

# Leveling the Playing Field

BY MARY MEDLAND

Over the past several decades, minority-owned businesses have made great strides when it comes to being equal participants in the workplace. Nonetheless, there is still room for improvement.

And a number of Maryland organizations are stepping up to the plate to level the playing field.

"In the spring of 2007, Sen. Verna Jones — who is a State Senator from Baltimore City and former chair of the Legislative Black Caucus — initiated a conversation with the Maryland Hospital Association (MHA) staff that really got things rolling," says Denise Matricciani, vice president, government relations for the MHA. "It became apparent that we could do more to help strengthen our relationship with the minority business community.

"The Maryland Hospital Association had never been formally asked for assistance, so we spent a number of months processing all of the relevant information. Through that process we learned that a number of our members were already fully engaged with the MBE community.

"As a consequence, we were able to build on the experience of those hospitals to develop our Women and Minority-Owned Business Initiative."

Matricciani notes that the MHA took a three-pronged approach that included educating its members, developing policies and tools to assist them in strengthening their supplier diversity program, and educating them as to how to best reach out to the minority business community.

"First, we focused on educating our membership on the importance of establishing strong supplier diversity programs within their organizations, which benefits both the hospi-

tals and the minority business community," she says.

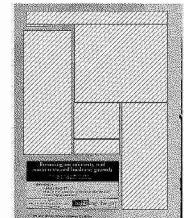
For instance, says Matricciani, many hospitals have been doing business with the same contractors for several decades. "But doing that may limit their opportunities for other qualified businesses in the community to work with the institution. It is crucial for management to be totally committed and to provide the necessary resources to change the culture that exists," she says.

Also, the MHA is stepping up its outreach to the minority business community.

"We are just now beginning to focus on the outreach component by working with the Governor's Office of Minority Affairs, the Greater Baltimore Committee and our member hospitals to determine how we can pool our resources to provide meaningful opportunities for outreach ... we are still trying to figure out how to eliminate barriers," says Matricciani.

From the standpoint of the Greater Baltimore Committee's Bridging the Gap Initiative, it is crucial for everyone to pursue professional partnerships with minority businessmen and women. "We are attempting to change the culture of how we engage with minority and women-owned enterprises," says Donald Fry, president and CEO of the Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC). "We are trying to create a business environment where it is the norm to look at what is required under the law for these businesses, but also what is in the best interest of businesses, both large and small, to create equity ventures as we move forward."

Fry adds that considering the current state of the economy, it is increasingly important that businesses consider partnering. "If



structured correctly," he says, "partnerships can provide one's company with significant competitive advantages."

In other words, pooling resources provides everyone an opportunity to strengthen their position in the market.

"What we are trying to do is to have corporations and businesses look a bit differently at the way they do business and make a concerted effort to see where opportunities exist for working with the local business and minority communities," says Fry.

As an example, he points to Presidential Partners LLC, a collaboration of five of the region's prominent minority development and construction firms, which have used their combined financial resources to successfully bid on projects that individually they would not have been likely to pursue.

Along with the GBC and the Maryland Hospital Association, MICUA, or the Maryland Independent College & University Association, is striving to reach out to minority businesses.

"Our Minority Business Program is an initiative begun by our board of directors about a year ago," says Tina M. Bjarekull, president of MICUA. "We have met with representatives from the Governor's Office of Minority Affairs to learn from it and to see what we can do dif-

ferently."

In the case of MICUA, most of its opportunities are in the area of construction and facilities renovation. "We follow the State's definition as to what a minority business enterprise is," says Bjarekull.

Bjarekull notes that MICUA provides training for its members on how to do outreach to minority business contractors. "We are starting a portal on our Web site, so there will be a single place for minority contractors to see what our

members need and where to go for further information," she says. "We train our members to let their main contractors know that they will be expected to reach out to minority subcontractors.

"Our initiative is supported by every one of our members, and everyone takes this very seriously."



**“**  
We are attempting to change the culture of how we engage with minority and women-owned enterprises.  
**”**

**DONALD FRY**  
Greater Baltimore Committee



ISTOCKPHOTO.COM