

1. **What inspired you to be an advocate for supplier diversity economic inclusion?**

My inspiration for becoming an Advocate, started on the playgrounds of Philadelphia. The bullies at the playgrounds tried to push the smaller children around and relegate us to an unhabitual portion of OUR playground; so I stood up to them and since I was only 6 years old that looked down at me and laughed, but I was not going to be laughed at, I pushed back and rallied the other smaller children to join me and they bullies backed down. Now, my playground is public contracting and the bullies are not as clear as they once were, however with unwavering commitment I remain vigilant and ready to pounce on those who it make their business to ensure minorities and women are excluded from contracting opportunities and wealth creation.

My actions speak louder than words and my track record, thus far, demonstrates that my advocacy is not lip service, it is ACTIONs that lead to profits and wealth creation for diverse communities.

Honestly, the reason why I am an advocate for minorities and women businesses and why an equity, diversity and inclusion expert is simple...it is more than career to me is my Calling. I recognized earlier in my career that it my role was not to be a career ladder climber, it is was important for me to be a ladder builder, this would create more sustainable results and have greater influence. Similarly, as it is relates to diverse businesses, I set out to not level the playing field, but to reengineer the playing field; not to just ensure diverse businesses have a seat at the table, but build a new and longer table...you see I am passionate about equity, diversity and inclusion as long has that passion turns into profits for my diverse communities.

2. **Why is it important for government and public corporations to implement law and polices, respectively, that force economic inclusion?**

There are several critical tenants of ensuring equity, diversity and inclusion on public/private contracting or on public/private projects and one of the most critical is enabling legislation and regulations. We would like to believe that folks will inherently do the right thing to ensure fair and equitable contracting; however, as our past has shown us this is not the case when sharing the wealth is involved. We have made little to no **sustainable** equity and inclusion of diverse firms on public/private, since the inception of the 1953 Small Business Act and the 1969 Minority Business Office. Key word here, is sustainable. Therefore, having enabling legislation and authority to guide and enforce equity and inclusion in public and private contracting is integral to starting, growing and sustaining inclusion in these contracting opportunities. Similarly, in the private-sector a shift has to occur in the development of their supplier diversity programs (some companies get it and have disrupted the status quo) from mere paper programs and programs that relegate diverse firms to peripheral and low value work; elevate diverse firms to strategic partners that can learn and grow with them; in other words they have to invest in their diverse suppliers. In addition, addressing laws, policies and regulations that are working at cross purposes to prevent barriers we see and don't see from getting in the way of engaging diverse businesses must be dealt with head on. We must facilitate courageous conversations and take unapologetic actions to ensure inclusion and sustainable wealth creation in our communities.

**3. In your long professional career, please comment on some of the high points as well as low?**

I received numerous awards and recognitions over my career that served as beacons that served as indicators that I was walking the talk and achieving sustainable results for various diverse communities. Some of the most relevant and notable are as follows:

- ✓ In 2013, Towanda received the Maryland/DC (Capital Region) Minority Supplier Development Council Advocate of the Year Award.
- ✓ In 2016, Towanda was awarded the Black History Hero Award from Maryland Washington Minority Companies Association (MWMCA).
- ✓ In 2016, Towanda was selected for Diversity MBA's Top 100 under 50 Diverse Executive Leaders List 2016.
- ✓ In 2017, Towanda was awarded the Women of Leadership & Power Award from Minority Enterprise Advocate (MEA) Magazine.
- ✓ In 2017, Towanda was awarded the Outstanding Leaders in Advocacy and Entrepreneurship award from ProBiz.

In reference to teachable moments, I have had many all of which served to help me hone my knowledge, skills and abilities; and has led to me becoming a better advocate for diverse businesses and communities. Since I always fail forward, I have been able to turn the manure that life (and my career) tossed my way into fertilizer to help start, grow and sustain diverse businesses in contracting.

**4. Tell us about your new role in The Department of Commerce with The City of Philadelphia?**

Currently, I serve as the Senior Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity for the City of Philadelphia' Department of Commerce. I serve as the primary Leader in implementing and overseeing supplier equity, diversity, and inclusion-related programs that are guided by the City of Philadelphia's legislative mandates and requirements. Philadelphia is one of the largest Cities in the State of Pennsylvania has an approximate population of 1.5 million. Fiscally, Philadelphia does approximately \$4 billion dollars in contracting via its 40 plus departments. Philadelphia aspires to have 35 cents of every dollar The City invests used for Minority/Women/Disable Enterprise (M/W/DSBE) firms' participation.

**5. It's noted that Philadelphia's annual operating budget is in excess of \$4 billion. How will certified minority owned firms participate in that?**

The first, and key, step in doing business with the City of Philadelphia requires you to register in our OEO Registry or Compliance Reporting System. Firms will receive email notifications when we are soliciting for services that are within your business' capabilities and classification(s). Registration is FREE and it only takes approximately fifteen (15) minutes to register. Please click on the following web link to join TODAY: <https://www.phila.gov/services/business-self-employment/register-as-a-minority-woman-or-disabled-owned-business/>.

To access and learn about various types of the approximate \$2 billion in contracting opportunities with the City of Philadelphia, I would encourage firms to visit the following websites:

- ✓ eContractPhilly (URL: <https://secure.phila.gov/econtract/>) for Personal and Professional services; and
- ✓ City's Procurement website, PHLContracts, (URL: <https://www.phlcontracts.phila.gov/bsa/>) for all other contracting needs.

In addition, I would encourage folks to attend one of our "Doing Business In The City" signature workshops. The next one is scheduled for November 14<sup>th</sup> and folks can register for the workshop on our website at <https://www.phila.gov/departments/office-of-economic-opportunity/>

**6. How does one get certified as a minority and women owned business in Philadelphia? And do you accept and or acknowledge other government and or private concerns certification? If so, who?**

Currently, the City of Philadelphia accepts over 14 Minority Business/Women business/Disabled Business certifications from other government agencies and certification organizations. To see the full list of certifications we accept please visit our website at: <https://www.phila.gov/departments/office-of-economic-opportunity/>. The City does not certify minority or women businesses, instead we rely on third-party certification entities.

**7. Will you encourage the use of Mentor Protégé and Joint Venture Agreements and will they be memorialized by The City of Philadelphia and monitored?**

Yes, we are working on this effort as we speak.

**8. How will goals be set on minority and women owned business spend?**

We have 35% M/W/DSBE goal for the City of Philadelphia. Our forward-thinking Mayor Jim Kenney has charged us with ensuring 35 cents of every dollar the City invests in contracts or projects is spent with Minority/Women/Disability Enterprise (M/W/DSBE) firms' participation. Therefore, my team works with the 40 plus City departments to establish their departmental goals and we have Minority Business Specialists that establish participation goals on a contract/project-specific basis; all goals must be vetted and approved by our Deputy of Commerce, Ms. Iola Harper.

**9. How will the city treat Request for Waivers from Primes?**

All waiver requests must be vetted and approved by the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) via our Deputy Director Iola Harper.

**10. How will the city track payments and performance in your goal base program?**

We track M/W/DSBE firm payments via our web-based compliance system, "M/W/DSBE Inclusion Works Compliance Reporting System." This solution is provided to us by B2GNOW.

**11. For the good of the order, would you like to add anything to close out this interview?**

We are ALL In when it comes to ensuring the equity, diversity and inclusion of minority and women businesses in our contracting opportunities. I personally invite diverse businesses to join me our journey!