

UChicago to expand diversity and local employment on construction projects

University and Medical Center set ambitious diversity and workforce goals, plan mentor-protégé program

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The University of Chicago and the University of Chicago Medical Center are expanding their efforts to increase the participation of minorities, women and local residents in construction projects, creating more ambitious workforce diversity goals and developing a new mentor-protégé program.

The University is increasing its goal for the participation of certified minority-owned contracting firms from 25 percent to 35 percent, in line with the Medical Center's goal. The University and the Medical Center are increasing the goal for certified women-owned firms from 5 percent to 6 percent and raising the Chicago residency goal for on-site construction workers to 40 percent. The changes will increase construction workforce diversity and align the University and Medical Center with the same goals.

The University and the Medical Center also will work together to develop a mentor-protégé program to help smaller minority- and women-owned contracting firms gain technical and administrative expertise that will enable them to successfully compete for construction projects at UChicago and elsewhere. The new goals will apply to projects bid after March 15, 2017. The mentor-protégé program is expected to begin in the coming months.

The efforts reflect UChicago's commitment to enhancing business diversity and expanding economic opportunities in the neighborhoods surrounding its campus. In recent years, UChicago has been increasingly recognized as a leader in business diversity because of efforts to increase the number of women and minority suppliers in professional services and on construction and renovation projects.

UChicago's annual [Professional Services Symposium](#) has succeeded in connecting University administrators with numerous minority- and women-owned firms, growing the pool of available talent and producing a sustained model that other institutions have emulated. The University also has worked to support local businesses and job-seekers, including through the 2014 launch of [UChicago Local](#). Along with the newly aligned goals for construction contracting, the University and Medical Center will continue to work with contractors to place a direct emphasis on hiring qualified workers residing within eight zip codes near the campus.

“As the largest employer on the South Side and one of the largest in Chicago, the University of Chicago is committed to supporting local economic growth and a diverse workforce that draws upon the depth of talent in our city,” said President Robert J. Zimmer. “These new measures reflect our increasing ambition to expand diversity and inclusion, to the mutual benefit of local communities and the University.”

The Medical Center introduced minimum goals for the participation of certified women- and minority-owned firms on capital construction projects in 2001, and the University introduced minimum goals for capital construction projects of \$2 million or more in 2005. As part of the alignment, both will raise the Chicago residency goal for onsite construction projects to 40 percent, from 30 percent at the University and 35 percent at the Medical Center. The current goals for onsite workforce hours by women and minorities will remain in place. The new goals will apply to all University and Medical Center construction projects.

Contractors that fail to meet the goals will be subject to review, and any contractor that does not meet the goals on two consecutive projects may lose eligibility to compete for future University or Medical Center projects.

“The health and vitality of our community have long been cornerstones of UChicago Medicine’s commitment to strengthening the South Side, and our construction diversity program is just one way we support the economic health and development of our neighborhoods,” said Kenneth S. Polonsky, executive vice president for medical affairs. “This new joint initiative demonstrates, in a very tangible way, our commitment to the stability and growth of local businesses and the local economy.”

Mentor-protégé program will support increased goals, enhance skills of emerging firms

To support the contracting goals, the University and the Medical Center will develop a mentor-protégé program that will help prepare certified women- and minority-owned firms seeking to grow their business to better compete for major construction projects both on and off the UChicago campus. Through the program, protégé firms will work with prime contractors or construction managers that can provide industry knowledge and expertise to strengthen their skills in specific areas. The program will initially focus on architecture, engineering and construction.

Protégé firms also will be eligible to participate in programs offered through UChicago Local and the Polsky Exchange designed to strengthen the capacity of small businesses.

“In 2012 a coalition of community organizations formed an exploratory committee comprised of Bob Israel, Gregory Hinton, Omar Shareef, Paul Stewart, Carl Bibbs, Jock Hardy and myself. The committee engaged the University of Chicago concerning increased participation of certified minority- and woman-owned firms and workers on their construction projects,” said ‘EliYahh A. Ysr’Al, a member of the exploratory committee. “We are delighted with the outcome of our collaboration. This historical alignment of the goals and mentor protégé program are extraordinarily vital to the economic strength and vitality of this important segment of the community.”

To expand current reporting efforts around the achievement of construction contracting goals, the University and the Medical Center have formed a Joint Economic Sustainability Committee that will develop a common format for reporting diversity performance to the public. The committee also will collaborate to increase outreach to minority- and women-owned trade and prime contractors, coordinate community meetings to provide information on major projects, provide updates on upcoming opportunities and develop programs to formally recognize contractors that help advance UChicago's goals for increasing opportunities for minorities, women and local residents.

The committee will consist of administrators from the Facilities Services teams at the University and Medical Center and from the Office of Civic Engagement. Derek Douglas, vice president for civic engagement, will chair the joint committee.

"By increasing our goals for diversity and local hiring, we are helping to ensure that the University and the Medical Center can take advantage of the talent and skilled labor available in the communities around our campus," said Douglas. "As we consider new formats for engagement, we will seek input from community members, as well as contracting partners, to determine the most effective ways to share information on our performance."