

## Building Community Support

Joe Jingoli



In the construction industry we have a huge responsibility, as our industry quite literally touches every person in this nation every day of the week.

Not a day goes by where a person does not encounter a project built by someone in our industry at some

point over the past two centuries. We build in communities every day, and whether purposely or not, we become part of those communities.

In our experience, the most effective way to build a successful project is to include the community as much as possible.

The economic stability of the community a project is located in can be increased through the use of local workers, suppliers and subcontractors.

Dollars used to build the project remain in the community. The participation and direct involvement of the local community promotes a greater overall acceptance, cooperation and often excitement for the project. This invariably leads to greater success for the project.

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### A High Priority

Community outreach is achieved through the utilization of community residents, subcontractors and businesses. First and foremost, it is a commitment on behalf of management and ownership to truly make community outreach a core part of the construction process, as opposed to an afterthought. No matter where you fit in the construction process, there are many items that take priority with safety being first, along with meeting deadlines, quantifying costs, preventing overruns and dealing with the weather. It is imperative to make community outreach a priority in this mix and treat it with the same discipline as every other priority.

In our experience, the most effective way to prioritize community outreach is to have one person on staff whose responsibility is to monitor and enforce community outreach protocols.

Having one person responsible for the day-to-day monitoring, tracking, and other elements of the program ensures that the process works.

The outreach coordinator has a number of responsibilities. Before a project begins and before companies, suppliers and businesses in that community can become involved in the construction process, they must first be identified.

The person tasked with monitoring community outreach for an organization can:

- identify and locate local companies as well as minority-owned, women-owned or small businesses in the community;
- recruit these companies and businesses, educate them as to how to get on bidders lists, and even help them to qualify;
- provide information on these companies to subcontractors involved in the project;

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educate subcontractors on the importance of this process and of utilizing local companies and businesses; and  
work with subcontractors to buy from community suppliers.

### **The Multiplier Effect**

While it is crucial to use local contractors, companies and suppliers, it is just as important that local workers are used. In our industry there is a multiplier effect, meaning that for every dollar earned by a construction worker on your site, the buying power in a local community is significant.

When dollars earned in the community stay there, the entire community benefits well beyond just those individuals and companies who are actually working on the project.

This is where the community outreach coordinator is crucial. He or she can work with local organizations, nonprofits, labor unions, trade unions, community groups, etc., to identify and locate community members who may be assets to the project and help integrate them into the process. As a union shop, it is important to us that apprentices from the local community are given an opportunity, and we require all subcontractors to use local apprentices whenever possible.

One issue that is sometimes encountered with a community outreach program, especially with larger projects, is the lack of familiarity, and sometimes inability, for local and smaller companies and contractors to handle very large volumes of work.

We have seen this issue prevent qualified, competent small firms from participating and bidding on projects. While it requires a significant amount of manpower and time, a solution would be to make a concerted effort to break larger subcontracting opportunities into smaller, manageable components. This approach has proven to be very effective and often makes the difference in whether a smaller company can participate and also enables them to grow as a company.

Finally, there is the actual enforcement of these policies. After all, these policies certainly "read" well, but if they do not actually happen, community involvement is not maximized and community outreach did not occur.

What can a company do to make sure these procedures and processes occur? Having one person who oversees the program is paramount. Enforcing a community involvement program comes down to requiring frequent reporting from subcontractors, daily tracking, and continued and frequent contact with subcontractors. It also involves consultation to get companies who are off track back on and adjusting to make sure every effort is made to ensure the program is a success.