work for others while moonlighting. She was the only black female out of 1000 in the union

Ariane: AKA was a legacy business, which you don't often have with MBEs, where they are generational.

- 43% said yes to hiring MBEs, but that means more than 50% did not.
- She's lost work because it was decided they did not NEED to hire an MBE. She told story of a contractor who only wanted to hire her company to order materials to have their name on the project. "We need to call these things out!"

### Value of Certifications

Madison: she commented about "Edge?". Out of \$1.1 Billion in contracts, less than 5% diverse awarded. And less than 1% to white women.

Fatima: some companies won't work for you if not certified.

- Paperwork can be very cumbersome
- Required to recertify every year, which is stupid (her skin is still black every year)

Dan: Certifications are valuable but he doesn't stake his business on it.

- Some MBEs need it to survive. It's all about perspective.

Comment made about Whitelist (good) and Blacklist (bad)

### Experiences on Job Sites

Fatima: blue collar construction workers can be rough and openly racist (she told a story about a phone call but I missed it).

White collar not as openly honest or outwardly racist, they just don't hire you

## **How do we get better?**

Madison: look at the statistics

Dan – need to streamline the certification process, maybe on statewide basis.

Look at the situation through the lens of the diverse firm.

96,000 licensed architects, and less than 2% are black.

Bob Hager asked: “Who are your mentor – partners?”

Whiting-Turner has mentor program. They genuinely seem to care to want to help minority companies grow. Bostwick – they encourage growth. TH Martin

Shakorie: Intentionality. Be intentional. Make introductions and references. Need more advocates.

Its often ignorance – not always racism.

## **Breakouts: Opportunities for Improvement – how can Cogence help?**

### **Report outs:**

#### Team 1

Think outside the project. Mentor programs over a period of time, not just for a project. How do you extend it beyond the project, maybe even years?

All Cogence Partners make a public Cogence commitment and hold each other accountable

Partnerships side by side, sitting next to each other for more than the project

Mentors don't have to look like you.

Intentionality in change. If you want change you must dig in

Foster an environment for questions and support

If bad experience with mentor/protégé, how to re-vision?

What are some universal programs across the country that have worked?

Meet colleagues/teams where they are

Owners need to talk about mentor/protege programs. They need to push them

Stop the assumptions – build the relationships

Own the responsibility

Intentional Mentorships – ongoing after projects end

Authenticity

Try to change the statistics

Publicize what services are out there

### Team 2

Intentionality for opportunities. 2 intentional acts to introduce for opportunities per year/per individual

Access to capital, Intentional mentors, access to vendors

Walk the walk! Hire talent that is diverse

Entrepreneurship

- Start a fund for business creation
- Mentor/mentee approach (strengthen the process)

Qualifications matter – added value (trades etc)

Incubator Program

- Overhead items (launched by large companies to MBE/DBE)
- Create mentor/mentee
- Learn the business

### Team 3

Have a list, community board, opportunities

Recruit from HBCUs

Funding, capital, investment

Joint ventures

Entrepreneurship

- Mentors
- sponsors

Corporate Resources (ie Whiting Turner training)

Do Cogence Partners want to be change agents in the DEI area? In our companies? Do they have DEI committees? Unconscious bias training?

Measure success: Are we gaining traction?

- – track progress through the Partnership Committee. Goals and recruitment

Embody Kindness! Genuinely care for others

## Team 4

Intentional Business Mentoring (engaged)

Authenticity

Business Growth Services

- List, roadmap, and publicize

Joint ventures – Majority/Minority owned

Meet people where they are (part time? Family or health care needs?)

Speak up when people say that DEI doesn't matter

Simplify the Certification process

Cogence Capital Funding?

**Plus:** Panel, Honesty, Transparent

**Delta:** nothing