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Workforce development still top of mind for subcontractors - by Michael McDonagh

May 21, 2021 - Construction Design & Engineering

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In a recent survey, members of the Associated Subcontractors of Massachusetts (ASM) cited workforce development as one of the most significant barriers to economic growth and post-pandemic recovery for the construction industry. Responses included phrases such as “filling open positions” and “labor availability” as barriers. Bringing more people into the trades was a priority before the pandemic and those positions in the skilled trades remain a challenge to fill. As is often said, a job in the trades is more than a job, it is a rewarding career with great pay and benefits.

To help address the workforce shortage in the trades, one program worth highlighting is the Career Technical Institute Program or “CTI” Program. The CTI is a signature initiative of the Massachusetts Workforce Skills Cabinet aimed at addressing the persistent skills gap to fill construction and trades vacancies. Here are some of the aims of the CTI program: address the persistent skills gap that employers face in construction/trades and manufacturing; provide opportunity for youth and adults to retrain for skilled occupations especially those hardest hit by COVID; transform vocational high schools into Career Technical Institutes, running three shifts per day to expand enrollment of high school students and adults; train 20,000 new skilled workers in key trades and technical jobs as a multi-year strategy.

The level of success of the CTI program will depend on state funding levels and this is the time of year when the Legislature is debating the fiscal year 2022 state budget. By sometime in June, we’ll have a good sense of how much funding this program will receive. ASM recently submitted a letter in support of increased funding to the state budget for the Massachusetts Career Technical Institute.

DCAMM Certification- An opportunity to bid on public construction.

Certification by the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance is the first step needed for contractors who want to bid on public construction jobs as a filed sub-bidder. According to the DCAMM website, there are approximately 750 prime contractors and 570 filed sub-bidders certified. For filed sub-bidders, certification is obtained in one or more of the 17 categories available, such as

electrical, roofing, HVAC, or masonry. The certification requires a certain amount of experience that can often serve as a hurdle for smaller contractors.

Yet certification, once obtained, can open contractors to an entirely new set of projects and opportunities. It also provides greater protections for smaller contractors. Contractor certification is required when an awarding authority (any Massachusetts public agency) solicits bids for a vertical construction project under M.G.L. Chapter 149 or Chapter 149A with an estimated construction cost in excess \$150,000. The project must be for the construction, reconstruction, demolition, maintenance, or repair of a vertical building.

Supplier Diversity Office Elevated to a State Agency in 2021

The Supplier Diversity Office (SDO) certifies diverse businesses and manages several business programs that help enhance the marketability of small and diverse businesses when they bid on public contracts. In January of this year, legislation was signed that established the SDO as a separate state agency under the authority of the Executive Office for Administration and Finance. The SDO now has the ability to help businesses in a variety of new ways including, assisting with securing bonding and financing; developing a platform for diverse and small businesses to connect with prime contractors; notifying businesses of bid opening dates with assistance in bidding, and much more. It is exciting to see how these new tools will help minority and women owned businesses become successful in construction and specifically in public construction.

Later in May, ASM will host a seminar with DCAMM staff to walk through the steps to certification and answer questions. The SDO staff will also provide an update on new activities by the Agency. The program is open to all who are interested in attending.

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