

For Metro, WTS-LA, and Southern California Businesses, Small Is the New Big



Robyn Coates, WTS-LA Small Business Outreach/TBAC Chair (CM Solutions founder and CEO), 2017

When Metro talks, people listen. What makes Metro most unusual is that when people talk—particularly small businesses—Metro listens. Representing an array of industries and trades through professional business associations, TBAC is Metro’s mechanism to give small and disadvantaged businesses greater voice and entrée into working with one of the largest transportation authorities in the US. Naturally, WTS-LA is involved. And the chapter’s Small Business Outreach/TBAC chair is CM Solutions founder and CEO Robyn Coates.

“I’m new to this role, so I am learning as I go. TBAC is a group of professional associations that come together to be stronger together to advocate for small businesses. Metro and the DBE member organizations attend monthly meetings. And WTS-LA was just recently added. My role is to attend TBAC meetings, join the Professional Services Committee, and to communicate to WTS-LA information that comes from those meetings that would be of interest to the membership. I’m there to communicate to, and for, the WTS-LA members. My focus is to expand the opportunities for small businesses and to keep the WTS-LA small business members aware of what’s happening at Metro in terms of projects, SBE legislation, guidelines, etc.” More formally, TBAC’s stated mission is to “promote, improve and increase the development of business and/or economic opportunities, enhance accessibility to potential procurement and contracting opportunities and facilitate business and professional networking to all small businesses.”

“If you’re a small business or you’re interested in small business matters, you should definitely attend the meetings. You’ll learn a lot from them. The TBAC website is also a great resource for small businesses. It covers how to get certified with Metro, as well as the upcoming projects on Metro’s slate. It also explains how Metro’s contractors are doing in terms of meeting their [compliance] goals. This information allows small businesses to identify primes that that would benefit from stronger disadvantaged businesses relationships.”

But Ms. Coates points out that small businesses are not the only businesses attending monthly TBAC meetings.

“There is a role that the large firms can play in TBAC, and it’s a very important role. Large firms are always looking for good team members, particularly disadvantaged businesses. Many large companies

attend TBAC meetings for that exact reason. They want to see what small businesses are there, who they are, and what's going on with them. And they want to show Metro that they're committed to helping and working with small businesses. Hopefully, the information I share with WTS-LA will also allow larger businesses in WTS-LA to see what's going on in the small business world at Metro."

Though Ms. Coates credits Metro for launching TBAC, she also praises Metro for not resting on its laurels with just its creation.

"Metro didn't just stop when they created TBAC. Metro is always working to create better conditions for small businesses in terms of competing for work. They're putting forward new ideas all of the time. For example, they just created a new provision for small businesses that join together to compete for work to get preferential percentage points in their evaluation. They have also just passed a bonding program to help small construction companies. They are also working on making the conflict-of-interest limitations a little broader for small businesses. That's an important issue, because a small business can have a small role on project and then be 'conflicted out' for any other projects at Metro. To most people, these things may not mean much, but to small businesses they are at the heart of what can help make them successful and grow."



It was also no accident that WTS-LA chose Ms. Coates to represent the chapter with TBAC. The firm she founded, CM Solutions, is a 14-year old professional services company based in Monrovia, CA, that provides project controls consulting to the construction and engineering industry, including scheduling cost engineering, estimating, and claims resolution. Currently, her firm has contracts with both Metro and Los Angeles World Airports (LAWA). So, she knows firsthand what small businesses need to know to work with large agencies. And she's happy to share that information, along with everything else she learns through TBAC.

"If any small business owners in WTS-LA have any questions, please reach out to [me](#). Also, please attend the monthly TBAC meetings. I'm happy to share any and all information I have and I'm happy to help anyone from WTS-LA. This really is an extraordinary program and I hope that both small and large business people from WTS-LA take advantage of it."

When Metro talks, people listen. Now, Metro has created a way to make sure that when people in small businesses talk, Metro can listen. And WTS-LA members can be heard as well through the chapter's TBAC representative Robyn Coates.