



PONDER DIVERSITY GROUP LLC

# REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION CONSULTING SERVICES

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November 9, 2023



# Cover Letter



# Cover Letter

PDG is pleased to submit our response to your bid solicitation, reaffirming our unwavering commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within the realm of legal and consulting services. As Ponder Diversity Group LLC (PDG), we are dedicated to providing comprehensive DEI expertise to government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and public and private companies, in alignment with the specific needs outlined in the scope.

Established in 2018, PDG is proudly owned, controlled, and led by Anita Ponder, a distinguished minority woman with extensive experience as an attorney and a prominent DEIB leader. Our team consists of highly acclaimed attorneys, consultants, and esteemed teaming partners, each bringing diverse backgrounds, experiences, and specialized expertise in DEI, government contracts, procurement, and employment laws. We take great pride in the diversity of our team, as it enriches our perspectives and strengthens our capacity to deliver exceptional results. Situated in the iconic Willis Tower in downtown Chicago, we possess the capabilities, experience, and financial resources necessary to tackle projects of any scale. Our successful track record extends across both public and private sectors, and we are committed to providing our services nationwide, with distance never impeding our commitment to excellence.

At PDG, we understand the unique challenges that the Town of Swampscott faces. This small, diverse, and active community, nestled on the North Shore between Lynn and Salem, spans just over 3 square miles and is home to approximately 15,000 residents. With a rich history dating back to its settlement in 1629 and incorporation in 1852, the Town operates under a representative Town Meeting format, led by a Select Board and Town Administrator. Employing over 150 workers, including approximately two-thirds under union representation within five collective bargaining units, the Town has experienced inclusivity challenges, exacerbated by events during the pandemic and numerous protests. Additionally, the Town's departure from the civil service process has raised concerns.

The Town is now committed to addressing these critical shortcomings and better engaging and including its diverse population. Initiating this Request for Proposals (RFP) is a proactive step in this direction. This RFP seeks a qualified firm to conduct an organizational assessment, provide specialized facilitation, create an employee training plan, and initiate community and employee education programs. These endeavors aim to support the development of a strategic plan that will guide the Town in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion within the workplace and on various boards and committees.



## Cover Letter (cont'd)

The ultimate goal of this initiative is to craft a comprehensive Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategic plan, built upon the insights garnered from the organizational assessment. This plan will provide a clear short and long-term roadmap for making substantive improvements in the realms of diversity, equity, and inclusion. It will also offer invaluable educational resources and training guidance, catering to both current and future employees, as the Town takes momentous steps forward in embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion. PDG is delighted to have the opportunity to facilitate the development of Swampscott's goals.

PDG is ready and eager to engage in further discussions regarding our proposal. Whether through telephone conferences or in-person meetings, we look forward to addressing any inquiries you may have. Please refer to the contact information provided on the first page of this letter to reach us. We are fully committed to partnering with the Town of Swampscott in this transformative journey towards fostering a more inclusive and equitable community.

Upon contract award, PDG will become licensed in Massachusetts within thirty (30) calendar days of being selected.

Sincerely,

Anita Ponder

CEO, General Counsel & Chief of Diversity



## Plan of Service:

- Scope of Work
- Timeline



# Plan of Service

## Introduction

This Scope of Work outlines the responsibilities and objectives of Ponder Diversity Group (PDG) in facilitating the creation and implementation of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) program for the Town. The project aims to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion within the Town's organizational structure, processes, and community engagement.

## Definitions of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

To ensure clarity and understanding, PDG will provide clear and comprehensive definitions of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as follows:

- **Diversity:** The recognition and appreciation of individual differences in characteristics, experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives that contribute to a rich and inclusive community.
- **Equity:** The fair treatment and access to opportunities and resources for all individuals, addressing historical and structural inequalities to ensure a level playing field.
- **Inclusion:** The practice of creating a welcoming and respectful environment where all individuals feel valued, heard, and can fully participate in all aspects of community life.
  - Best Practice: PDG will refer to academic literature, industry standards, and consult with relevant experts in the field to develop a robust understanding of these concepts.

## Implementation Plan for DEI Staff Position

PDG will create an implementation plan for the creation of a staff position for DEI within the Town's organizational structure, which includes:

- A recommended job description that outlines the role, responsibilities, and qualifications.
- A suggested salary range that aligns with industry standards.
- Placement within the organizational chart to ensure effective collaboration with other Town departments, boards, community organizations, and the community in general.
  - Best Practice: PDG will ensure that the DEI staff position reports directly to senior leadership, demonstrating the Town's commitment to DEI at the highest level.



# Plan of Service (cont'd)

## DEI Board or Similar Group Recommendation

PDG will recommend the potential need for a DEI board or similar group, including:

- A mission statement that clearly defines the purpose and objectives of the group.
- An operational structure that outlines roles and responsibilities.
- Defined goals and measurable outcomes for the group's activities.
  - Best Practice: PDG will engage community members with expertise in DEI to serve on the board or group for diverse perspectives.

## Professional Assessment Tools and Training

PDG will provide assessment tools, resources, and training to Town department heads, including:

- Quantitative analysis tools to measure DEI progress.
- Guidelines for drafting quarterly or year-end department documents.
- Assistance in submitting Affirmative Action Plan (AAP)/Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) statistical reports.
  - Best Practice: PDG will provide ongoing training to build capacity within departments and ensure sustained DEI efforts.

## Assessment of Current DEI Practices

PDG will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the Town's current DEI practices and procedures, performing a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), covering areas such as:

- Hiring
- Internal and external communications
- Agency culture
- Professional development opportunities.
  - Best Practice: PDG will include employee input through surveys and focus groups to gather valuable insights.



# Plan of Service(cont'd)

## Review of Procurement Process

- PDG will review the Town's Procurement process to incorporate elements of equity in the bidding process and awarding of contracts.
  - Best Practice: PDG will develop a clear scoring system that considers DEI in the procurement evaluation process.

## Workforce Assessment

- PDG will assess the Town's workforce, comparing it with the composition of the Town's year-round population, availability of qualified minority candidates, and housing considerations.
  - Best Practice: PDG will develop strategies to attract and retain a diverse workforce that reflects the community.

## Community Training Programs

- PDG will assess the Town's ability to provide community training programs for minorities and continuous training and equal opportunities for all employees to advance within the Town's government organization.
  - Best Practice: PDG will offer mentorship programs and career development opportunities for underrepresented employees.

## DEI Training Plan/Manual

- PDG will develop a written DEI Training Plan/Manual that addresses training gaps. This plan will include topics like building a common language, implicit bias, structural inequalities, and promoting a welcoming and inclusive environment.
  - Best Practice: PDG will make training accessible and ongoing, incorporating feedback from employees for improvement.

## Community Engagement

- PDG will assess the Town's ability to engage minorities in the community and enhance civic participation through program creation or improvement.
  - Best Practice: PDG will develop mentorship and allyship programs to build trust and support minority participation in Town activities.





# Plan of Service(cont'd)

## Employee and Official Focus Groups and Surveys

- PDG will conduct a minimum of ten (10) focus groups with Town department employees, Union representatives, Select Board members, and others to gather insights and opinions on implementing a Town-wide DEI program.
  - Best Practice: PDG will ensure diverse representation in focus groups and use survey data for quantitative analysis.

## Strategy and Implementation Plan

- PDG will create a written strategy and implementation plan to engage appointed and elected leadership in DEI initiatives.
  - Best Practice: PDG will establish clear roles and responsibilities for leaders in advancing DEI goals.

## Public Focus Groups and Surveys

- PDG will conduct at least two (2) public focus groups and surveys to assess the community's perception of DEI.
  - Best Practice: PDG will ensure that the public engagement process is inclusive and representative of the Town's demographics.

## Data Utilization

- PDG will utilize existing data, assessments, and community agency data to develop deliverables and identify any obstacles to data collection.
  - Best Practice: PDG will ensure transparency and data privacy compliance when collecting and using data.

## Broad Participation in Data Collection

- PDG will aim for greater than 75% participation from Town employees in surveys and focus groups.
  - Best Practice: PDG will use diverse channels for data collection to reach as many employees as possible.
- Several benefits and costs are associated with various data collection methods:

METHOD	DEFINITION	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Individual Interviews	Conversation with a purpose that is conducted between two people either face-to-face or by telephone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviewer can ask what he or she wants to know</li> <li>• Can tell if questions are understood</li> <li>• Can ensure questions are answered.</li> <li>• Interviewees might tell interview things he or she would not write on a survey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time-consuming</li> <li>• Must transcribe notes after interview</li> </ul> <p>Person being interviewed may be biased</p>
Focus Groups	Involve gathering Information and opinions from a small group of people (8 to 10 per group) Group discussions often provide insights that might not emerge in interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can assess body language</li> <li>• Observers can be present without distracting participants. If live taped can share with others who couldn't attend.</li> <li>• Have participants' undivided attention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responders lose anonymity.</li> <li>• Higher travel expenses when multiple locales are used.</li> <li>• Logistical challenge in rural areas or small towns</li> </ul>
Observation	Mailing self-completion questionnaires to a targeted group of people (e.g., a client's customers or people living in a certain area)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relatively inexpensive</li> <li>• Less potential for people to give answers they assume the interviewer wants to hear</li> <li>• No interviewer training required</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suitable only for short and straightforward surveys</li> <li>• Data collection takes a long time</li> <li>• Relatively low response rates</li> </ul> <p>Moderate literacy level required</p>
Postal Survey	Mailing self-completion questionnaires to a targeted group of people (e.g., a client's customers or people living in a certain area)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relatively inexpensive</li> <li>• Less potential for people to give answers they assume the interviewer wants to hear</li> <li>• No interviewer training required</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suitable only for short and straightforward surveys</li> <li>• Data collection takes a long time</li> <li>• Relatively low response rates</li> <li>• Moderate literacy level required</li> </ul>
Telephone Survey	Collection of data from a sample population using a standardized questionnaire by telephone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimizes missing data</li> <li>• Can use open-ended questions and more complex interviewing schedules</li> <li>• Can record reasons and characteristics of nonrespondents</li> <li>• Quick and inexpensive</li> </ul> <p>Does not require a high level of literacy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be hard to prevent consultation with and/or interference from others</li> <li>• Need to keep questions few and short</li> <li>• Unable to ask questions requiring visual cues.</li> <li>• Some likelihood of socially desirable responses</li> </ul>
Face-to-Face Survey	A face-to-face survey is a telephone survey without the telephone. The interviewer physically travels to the respondent's location to conduct a personal interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows flexibility in number and style of questions</li> <li>• Minimizes missing data</li> <li>• Allows physical measurements &amp; direct observations</li> </ul> <p>Minimizes literacy level Issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High likelihood of socially desirable responses</li> <li>• Can be hard to prevent consultation with or interference from others.</li> <li>• Very expensive, especially if respondents are widespread geographically</li> </ul> <p>Time-consuming</p>
Web-Based Surveys	A group of potential respondents is invited to participate in completing a web-based survey, and their responses are submitted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be relatively inexpensive.</li> <li>• Relatively quick method of data collection</li> <li>• Minimizes social desirability biases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High set-up costs</li> <li>• Useful only for relatively large-scale surveys</li> <li>• High level of literacy and basic computer skills required</li> </ul>



# Plan of Service(cont'd)

## Short- and Long-Term Goals

- PDG will develop short- and long-term goals for the DEI Strategic Plan, taking into consideration Swampscott's unique characteristics.
  - Best Practice: PDG will ensure that goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART).

## Deliverables

- **Methodology:**
  - PDG will provide a review of Town personnel and department policies with a gap analysis.
  - PDG will provide a identification of municipalities and organizations with exemplary DEI programs.
  - PDG will conduct at least two (2) public surveys and one (1) Town employee survey.
  - PDG will facilitate multiple interactive workgroups with up to 400 Town employees and 50 elected and appointed officials.
  - PDG will facilitate interactive workgroups with community members to gather experiences and trust-related concerns.
- **Reporting:**
  - PDG will provide monthly updates to the Human Resources Director.
  - PDG will provide draft assessment and plan updates to the Town Administrator or designee.
  - PDG will present findings and recommendations to the Select Board in the form of draft and final assessment and plans.
- **Assessment:**
  - PDG will deliver a final written assessment that includes a comprehensive report and presentation to the Select Board.
- **Strategic Plan:**
  - PDG will develop a DEI Strategic Plan with targeted goals, an action plan, and clear oversight responsibilities, timeframes, and resource needs.
- **Short-Term Plan:**
  - PDG will develop a short-term plan with goals and benchmarks achievable within six months and one year.



# Plan of Service(cont'd)

## Education and Training:

- **Alignment with Organizational Goals:** PDG will ensure that the education and training programs align directly with the DEI roadmap's goals and benchmarks, as well as the short-term plan.
- **Comprehensive Coverage:** The programs will comprehensively cover DEI topics identified as priorities during the assessment.
- **Diverse Formats:** PDG will offer the education and training programs in various formats to cater to diverse learning preferences and schedules. These formats may include in-person sessions, small group discussions, lectures, webinars, workshops, and other interactive methods.
- **Incorporation of Best Practices:** PDG will integrate best practices in adult education, DEI training, and diversity management into the design and delivery of the programs.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Regular evaluations will be conducted by PDG to gauge the effectiveness of the education and training programs. Adjustments will be made as necessary to ensure ongoing engagement, relevance, and alignment with evolving organizational needs and goals.
- **Target Audience:** PDG will provide education and training for all levels of employees, from front-line staff to leadership, elected officials, and appointed officials. Tailored content will be offered to address the unique needs of each group.
- **Community Engagement:** While primarily focused on internal staff and officials, PDG will work to engage the broader community, creating opportunities for residents to participate in learning and dialogue.

# Plan of Service: Timeline

## Months 1-3: Assessments

- PDG will assess current DEI practices, including strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.
- PDG will access and recommend equity elements in the procurement process.
- PDG will assess workforce diversity and hiring capabilities.
- PDG will assess the ability to provide inclusive training and advancement opportunities.
- PDG will assess and improve minority engagement in the community.
- PDG will assess Town's DEI knowledge and application.
- PDG will provide ongoing updates and prepare a quarterly report summarizing each assessment.

## Months 4-6: Data Collection

- Employee and elected/appointed official focus groups and surveys will help PDG develop DEI strategies from diverse perspectives.
- PDG will utilize existing data and identify ways to overcome data collection obstacles.
- PDG will ensure broad participation in data collection and reporting.
- PDG will provide ongoing updates and a quarterly report summarizing our data collection and analysis.

## Months 7-9: Creation and Implementation of Plans

- PDG will create an implementation plan with recommendations for a DEI staff position.
- PDG will prepare a strategy and implementation plan with recommendations.
- PDG will develop short- and long-term DEI goals, integrating DEI into Town processes and policies.
- PDG will create a strategy to engage leadership in DEI initiatives.
- PDG will create and execute a gap analysis compared to best practices.
- PDG will provide ongoing updates and a quarterly report detailing the plans' outcomes.

## Months 10-12: Development of Training Materials

- PDG will develop a DEI Training Plan/Manual.
- PDG will develop and provide assessment tools and training to department heads.
- PDG will map out one year of training with elements derived from the organizational assessment.
- PDG will provide ongoing updates and yearly and quarterly reports detailing the progress of the project.

## Months 13-15 Execution of Training

- PDG will conduct prepared training modules.
- PDG will provide clear definitions of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.
- PDG will facilitate multiple workgroups with employees and officials.
- PDG will provide ongoing updates and a quarterly report detailing the outcomes of training.

## Months 16-17 Submission of Findings

- PDG will recommend a DEI board's mission, structure, and goals.
- PDG will identify like-sized municipalities with exemplary DEI programs.
- PDG will provide a final written report and presentation to the Select Board by the end of the contract.



## **Experience & Resources:**

- **Staffing**
- **History of Providing Services**



# Experiences & Resources

- **Ponder Diversity Group (PDG) Overview:** Ponder Diversity Group (PDG) is a distinguished law and consulting firm specializing in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) solutions. We have a track record of successfully delivering thorough DEI education and training to organizations of all sizes. We are a dependable partner for developing inclusive workplaces and a diverse workforce because of our breadth of experience and expertise in this area.
- **Organizational Background:** PDG was established with the goal of fostering inclusion, diversity, and equity within organizations. Highly qualified individuals with experience in DEI consultation, instruction, and training make up our team. Our experts bring a plethora of knowledge to the table thanks to varied backgrounds and experiences.
- **Qualifications and Experience:** The PDG team has over 35 years of experience in delivering DEI initiatives and support to organizations. We have successfully partnered with various government entities, corporations, and nonprofit organizations to advance DEI initiatives. Some key qualifications and experiences that set us apart include:

#### **Customized Training Solutions:**

The PDG team specializes in tailoring DEI education and training programs to meet the unique needs and goals of our clients. Our programs are not one-size-fits-all but are designed to align with an organization's specific objectives.

#### **Bias Training:**

PDG offers comprehensive bias training programs for all levels of staff, using interactive exercises and scenarios to help participants recognize and address bias in real-time.

#### **Inclusive Curriculum Development:**

PDG's curriculum development process emphasizes inclusivity. We incorporate interactive and experiential learning methods, real-life scenarios, and case studies relevant to Swampscott's workforce.

#### **Legal Compliance:**

We ensure that our training programs align with legal requirements and regulations governing DEI, including Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) laws and related legislation.

#### **Leadership Development:**

PDG provides specialized training to leaders and managers on inclusive leadership practices. We empower leaders with practical tools to foster inclusivity within their teams.

#### **Community Engagement:**

We actively seek input and feedback from diverse stakeholders, including underrepresented communities, advocacy organizations, and experts in social equity and related fields, to ensure our programs align with community needs.



# Experiences & Resources – Staffing

Ponder Diversity Group possesses extensive experience in delivering expert consulting services tailored to the needs of organizations seeking to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Our team's qualifications align perfectly with the criteria for selecting consultants on similar projects. With a wealth of collective experience exceeding five full-time years, our project principals are well-versed in providing comprehensive diversity, equity, and inclusion consulting and training to organizations. Moreover, our track record highlights our proficiency in developing and delivering customized education and training programs, specifically designed to foster inclusive workplaces and workforces. We have also excelled in providing inclusive leadership education and training to leaders across various organizational levels and implementing bias training programs for staff at all tiers within organizations. Our expertise extends to diverse workforces, encompassing exempt, non-exempt, unionized, and non-unionized employees. Furthermore, our consulting services are underpinned by methodologies tailored to diversify and sustain staff, cultivate inclusive environments, drive engagement and growth, and embed equity into organizational cultures. PDG anticipates and commits to ensuring that no conflicts of interest will arise within its operations or among its personnel.

Anita Ponder, a black woman, is the proud owner of Ponder Diversity Group. Her team is a diverse and inclusive group, with members such as Leticia Herrera, a Hispanic woman with fluent Spanish skills, Tiffini Calimee, a black woman, Khizr Masalawala, an Indian man, and Megan Larson, who represents the LGBTQIA community. Despite the team's small size, a significant percentage of its members belong to federally and state-protected classes, embodying the company's commitment to fostering diversity and inclusivity in their work.





# Experiences & Resources – Staffing



## Anita Ponder

PROJECT  
MANAGER

Experience: Anita J. Ponder is an award-winning attorney who currently serves as CEO, General Counsel, and Chief Diversity Officer at Ponder Diversity Group (PDG). With over 30 years of experience, she has provided consultation, training, and advocacy in the areas of government contracts, procurement, supplier diversity and equal employment opportunity. Ms. Ponder has been a prominent advocate for diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) in both the public and private sectors. She has represented government agencies, nonprofit organizations, Fortune 500 corporations, and businesses of various sizes, including disadvantaged, minority, women, and veteran-owned enterprises.

Before joining PDG, Ms. Ponder held significant roles at law firms such as Seyfarth Shaw LLP and Drinker Biddle & Reath. She has been recognized for her outstanding achievements in promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging throughout her legal career. Ms. Ponder's educational background includes a J.D. from the esteemed University of Florida Holland Law Center and a B.A. with honors in public administration and political science from Fisk University. She is admitted to the Illinois State Bar and the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois. She began her career as an Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Specialist in Chicago and progressed to supervisory EEO roles, eventually becoming the Director of EEO & Contract Compliance. In this role, she enforced employment laws and provided EEO training to employees and contractors. Anita has extensive knowledge of federal, state, and local employment laws, as well as expertise in areas like sexual harassment, retaliation, and diversity equity and inclusion. She possesses strong research, writing, and analytical skills, can build coalitions, and excels in problem-solving. Anita is highly organized, detail-oriented, and professional, making her a valuable asset for handling sensitive government DEI matters. Throughout her career, Ms. Ponder has demonstrated her commitment to advancing DEI and supplier diversity. She has helped clients develop and improve their DEI programs, ensuring the inclusion of diverse employees and DBE/MBE/WBEs (Disadvantaged Business Enterprises/Minority Business Enterprises/Women Business Enterprises) in federal, state, and local contracts.



# Experiences & Resources – Staffing



**Anita Ponder**

PROJECT  
MANAGER

## DEI Outcomes Achieved:

- An engagement with the State of Washington to implement a Social Equity in Cannabis Program which includes the development of an end-to-end online cannabis retail license application process and legal review of comprehensive applications and supporting documents from applicants who are seeking a cannabis retail license.
- The development and implementation of a law firm (QBWB) sponsored Small Business Certification Initiative that provides legal and business consulting services to DBE/MBE/WBE/VBE certification applicants who are seeking to fulfill DBE/MBE/WBE/VBE contract participation goals on government contracts.
- An engagement with the Illinois Tollway's Technical Assistance Program, which is designed to prepare emerging and established transportation-related construction and professional engineering services firms with small, diverse and veteran-owned businesses to participate on highway and vertical construction projects. Participants receive comprehensive, customized business development assistance to build financial understanding and business plan development for increased business stability and growth in the transportation-related construction industry. Services are customized to the assessed strengths, challenges and needs of participating firms. The legal services consisted of contract review, DBE/ME/WBE legal consultation/training and presentations at small business workshops.
- An engagement with the State of Illinois Executive Ethics Commissions to provide DEI/social equity consulting and related legal services that included: writing administrative rules to implement the Request for Proposal (RFP) Commitment to Diversity requirement as outlined in the agency's Procurement Code; writing a minimum of six (6) new objective elements that can be scored under RFP Commitment to Diversity and prepare a rubric that will guide evaluators on how best to score the recommended elements; writing justification and provide supporting evidence that the selected Commitment to Diversity elements best represent a firm's commitment to diversity which included court cases where the element was challenged; and writing and formatting the RFP-template instructions for Commitment to Diversity.



# Experiences & Resources – Staffing



**Anita Ponder**

PROJECT  
MANAGER

- An engagement with the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to provide legal support in connection with their solicitation of fourteen (14) separate government contracts. Our legal team managed and facilitated the development of fourteen (14) bid solicitations from drafting to final contract award. These contracts required our preparation and counsel regarding the applicable terms and conditions, including the supplier diversity contract participation goals.
- An engagement with the Chicago Department of Aviation to assist the department in producing a comprehensive Code of Conduct governing employees and City vendors, which included DEIB/social equity related topics involving supplier diversity.
- An engagement with the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) to provide a variety of legal services to Section 3 business owners and DBE/MBE/WBEs, including their participation on government contracts and related contract terms and conditions. The CHA has approximately 700 businesses self-certified in its Section 3 system. Businesses range from construction, professional services, supply, and delivery.
- Various DEI/social equity projects for the Chicago Department of Procurement Services which included comprehensive research and legal analysis of DBE/MBE/WBE governmental programs nationwide, as well as program recommendations which led to significant changes and improvement of the City's DBE/MBE/WBE Program.
- An engagement with the State of Illinois, Department of Central Management Services which included conducting comprehensive nationwide research to examine the supplier diversity policies and procedures and related case law, in connection with public and private sector minority and women business enterprise (MBE/WBE) programs nationwide in order to identify innovative programs, best practices and recommendations that maximize the participation of MBE/WBEs on government contracts.



# Experiences & Resources – Staffing



**Anita Ponder**

PROJECT  
MANAGER

- Organized and facilitated an innovative City-wide Government Contractors Business Forum (Forum) for over 1000 government contractors and subcontractors, including DBE/MBE/WBEs, for approximately seven (7) years. The purpose of the Forum was to: help participating businesses to compete more effectively in the federal, state and local governmental marketplace; provide them opportunities to develop government relationships; identify major contracting and subcontracting opportunities; provide consultation regarding new procurement laws, legislation, and supplier diversity programs; provide business development consultation; promote strategic alliances between participating businesses; and provide government contract and diversity related consultation services.
- Engagements with public housing authorities (PHAs) in connection with their efforts to promote economic development, neighborhood economic improvement and individual self-sufficiency by low-income, minority residents. Facilitated PHAs compliance to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) regulations, reduced their legal exposure, secured their HUD funding, and improved their relationships with HUD officials and PHA residents.

## **DEI Services Include:**

- State of Washington, Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board: An engagement with the State of Washington to implement a Social Equity in Cannabis Program which included our participation in webinars to provide information and answer questions regarding the Program and our online cannabis retail licensing application process.
- Small Business Certification Initiative: The development and implementation of a law firm (QBWB) sponsored Small Business Certification Initiative. Provided consultation and training to DBE/MBE/WBEs and small businesses to: 1) better understand the certification eligibility requirements and common pitfalls; 2) determine whether their business qualifies for certification eligibility; 3) complete their certification application, including the checklist of supporting documentation; 4) properly respond to certification inquiries and denial decisions by a certifying agency; and 5) facilitate the expansion of their designated certification specialty areas, so that their business can qualify to participate on more contracts.



# Experiences & Resources – Staffing



**Anita Ponder**

PROJECT  
MANAGER

- **Illinois Tollway:** An engagement with the Illinois Tollway's Technical Assistance Program. Provided consultation and training to DBE/MBE/WBEs regarding bidding and contracting with the Illinois Tollway and other governmental agencies.
- **State of Illinois Executive Ethics Commission:** An engagement with the State of Illinois Executive Ethics Commission. Ms. Ponder provided training to State administrators regarding: proposed administrative rules to implement the Request for Proposal (RFP) Commitment to Diversity requirement as outlined in the agency's Procurement Code; proposed objective elements that can be scored under RFP Commitment to Diversity; proposed scoring rubric that will guide administrators on how best to score the recommended elements; our comprehensive nationwide legal research to support our proposed elements; and proposed RFP-template instructions for Commitment to Diversity.
- **Chicago Housing Authority (CHA):** An engagement with the CHA to provide consultation and training to Section 3 business owners and DBE/MBE/WBEs regarding government contracts and related contract terms and conditions.
- **Illinois Department of Central Management Services:** An engagement with the Illinois Department of Central Management Services which included consultation and training of City administrators regarding our comprehensive nationwide research to examine the supplier diversity policies and procedures and related case law, in connection with public and private sector minority and women business enterprise (MBE/WBE) programs and related program recommendations.
- **Government Contractors Business Forum (Forum):** Organized and facilitated an innovative City-wide Forum to provide consultation and training to over 500 government contractors and subcontractors, including DBE/MBE/WBEs.



# Experiences & Resources – Staffing



## **Sandy Stein**

DEI OF COUNSEL

Sanford Stein brings a wealth of experience in the realm of social equity to his professional portfolio. For more than four decades, he has actively championed diversity, equity, and inclusion in various sectors, including governmental and private entities. Beyond these accomplishments, he has established himself as a leading authority in the highly regulated cannabis industry in the United States. Mr. Stein's work extends into the heart of agencies, where he focuses on fostering inclusive workplaces and workforces. He provides consulting and training services that are specially tailored to the needs of each organization. His approach centers on developing organizations to create and sustain inclusive environments where diversity thrives.

Sanford's professional journey commenced at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, where he managed a multitude of enforcement and policy matters. Today, his practice encompasses a broad spectrum of business regulatory affairs, spanning Illinois and nationwide. Notably, Sanford Stein is at the forefront of the movement advocating for cannabis legalization, social equity in cannabis retail sales, rational cannabis regulations. He has lent his expertise to cannabis legislation and rulemaking, regulatory compliance, business development, real estate, finance, banking, license applications, Tribal Government guidance, and zoning for cannabis enterprises across several states.

Tribal advocacy has been a cornerstone of Sanford Stein's multifaceted career. With a deep understanding of government relations and legal expertise, Mr. Stein has been a dedicated advocate for tribal governments and their unique challenges. His experience spans a range of critical issues, from assisting tribal nations with legislative initiatives to providing counsel on matters related to land use, zoning, and economic development within tribal territories. Mr. Stein's commitment to tribal advocacy extends to supporting tribal governments in their efforts to navigate the complex landscape of cannabis regulation and legalization, ensuring that these communities have a voice and opportunities in this emerging industry. His extensive background in both governmental and private sector affairs positions him as a trusted partner in advancing tribal sovereignty and prosperity.



# Experiences & Resources – Staffing



**Sandy Stein**

DEI OF COUNSEL

Additionally, Sanford Stein's extensive legal expertise in social equity initiatives is exemplified through his notable engagement with the State of Washington. In this pivotal role, Mr. Stein has played a vital part in shaping and implementing the Social Equity in Cannabis Program. His contributions have focused significantly on providing essential legal advising to guide the development and execution of this groundbreaking program. This initiative aims to create a more inclusive and equitable cannabis industry, addressing historical disparities and promoting diverse participation. Through his legal acumen and dedication to social equity, Mr. Stein has played a pivotal role in advancing Washington's commitment to fostering a fair and inclusive cannabis landscape.

**Approach to Similar Work:** Sanford Stein has been dedicated to serving both governmental and private sector clients, navigating a diverse range of legislative, regulatory, and judicial landscapes. With a unique blend of expertise in business and government relations law, Sanford has cultivated extensive experience in infrastructure development, public finance, public-private partnership economic development, government regulations, and procurement.

## DEI Outcomes Achieved:

- **State of Washington, Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board:** An engagement with the State of Washington to implement a Social Equity in Cannabis Program which included providing consultation and training to the Social Equity Contractor regarding cannabis licensing laws, regulations, policies and practices nationwide. Mr. Stein also Supported an engagement with the State of Washington to implement a Social Equity in Cannabis Program which included webinars to provide information and answer questions regarding the Program and our online cannabis retail licensing application process.
- **John Marshall Law School:** Taught, mentored and trained female, minority and nonminority students via numerous lectures and speeches regarding the environmental aspects of real estate transactions, environmental law, land use, free speech, municipal law and legislation.



# Experiences & Resources – Staffing



**Sandy Stein**

DEI OF COUNSEL

- Cannabis Business Enterprises: Various engagements by Cannabis Business Enterprises, including minority and women-owned businesses, which included consultation and training on cannabis licensing eligibility requirements and their applications for a cannabis license in multiple jurisdictions.

Mr. Stein's advocacy and legal expertise have contributed to the advancement of cannabis legalization and sensible regulations. He has facilitated business development, secured real estate and finance options, and guided license applications, supporting the growth of diverse cannabis enterprises.





# Experiences & Resources – Staffing



## **Meg Larson**

DEI CONSULTANT

Experience: Megan (Meg) Larson is a resolute and passionate DEI consultant at PDG with a strong background in government policies, legislation, and public issues related to BIPOC, diverse groups, and low-income communities. Ms. Larson excels in various areas such as community outreach, resource development, training, research, writing, and marketing. Megan is a highly skilled professional who has honed her expertise in diversity-related matters, governmental and community affairs, and social media. She is proficient in Adobe Creative Suite and consistently delivers exceptional work of the highest quality. With a proven history of success in the governmental, educational, and not-for-profit sectors, Megan is committed to achieving outstanding results in all aspects of her work. She brings significant educational, training, and mentoring experience, including proficiency in software such as LexisNexis, Excel, and archival work. Ms. Larson's research encompasses various legislation and policies focused on economic inequality, labor rights, and public and private health insurance, and she takes considerable pride in her exceptional ability to educate, mentor, and tutor diverse individuals.

Ms. Larson is dedicated to making a meaningful impact in diverse communities nationwide. In addition to her work at PDG, Ms. Larson has a diverse background in education, research, and community engagement. As an Adjunct Professor at Arrupe College at Loyola Chicago, she designed and implemented instructional materials, utilized diverse teaching styles, and integrated multimedia technology to cater to the needs of a diverse student population. Ms. Larson's roles as a Research Assistant Intern at SEIU Local 1 and a Senior Writing Fellow at Carthage College involved extensive research on policy issues, legislation analysis, and mentoring students to ensure their academic success. She actively engages with communities and organizations to promote social justice and equality, collaborating with diverse teams, connecting individuals with community resources, coordinating fundraising, and networking events, and engaging in lobbying efforts to advocate for policy creation.



# Experiences & Resources – Staffing



**Meg Larson**

DEI CONSULTANT

## DEI Outcomes Achieved:

- **Arrupe College at Loyola University Chicago:** Megan Larson assumed the role of an adjunct professor at Arrupe College, a two-year institution dedicated to equipping diverse and underprivileged communities with educational training and transformative opportunities. In her capacity, she delivered comprehensive instruction in American Politics and International Relations, skillfully interweaving essential components of diversity, equity, and equality throughout her teaching approach. Megan's tenure at Arrupe College exemplified her profound commitment to fostering an inclusive and accessible educational environment. By integrating themes of diversity, equity, and equality into her courses, she not only imparted knowledge but also instilled a deep understanding of the importance of representation, fair treatment, and balanced perspectives within the realm of American politics and international relations.
- **SEIU Local 1:** As a member of the Immigrant Justice Committee, Megan Larson played a role in the creation of educational materials and the training of non-native English-speaking union members on matters related to immigration and legal affairs at SEIU Local 1. Her contributions to this initiative were instrumental in empowering a diverse group of workers to navigate complex legal processes and understand their rights within the context of immigration laws.
- **Loyola University Chicago Tutoring Center:** Megan Larson made a significant contribution to Loyola's tutoring center by actively collaborating in the development of comprehensive educational materials tailored for both student workers and their diverse clientele. Recognizing the importance of inclusivity and accessibility, she championed the creation of materials that transcended cultural and linguistic boundaries, fostering a universally enriching learning experience for all. In her role, Megan worked diligently to ensure that the educational materials resonated with Loyola's diverse student body. Through meticulous diligence, she crafted resources that not only catered to various learning styles but also celebrated the multicultural backgrounds and perspectives present within the community. By embracing a universal approach, Ms. Larson facilitated a deeper connection between student workers and their clients, enabling them to engage in meaningful and effective learning interactions.



# Experiences & Resources – Staffing



## **Khizr Masalawala**

DEI ASSOCIATE

Experience: Khizr Masalawala is a DEI Associate at PDG who brings a wealth of experience in social equity matters, government policies, legislation, and public policy issues. Alongside his studies at Chicago-Kent College of Law, he has established himself as a highly skilled professional with a remarkable performance record. His expertise includes utilizing legal databases like LexisNexis and Westlaw, ensuring his work consistently meets exceptional standards. Mr. Masalawala has dedicated his research efforts to analyzing and summarizing legislation and policies related to economic inequality, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB), as well as government contracts. He takes immense pride in his research abilities, evaluating findings, and facilitating government contracts, all with the aim of creating a meaningful impact in diverse communities nationwide.

One of Khizr Masalawala's core strengths lies in his commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. His deep understanding of DEI issues informs his work as he strives to tackle economic inequality through legal channels. With a passion for social equity, he seeks to promote fair and just practices that uplift marginalized communities. His focus on researching and analyzing legislation and policies related to DEI demonstrates his dedication to creating an inclusive and equitable society. By applying his skills and knowledge to government contracts, Mr. Masalawala aims to facilitate positive change on a national scale, fostering a sense of belonging for diverse communities.

In his pursuit of social justice, Khizr Masalawala's exceptional performance and commitment to DEI make him a valuable asset. With his strong research capabilities and extensive understanding of the law, he leverages his skills to address economic disparities and promote fairness. By actively engaging with legal databases and staying up to date with legislation, he ensures that his work is comprehensive and effective. Through his work at PDG and his studies, Mr. Masalawala strives to be a catalyst for change, working towards a future where diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging are central to societal progress.



# Experiences & Resources – Staffing



## **Khizr Masalawala**

DEI ASSOCIATE

**Approach to Similar Work:** Mr. Masalawala is deeply committed to DEI issues and utilizes his research skills to analyze legislation and policies. He actively engages with legal databases and stays updated on legislative changes.

### **DEI Outcomes Achieved:**

- **Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board:** Mr. Masalawala has proven to be an indispensable asset to the WSLCB team, particularly in his role of providing essential technical assistance and training. His expertise and dedication have significantly enhanced the organization's capacity to navigate complex challenges and foster professional growth among its members. With a deep reservoir of knowledge and a keen understanding of intricate technical aspects, Mr. Masalawala has consistently offered guidance that has been instrumental in streamlining operations and achieving strategic objectives. His ability to dissect complex concepts and present them in an accessible manner has empowered team members to grasp intricate details with confidence.
- **Georgia General Assembly:** Mr. Masalawala has consistently used his skills and expertise to support DEI initiatives. During his internship at the Georgia General Assembly, he researched state and federal case law and statutes relating to health advocacy and policy. In addition to his research, he coordinated with advocacy groups to discuss major issues pertaining to underrepresented communities and schedule meetings with representatives.
- **Community Involvement:** As a staunch advocate for DEIB, Mr. Masalawala has acted in roles dedicated to advancing initiatives designed to improve the lives of underrepresented communities. He has worked as an outreach volunteer for homeless communities and as a volunteer for the Children's Legal Center Asylum Clinic.



# Experiences & Resources – Staffing



## **Tiffini Calimee**

DEI RESEARCH ASSOCIATE

Experience: Tiffini Calimee, the Research Associate at PDG, brings a wealth of skills in research and analysis to her role, where she plays a vital role in diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging matters. Prior to joining PDG, Ms. Calimee served as a legal assistant at Quintairos, Prieto, Wood & Boyer, P.A., honing her expertise in various areas. Ms. Calimee's exceptional skills in research and numeracy are complemented by her strong organizational abilities, effective time management, and the ability to work autonomously. Her responsibilities include efficiently managing calendars, arranging travel itineraries, researching opportunities, and overseeing major financial elements.

Within Ponder Diversity Group, Ms. Calimee stands as a major asset to the team, providing personalized and timely support to attorneys, consultants, professional team members, and clients. Her proficiency in research and analysis ensures that she can handle complex tasks and challenges with precision, further contributing to the overall efficiency of the organization.

### DEI Outcomes Achieved:

- State of Washington, Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board: Supported the engagement with the State of Washington to implement a Social Equity in Cannabis Program which included our participation in webinars to provide information and answer questions regarding the Program and our online cannabis retail licensing application process.
- Illinois Tollway: Supported the engagement with the Illinois Tollway's Technical Assistance Program. Provided consultation and training to DBE/MBE/WBEs regarding bidding and contracting with the Illinois Tollway and other governmental agencies.



# Experiences & Resources – Staffing



## **Tiffini Calimee**

DEI RESEARCH ASSOCIATE

- **State of Illinois Executive Ethics Commission:** Supported the engagement with the State of Illinois Executive Ethics Commission. Provided training to State administrators regarding: proposed administrative rules to implement the Request for Proposal (RFP) Commitment to Diversity requirement as outlined in the agency's Procurement Code; proposed objective elements that can be scored under RFP Commitment to Diversity; proposed scoring rubric that will guide administrators on how best to score the recommended elements; our comprehensive nationwide legal research to support our proposed elements; and proposed RFP-template instructions for Commitment to Diversity.
- **Illinois Department of Central Management Services:** Supported the engagement with the Illinois Department of Central Management Services which included consultation and training of City administrators regarding our comprehensive nationwide research to examine the supplier diversity policies and procedures and related case law, in connection with public and private sector minority and women business enterprise (MBE/WBE) programs and related program recommendations.



## Experiences & Resources – Staffing: Subconsultants



### **Suzanne Griffith**

DEI CONSULTANT

Ms. Griffith is the Founder and CEO of VEGA Partners LLC, a dynamic social impact consulting firm dedicated to driving diversity, equity, and inclusion in organizations. With over nine years of exceptional leadership at the helm of VEGA, Ms. Griffith has been instrumental in transforming organizations into beacons of inclusivity and fairness. At VEGA Partners, Ms. Griffith specializes in providing consulting and training services that empower organizations to thrive while embracing social responsibility. Her passion lies in developing and delivering customized education and training programs that focus on creating and sustaining inclusive workplaces and workforces. Ms. Griffith's expertise extends to inclusive leadership education and training for organizational leaders at all levels, making her an advocate for equity and fairness in leadership. Ms. Griffith's commitment to diversity and inclusion also shines through her work in developing and delivering bias training to staff at all levels within organizations. Her training services cater to organizations with diverse staff, including exempt, non-exempt, unionized, and non-unionized employees, ensuring that everyone is equipped with the tools to build an inclusive environment.

With methodologies specifically tailored to diversifying and sustaining staff, creating inclusive cultures, and infusing equity into organizational DNA, Ms. Griffith and VEGA Partners help organizations achieve greater engagement and growth. By partnering with VEGA, organizations are poised to meet stakeholder expectations regarding inclusivity, fairness, and innovation. Ms. Griffith's dedication to social impact goes beyond her role at VEGA Partners. She brings her passion for change and her expertise to the board of advisors at VXpass, where she contributes to shaping the future of corporate responsibility and engagement. Her previous roles at Urban Partnership Bank and Exelon Corporation/ComEd have provided her with a wealth of experience in corporate social responsibility and external affairs. Ms. Griffith's journey in driving social change began with her leadership at the Goodman Theatre and the Jane Addams Hull House Association.

## Experiences & Resources – Staffing: Subconsultants



### Suzanne Griffith

DEI CONSULTANT

Suzanne Griffith views training not merely as a routine process but as a profound journey of learning, with the ultimate goal of fostering genuine behavioral change within the realm of diversity, equity, and inclusion in workforces. Her leadership and expertise have had a profound impact on the organizations she has worked with, leading to several key outcomes:

- **Transformation of Organizational Cultures:** Ms. Griffith's commitment to providing diversity, equity, and inclusion consulting and training has resulted in the transformation of organizational cultures. Organizations that have partnered with VEGA Partners have undergone cultural and behavioral shifts, becoming more inclusive, fair, and socially responsible.
- **Inclusive Workplaces:** Through her customized education and training programs, Suzanne has helped organizations create and sustain inclusive workplaces. These efforts have fostered environments where employees from diverse backgrounds feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their best.
- **Inclusive Leadership:** Ms. Griffith's emphasis on inclusive leadership education and training has empowered leaders at all levels within organizations. This has led to the development of leaders who are better equipped to foster inclusive environments, make equitable decisions, and drive positive change.
- **Bias Mitigation:** Ms. Griffith's work in developing and delivering bias training has resulted in reduced biases within organizations. Staff at all levels have become more aware of their biases and have gained the skills to mitigate them, fostering a fairer and more inclusive workplace.
- **Engagement and Growth:** Organizations that have engaged with VEGA Partners have experienced increased engagement and growth. Employees who feel included and valued are more likely to be motivated, leading to higher productivity and innovation.





## Experiences & Resources – Staffing: Subconsultants



### **Terri Johnson**

DEI CONSULTANT

Terri A. Johnson is a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) consultant with over 25 years of dedicated experience. Ms. Johnson's work has been centered around combating racism and inequity in various sectors, including social service agencies, arts and cultural organizations, philanthropy, governmental agencies, educational institutions, and community organizations. She has trained in multiple anti-racism, anti-oppression, diversity, equity and inclusion frameworks. She has developed and facilitated numerous workshops tailored for different audiences and led the team that created and implemented the Chicago Dinners, a dialogue model that has engaged many individuals in difficult, but critical conversations about race and social change. She continues to consult organizations throughout nationally and globally about ways to adapt and implement this dialogue model.

Ms. Johnson's career highlights include leading two anti-racist social justice organizations – the Human Relations Foundation of Chicago and the Center for New Community. She has also served as a consultant to organizations across different sectors, assisting them in developing and implementing DEI strategies. Ms. Johnson is a dynamic workshop and forum designer, utilizing interactive methodologies, dialogues, and curricula to foster inclusive environments. Her work extends to facilitating and participating in multi-sector collaborations for systemic change, both locally and internationally. Additionally, Ms. Johnson is a published author and sought-after lecturer on the systemic impacts of disparities and inequities. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are core principles in all of Ms. Johnson's services, which encompass capacity building, planning, training, facilitation, and fundraising. Ms. Johnson collaborates with organizations to create space for thoughtful organizational change, guiding them through challenging discussions, facilitating insights, and inspiring actionable change.

Ms. Johnson's approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion consulting and training for organizations is comprehensive and tailored to the unique needs of each client. Ms. Johnson conducts comprehensive DEI assessments, empowers organizations through education and skill development for internal DEI capacity building, collaborates on DEI-focused strategic planning aligned with organizational goals, designs and delivers customized education and training programs to address specific DEI challenges, provides inclusive leadership development, offers bias training to raise awareness and address unconscious bias, ensures inclusivity for diverse staff, including exempt, non-exempt, unionized, and non-unionized employees, and tailors approaches to respect each organization's unique cultural context.



## Experiences & Resources – Staffing: Subconsultants



**Terri Johnson**

DEI CONSULTANT

### DEI Outcomes Achieved:

Ms. Johnson has achieved transformative outcomes throughout her career, from leading anti-racist social justice organizations to consulting with diverse sectors on effective DEI strategies. Her innovative workshop designs and collaborative facilitation have driven systemic change on local and international levels, illuminating the systemic impacts of disparity and inequity.

- **Leadership in Anti-Racism:** Ms. Johnson has successfully led two prominent anti-racist social justice organizations, where she played pivotal roles in advancing equity and dismantling systemic racism.
- **DEI Consulting Expertise:** Her consultancy work has empowered organizations across various sectors to develop and implement effective DEI strategies, fostering inclusive workplaces and cultures.
- **Innovative Workshop Design:** Her design of workshops, forums, dialogues, and curricula has been instrumental in creating interactive learning experiences that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- **Thought Leadership:** Ms. Johnson's research, publications, and lectures have increased awareness and understanding of the systemic impacts that perpetuate disparities and inequities.



## Experiences & Resources – Staffing: Subconsultants



**Amira Turner**

DEI CONSULTANT

Amira Turner is a dynamic and dedicated consultant with a profound commitment to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the workplace. With a rich background in nonprofit management, fundraising, and community-centered equity, Amira has consistently delivered transformative outcomes. Her journey towards becoming a leading DEI consultant was shaped by diverse experiences in DuPage County and Chicago. Ms. Turner has organized local communities, leveraging her strong organizational skills and community-building acumen.

Ms. Turner's commitment to continuous learning and professional growth is evident through her educational background. She pursued coursework at the University of Illinois, Chicago, enriching her understanding of DEI principles. Furthermore, she engaged in philanthropy-focused programs at Indiana University's Lilly School of Philanthropy, further deepening her expertise in fostering equitable and inclusive environments. As an active member of the Association of Fundraising Professionals and Public Equity, Ms. Turner is deeply connected to the DEI community, consistently networking and staying aware with the latest trends and best practices in the field.

### DEI Outcomes Include:

Ms. Turner's passion, experience, and results-driven approach make her an invaluable asset for any organization committed to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. Her dedication to creating equitable and inclusive spaces is not only a professional calling but a personal mission to drive positive change. Ms. Turner's approach to DEI consulting is rooted in a holistic and data-driven methodology.



## Experiences & Resources – Staffing: Subconsultants



**Amira Turner**

DEI CONSULTANT

### DEI Outcomes Achieved:

- Customization: Tailoring DEI strategies to meet the unique needs and challenges of each organization.
- Data-Driven Insights: Leveraging data and analytics to identify areas of improvement and measure the impact of DEI initiatives.
- Inclusive Leadership Development: Prioritizing the development of inclusive leadership skills at all levels of an organization.
- Bias Awareness: Implementing ongoing bias training to create awareness and mitigate biases within the organization.
- Comprehensive Inclusivity: Ensuring that DEI efforts are inclusive of all staff, including exempt, non-exempt, unionized, and non-unionized employees.
- Cultural Transformation: Fostering a cultural shift toward equity by diversifying staff, creating inclusive environments, and embedding equity into the organization's DNA.



## Experiences & Resources – Staffing: Subconsultants



### Ellen Rozelle Turner

IT CONSULTANT

Ellen Rozelle Turner is the President and CEO of The William Everett Group (TWEG), a prominent Management and Information Technology consulting firm based in Chicago, Illinois. TWEG specializes in a range of core services, including Management Consulting, Technology Consulting, Infrastructure Consulting, and Enablement Services. With a dedicated team of over 100 full-time consultants and 15 contractors, TWEG serves a diverse client base that spans state and local governments as well as Fortune 500 corporations.

Ellen Rozelle Turner's dedication to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging is exemplified through her significant engagement with the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board (WSLCB). She is part of the project leadership team working on the development of an electronic solution aimed at revolutionizing the Social Equity application process within the cannabis industry. This comprehensive electronic tool is instrumental in advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in the cannabis sector. Under Ms. Turner's guidance, the Social Equity Program's regulations are efficiently enforced, with meticulous attention to each criterion. Her commitment lies in offering a fair, accessible application process for diverse cannabis entrepreneurs, particularly those with geographical or mobility constraints.

The system incorporates scoring mechanisms that promote equity by considering factors such as minority ownership, community reinvestment, opportunities for marginalized groups, and addressing past cannabis-related injustices. Ms. Turner's dedication to inclusivity goes beyond the technical aspects of the tool. She actively seeks input and feedback from diverse stakeholders, including individuals from underrepresented communities, advocacy organizations, and experts in social equity and the cannabis industry.

#### DEI Outcomes Include:

This collaborative approach ensures that the tool aligns with the needs and concerns of those it aims to benefit, reinforcing Ellen Rozelle Turner's commitment to holistic and community-driven solutions. Her work with the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board reflects her passion for creating positive change and promoting equity in all aspects of her professional endeavors.



## Experiences & Resources – Staffing: Subconsultants



### Ellen Rozelle Turner

IT CONSULTANT

Ellen Rozelle Turner's leadership and dedication to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging have resulted in several significant outcomes and achievements:

- **Enhanced Diversity and Inclusivity:** Through her work, Ms. Turner has significantly advanced diversity, equity, and inclusion within the cannabis sector. The tool's scoring mechanisms prioritize factors like minority ownership, community reinvestment, and opportunities for marginalized groups, promoting a more inclusive and representative industry.
- **Accessibility and Equity:** Ms. Turner's commitment to creating a fair and accessible application process has addressed geographical and mobility constraints that previously hindered marginalized entrepreneurs from entering the cannabis market. This outcome has expanded opportunities for underrepresented individuals.
- **Efficiency and Compliance:** The electronic tool developed under Ms. Turner's leadership has streamlined the Social Equity Program's regulations, ensuring efficient enforcement while maintaining strict adherence to criteria. This has resulted in a more effective and compliant process.
- **Community Engagement:** Ms. Turner's collaborative approach, actively seeking input from diverse stakeholders, has fostered meaningful community engagement. By involving underrepresented communities, advocacy organizations, and industry experts, she has ensured that the tool aligns with the needs and concerns of those it serves.



## Experiences & Resources – Staffing: Subconsultants



### Okaey Ukachukwu

IT CONSULTANT

Mr. Ukachukwu's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging is exemplified through his project management role with the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board (WSLCB). This partnership underscores Mr. Ukachukwu's dedication to fostering positive change within various industries. The primary focus of this collaboration is the development of an innovative electronic solution designed to revolutionize the Social Equity application process in the cannabis industry. This groundbreaking electronic tool plays a pivotal role in advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in the cannabis sector.

Under this transformative initiative, the Social Equity Program's regulations are meticulously enforced, with a keen eye on each criterion. Mr. Ukachukwu's deep understanding of the profound industry and personal impacts drives his commitment to providing a fair and accessible application process for a wide range of diverse cannabis entrepreneurs. The system's streamlined submission process is particularly beneficial for individuals facing geographical or mobility constraints. commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging has yielded several notable outcomes, showcasing his impact on both the technology and cannabis sectors.

#### DEI Outcomes Include:

- **Enhanced Regulatory Compliance:** Through meticulous attention to detail and the incorporation of scoring mechanisms, Mr. Ukachukwu's electronic solution has significantly improved regulatory compliance within the cannabis sector. It ensures that Social Equity Program regulations are efficiently enforced, fostering fairness and equity in the industry.
- **Increased Accessibility:** Mr. Ukachukwu's commitment to equity extends to addressing geographical and mobility constraints faced by applicants. His system's streamlined submission process has made it easier for individuals from various backgrounds to participate in the industry, promoting inclusivity and broadening access to opportunities.



## Experiences & Resources – Staffing: Subconsultants



### **Okaey Ukachukwu**

IT CONSULTANT

- **Promoting Minority Ownership:** By considering minority ownership and community reinvestment as part of the scoring mechanisms, Mr. Ukachukwu's solution actively promotes diversity within the cannabis industry. It encourages and rewards minority entrepreneurs, helping to address historical disparities in ownership and opportunity.
- **Community Engagement and Feedback:** Mr. Ukachukwu's dedication to inclusivity is reflected in his active engagement with diverse stakeholders. By seeking input and feedback from underrepresented communities, advocacy organizations, and industry experts, he ensures that the electronic tool aligns with the actual needs and concerns of those it aims to serve. This collaborative approach has strengthened the tool's effectiveness and relevance.





## DEI Experiences & Resources – Firm Experience: LEID Lab™

The Ponder Diversity Group team members recognize the importance of utilizing the LEID Lab™ as a valuable resource to support their leadership development and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. In many organizations today, leaders often find themselves leading teams that are more diverse than ever before. This diversity brings unique challenges and opportunities. The LEID Lab™ is designed to address these challenges and help leaders hone their skills in order to create an inclusive and equitable workplace environment.

The LEID Lab™ provides an exceptional learning experience for executives. It focuses on helping them develop both personal and professional leadership strategies specifically tailored to lead diverse teams effectively. This includes understanding the nuances of different cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives within their teams and how to leverage these differences for better decision-making and innovation.

Furthermore, the program offers a cohort experience over a 10-week period. This cohort-based approach enables leaders to learn from one another, share experiences, and collaborate on solutions to common DEI challenges. It creates a supportive community of like-minded individuals who are dedicated to championing inclusion within their organizations.

Importantly, the LEID Lab™ program is particularly relevant for white leaders who wish to play an active role in embedding equity and inclusivity in their organizations. It equips them with the tools, knowledge, and skills required to navigate the complexities of leading diverse teams, understanding privilege, and addressing systemic bias. By participating in this program, leaders can better support their organizations' DEI efforts and contribute to fostering a more inclusive workplace culture.

In summary, the LEID Lab™ is a comprehensive, 10-week program designed to empower leaders to lead diverse teams effectively and champion inclusion within their organizations. It is a valuable resource for leaders who are committed to the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. Services include:

- Leadership Development Workshops: Providing leaders with skills and knowledge to lead diverse teams effectively.
- Cohort-Based Training Programs: 10-week programs fostering a supportive community of leaders dedicated to diversity and inclusion.
- DEI Strategy Consulting: Customized consulting services to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives within organizations.



## DEI Experiences & Resources – Firm Experience: Embrace Belonging™

The PDG team members prioritize Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) as integral components of their organizational culture. To foster these values and ensure that every team member is actively engaged in the DEI journey, the team has implemented the Embrace Belonging program as a central part of their training and development initiatives.

Embrace Belonging is a specialized program designed to address the multifaceted aspects of DEI. It provides a structured platform where team members can come together, share experiences, and engage in open, constructive dialogue. The primary objective of this program is to build a common understanding of equity, diversity, and inclusion within the team.

During the Embrace Belonging sessions, team members participate in various activities and discussions that help them explore their own biases, challenge stereotypes, and gain a deeper appreciation for the unique perspectives and backgrounds of their colleagues. This program encourages team members to reflect on their own roles in promoting diversity and inclusion within the organization.

The collective work initiated through the Embrace Belonging program goes beyond awareness and understanding. It encompasses practical strategies and action plans for fostering a culture of belonging and inclusion within the organization. These strategies can include changes in policies, communication, and behavior, all aimed at making the workplace more equitable and inclusive.

By adopting the Embrace Belonging program, the PDG team members are actively committed to creating an environment where every individual feels valued and included, irrespective of their background or identity. This approach not only strengthens the team's DEI efforts but also fosters a more vibrant and innovative work culture that benefits both employees and the organization as a whole. Services include:

- **Reduced Bias:** Participants may develop strategies to recognize and mitigate unconscious biases, promoting fairer decision-making processes.
- **Recruitment and Retention:** An improved culture of belonging and inclusion can make the organization more attractive to diverse talent and help retain current employees.
- **Innovation and Creativity:** Diverse and inclusive teams tend to be more innovative, leading to fresh ideas and solutions.
- **Increased Productivity:** A more inclusive workplace can lead to higher levels of engagement and job satisfaction, ultimately boosting productivity.
- **Compliance and Risk Mitigation:** By addressing DEI issues proactively, organizations can reduce the risk of discrimination and harassment claims.



## DEI Experiences & Resources – Firm Experience: Illinois Executive Ethics Commission

Ponder Diversity Group's collaboration with the State of Illinois Executive Ethics Commission for comprehensive DEI research and the development of additional requirements for prospective vendors exemplifies the organization's commitment to driving real change in the realm of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

By promoting inclusivity and belonging, PDG has played a pivotal role in creating a more equitable business environment that benefits not only underrepresented groups but society as a whole. The collaboration aimed to identify and implement additional DEI elements for prospective vendors competing for contracts with the State of Illinois, emphasizing a commitment to fostering a fair and inclusive business environment. PDG's research was data-driven, delving deep into systemic challenges faced by marginalized communities, leading to the development of robust DEI requirements integrated into the vendor selection process. This pioneering work set a precedent and sparked nationwide conversations and actions on DEI in both public and private sectors, showcasing PDG's dedication to driving meaningful change and creating a more equitable society.

The State of Illinois is deeply committed to assisting minorities, women, persons with disabilities, and veterans in building their American dream. The state recognizes the importance of providing fair access to job and contracting opportunities. Furthermore, the State strives to enhance its workplace culture by fostering an environment where individuals with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and ideas are respected and valued. The Executive Ethics Commission (EEC) played a vital role in promoting ethics in public service and ensuring that the State's business was conducted with efficiency, transparency, fairness, and integrity. The EEC's responsibilities encompassed overseeing annual ethics training and enforcing the Ethics Act for all executive branch employees. Additionally, the EEC provided independent oversight of the State's procurement process, emphasizing the commitment to DEI by State vendors.

Throughout our collaboration, we focused on the values of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, working towards a more inclusive and equitable environment for all individuals involved in the State of Illinois contracting process.



## Experiences & Resources – Firm Experience: Illinois Executive Ethics Commission (cont'd)

We conducted comprehensive, nationwide DEI research that included:

- Outreach to obtain diversity information from more than one hundred (100) corporations
- Review of secondary sources, including news media, legal journals, and related studies
- Analyses of relevant case law
- Review of supplier diversity programs in the public sector, including the federal government, each state, the largest (by population) fifty (50) cities and counties; and the evaluation of race-neutral recommendations in various diversity studies.

Our DEI Services Included:

- Ponder Diversity Group (PDG) established a robust training program that involved delivering weekly training sessions to stakeholders. These sessions were designed to provide ongoing education and insights into diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) practices.
- PDG leveraged comprehensive national research as the foundation for its weekly training reports. By drawing insights from a wide range of sources, including reputable studies, reports, and case analyses, PDG ensured that its training content was informed by the latest and most relevant DEI data.
- The weekly training reports were meticulously crafted to distill data-driven insights from the national research. PDG focused on presenting key findings, trends, and best practices in a clear and concise manner, enabling stakeholders to gain a deeper understanding of DEI principles.
- PDG customized each weekly training report to address specific industries, sectors, or challenges faced by its stakeholders. This approach ensured that the training content remained relevant and applicable, addressing the unique needs and contexts of the audience.
- Through the consistent delivery of weekly training reports, PDG fostered a culture of continuous learning and improvement. Stakeholders were encouraged to engage with the content, ask questions, and provide feedback, creating an iterative process that contributed to the refinement and enhancement of future training sessions.



## Experiences & Resources – Firm Experience: Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board

PDG's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging is exemplified through our significant engagement with the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board (WSLCB). The focus of this collaboration is the development of an electronic solution aimed at revolutionizing the Social Equity application process within the cannabis industry.

This all-encompassing electronic tool plays a crucial role in advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in the cannabis sector. Under the transformative PDG initiative, the Social Equity Program's regulations are efficiently enforced, with meticulous attention to each criterion. PDG understands the significant industry and personal impacts, aiming to offer a fair, accessible application process for diverse cannabis entrepreneurs. The system streamlines submissions, especially aiding those with geographical or mobility constraints. Incorporating scoring mechanisms, PDG focuses on promoting equity by considering minority ownership, community reinvestment, opportunities for marginalized groups, and addressing past cannabis-related injustices. PDG's dedication to inclusivity extends beyond the technical aspects of the tool. Recognizing the importance of community engagement, PDG actively seeks input and feedback from diverse stakeholders, including individuals from underrepresented communities, advocacy organizations, and experts in social equity and cannabis industries. This collaborative approach ensures that the tool aligns with the needs and concerns of those it aims to benefit, reinforcing PDG's commitment to holistic and community-driven solutions.

The WSLCB's mission is to promote safety through the consistent and fair administration of liquor and cannabis laws. Our work with them aligns with their goal of preventing the misuse of alcohol, cannabis, and tobacco while fostering responsible sales. Privatizing the sale of spirits in 2011 and legalizing recreational marijuana sales through Initiative 502 in 2012 mandated the WSLCB to oversee the recreational cannabis market. Recognizing the need to reduce barriers to entry for individuals and communities most affected by the enforcement of cannabis-related laws, the Washington State legislature determined the implementation of a Social Equity Program. This program aims to establish an equitable and accessible cannabis industry for those disproportionately impacted. It focuses on promoting business ownership among diverse individuals residing in areas of high poverty and cannabis law enforcement. By offering financial assistance, technical support, and license application benefits, the program enables diverse individuals who have been directly and adversely affected by cannabis-related laws to pursue cannabis business enterprises.



## Experiences & Resources – Firm Experience: Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board (cont'd)

Our DEI services include:

- Evaluating social equity license applications and supporting documents from applicants
- Determining eligibility of applicants and score each application
- Ensuring that applicants are identified in only one application
- Identifying the preferred jurisdiction selected by each applicant
- Determining the applicant's rank by preferred jurisdiction using a scoring rubric
- Evaluating supplemental application materials from applicants
- Verifying information provided by applicants
- Identifying current title certificate holders for retail cannabis and determine whether they meet the minimum social equity requirements
- Reviewing WSLCB rules, laws and regulations governing the social equity program
- Drafting workshop content and presentation
- Providing translation services for applicants
- Providing testimony in court hearings

Our DEI Training Services Include:

- Ponder Diversity Group (PDG) offers tailored training programs designed to equip cannabis entrepreneurs with essential skills and knowledge, addressing specific needs and challenges faced by diverse applicants.
- PDG conducts technical assistance workshops, providing hands-on guidance and support to applicants navigating the intricacies of the cannabis industry, including business planning, regulatory compliance, and operational strategies.
- PDG organizes webinars featuring industry experts who share insights on key topics such as equity-driven business practices, sustainable cultivation methods, marketing strategies, and financial management, ensuring applicants have access to a wealth of relevant information.
- PDG facilitates networking events and forums that connect applicants with established cannabis entrepreneurs, industry professionals, and potential partners, fostering a supportive community where knowledge and experiences are shared, and collaborations are nurtured.



## Experiences & Resources – Firm Experience: Chicago Department of Aviation

Ponder Diversity Group (PDG) played a leading role in driving positive change and promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging at the Chicago Department of Aviation (CDA). Our partnership resulted in a comprehensive Code of Conduct that not only governed employee and vendor actions but also set new DEI standards within the organization. PDG's approach involved thorough analysis and integration of DEI principles throughout the document, reflecting a firm stance against discrimination and bias. Collaborating closely with the CDA, PDG conducted inclusive workshops and implemented monitoring systems to foster accountability and continuous improvement. The CDA's commitment to DEI became a powerful example for other organizations in the Chicago area, making a transformative impact on workplace culture and inspiring inclusivity beyond the aviation department.

The Chicago Department of Aviation had a clear objective of enforcing high professional and business standards, along with promoting a positive workplace culture where individuals from diverse backgrounds, including minorities and women, felt respected and valued for their unique perspectives and experiences. To achieve this, they sought the assistance of our team at PDG to develop a comprehensive Code of Conduct. PDG's role was to create a central guide that reflected the department's core values, vision, and standards of conduct. This guide aimed to ensure that both government employees and vendors carried out their work and business activities with honesty, integrity, and a strong commitment to DEI principles.

By establishing a clear set of expectations and policies, the Code of Conduct aimed to help employees, vendors, and other stakeholders understand the legal and ethical framework that governed their daily decision-making. Furthermore, PDG's Code of Conduct emphasized the importance of preventing any violations of laws and regulations. It provided a comprehensive list of appropriate and expected actions to guide employees and vendors, helping them navigate professional situations in line with DEI principles. Topics covered included professionalism, fairness, and integrity, as well as Equal Employment Opportunity, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, workplace harassment, bullying, retaliation, health and safety, maintaining a drug-free workplace, and addressing violence in the workplace. By focusing on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging within the Code of Conduct, we aimed to foster an environment where everyone, regardless of their background, felt valued, respected, and had equal opportunities to thrive and contribute to the Chicago Department of Aviation's success.





## Experiences & Resources – Firm Experience: Chicago Department of Aviation (cont'd)

The topics covered in the CDA Code of Conduct included:

- Ethical Principles, Core Values and Standards of Conduct
- Personnel Policies and Sustainability Practices
- Conflicts of Interest and Appearance of Impropriety
- Bribery and Extortion
- Harassment, Discrimination and Retaliation
- Political and Charitable Activities
- Health and Safety
- Information Security and Information Technology
- Enforcement Procedures

Our DEI Services Include:

- Ponder Diversity Group (PDG) provided specialized training to the Department of Aviation, focusing on Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE), Minority Business Enterprise (MBE), and Women Business Enterprise (WBE) initiatives aligned with the City of Chicago's supplier diversity goals.
- PDG played a vital role in training city vendors on best practices for engaging with the Department of Aviation. Our training sessions empowered vendors with the knowledge and tools needed to navigate the complexities of supplier diversity requirements and effectively conduct business within the department.
- PDG's training covered essential aspects of DBE, MBE, and WBE programs, offering insights into certification processes, compliance guidelines, and reporting requirements. By demystifying these initiatives, PDG enabled vendors to confidently participate and contribute to the department's diversity-driven goals.
- PDG's training was tailored to address the unique challenges and opportunities within the aviation sector. We provided practical guidance on how vendors could align their offerings with the department's needs, enhancing their competitiveness and fostering mutually beneficial partnerships.





## Experiences & Resources – Firm Experience: Illinois Department of Central Management Services

Ponder Diversity group (PDG) has demonstrated a strong commitment to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion through its partnership with the Illinois Department of Central Management Services (CMS). The focus of this collaboration was on conducting comprehensive nationwide research to identify and highlight best practices in supplier diversity programs that specifically supported minority and women-owned businesses. PDG's efforts were aimed at empowering certified DBE/MBE/WBE/VBEs by providing them with fair access to job and contracting opportunities.

PDG's involvement in this initiative underscores their dedication to contributing to the State of Illinois' commitment to supporting marginalized communities, including minorities, women, persons with disabilities, and veterans. By advocating for and facilitating increased access to business opportunities, PDG sought to help these underrepresented businesses overcome historical barriers and achieve their American dream. The ultimate goal of the collaboration was to advance diversity initiatives and foster an inclusive, equitable, and competitive business environment. PDG recognized that a diverse and inclusive marketplace is vital for sustainable economic growth and societal progress. By supporting underrepresented businesses, PDG aimed to create a business ecosystem that would not only benefit the businesses themselves but also enrich the communities we serve. PDG's comprehensive nationwide research was a critical step in this process, as it allowed for the identification and dissemination of best practices from supplier diversity programs across the country. By learning from successful initiatives, PDG and CMS could tailor their approach to address the unique challenges and opportunities faced by minority and women-owned businesses in the Illinois context. Moreover, PDG's efforts were not solely focused on theoretical research but also on practical support for underrepresented businesses.

PDG worked towards increasing the capacity of these businesses, helping them grow their revenues, and enhancing their credentials. This comprehensive approach aimed to empower these businesses to compete on a level playing field and thrive in a competitive business environment. Through our work, PDG positively contributed to the overall economic development of the State of Illinois by strengthening its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in business practices. This collaboration not only aligns with the state's values but also serves as a model for other states and organizations looking to advance supplier diversity programs and create meaningful opportunities for underrepresented entrepreneurs.



## **Experiences & Resources – Firm Experience: Illinois Department of Central Management Services (cont'd)**

The following professional services were provided to CMS:

- Comprehensive legal research regarding other business enterprise programs relating to goods and services, including an examination of case law challenging the constitutionality of the programs
- A risk analysis of the programs
- A summary of the findings
- Legal analyses
- Proposed recommendations of specific policies, procedures that might be implemented

Our DEI Services Included:

- PDG's training sessions provided in-depth insights into the principles of DEIB, emphasizing the importance of fostering an inclusive business environment that supports minority and women-owned businesses.
- PDG facilitated interactive sessions that showcased best practices from across industries, highlighting successful strategies and case studies from supplier diversity programs. This allowed CMS employees to gain practical insights into effective DEI implementation.
- PDG's training covered legal and operational aspects of supplier diversity, offering guidance on crafting policies, procedures, and risk management strategies that align with DEI goals. This equipped CMS with practical tools for implementing and sustaining successful supplier diversity programs.



## Experiences & Resources – Firm Experience: Illinois Tollway

PDG's engagement with the Illinois Tollway Technical Assistance Program was a significant milestone in their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work. We actively supported underrepresented transportation-related businesses, particularly small, diverse, and veteran-owned firms, preparing them for major construction projects.

PDG emphasized fair procurement practices to ensure equal opportunities, and we provided valuable mentorship and resources to foster sustainable growth. We also supported the implementation of internal DEI initiatives, promoting diversity within their workforce. PDG's ongoing commitment to DEI extended beyond the program, as we partnered with various organizations to champion inclusion in the construction sector and beyond, aiming to influence industry-wide change and create a more equitable business landscape.

Ponder Diversity Group (PDG) has been dedicated to driving meaningful change and fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within the transportation-related construction industry through their partnership with the Illinois Tollway. We provided comprehensive and customized business development assistance, aimed at enhancing financial understanding, promoting business stability, and fostering growth within the construction sector. We extended their impact beyond their own firm by offering valuable legal services, including contract review and training workshops, to other construction companies and engineering firms, empowering them to operate effectively with a focus on DEI principles.

PDG's commitment to the mission of the Illinois tollway's program is evident in their active involvement in promoting DEI and belonging within the construction industry. We engaged in consultation and collaboration with various stakeholders, advocating for inclusive practices, diverse hiring strategies, and equal opportunities for all participants. Our efforts have led to a more welcoming and equitable construction industry, breaking down barriers, challenging biases, and creating an environment where everyone feels valued and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives and skills. PDG's work continues to make a significant impact in building a more inclusive and equitable industry, with a strong focus on inspiring further positive change in the future.



## Experiences & Resources – Firm Experience: Illinois Tollway (cont'd)

The legal and consulting services provided by PDG significantly impacted the firms in the following areas:

- Contract Review
- Bidding and estimating
- Government contracting and subcontracting
- Contract compliance
- Certification eligibility
- Project management
- Employment laws
- Workforce planning
- Facilitating prompt payment
- Lien preparation
- Marketing and business development
- Best practices

Our DEI Services Included:

- PDG's engagement with the Illinois Tollway Technical Assistance Program provided comprehensive business development assistance to underrepresented transportation-related businesses. We focused on enhancing financial understanding, promoting business stability, and fostering growth within the construction sector, particularly for small, diverse, and veteran-owned firms.
- PDG prioritized fair procurement practices and offered valuable mentorship and resources to prepare underrepresented businesses for major construction projects. This support aimed to foster sustainable growth and empower these firms to succeed in a competitive industry.
- PDG actively supported the implementation of internal DEI initiatives within the Illinois Tollway. We promoted diversity within their workforce by advocating for inclusive practices and diverse hiring strategies, contributing to a more equitable work environment.



## Experiences & Resources – Firm Experience: Chicago Department of Procurement Services

Ponder Diversity Group (PDG) has been a driving force in promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) within the Chicago Department of Procurement Services through a series of impactful projects. PDG's initiatives encompassed legal research, analysis, and recommendations that led to substantial modifications and improvements in the City of Chicago's Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE), Minority Business Enterprise (MBE), and Women Business Enterprise (WBE) Program, as well as related policies and procedures. These projects represent a commitment to advancing DEI principles and fostering an inclusive and equitable business environment.

### Our DEI Training Services Included:

- PDG critically evaluated and enhanced the City of Chicago's contract compliance and monitoring process. By meticulously analyzing DBE/MBE/WBE contract participation on City contracts, PDG contributed to a more effective and transparent system, ensuring that diverse businesses have equal access to contracting opportunities.
- PDG's efforts resulted in the creation of a comprehensive DBE/MBE/WBE Contracting and Compliance Manual. This manual serves as a vital resource, outlining procedures, provisions, and compliance requirements that align with the MBE/WBE Procurement Program and MBE/WBE Construction Program Ordinances. The manual's creation reflects PDG's commitment to providing clear guidance and training for supporting and complying with DEIB-focused procurement initiatives.
- PDG played a pivotal role in coordinating and implementing the first annual City-sponsored Construction Management Training Program for DBE/MBE/WBEs. This initiative aimed to empower underrepresented businesses with valuable knowledge and skills, fostering their growth and success within the construction industry while promoting equity and inclusion.

PDG's involvement extended to drafting the City of Chicago DBE/MBE/WBE and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Contract Monitoring and Compliance Manual of Operating Procedures. This manual establishes essential guidelines and practices to ensure rigorous monitoring and compliance with DEIB-focused contracts, reinforcing the city's commitment to accountability and equitable practices.



## Experiences & Resources – References:

### **Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board (WSLCB)**

Rebecca Smith  
1025 Union Ave SE, Olympia, WA 98501  
Rebecca.smith@lcb.wa.gov  
360-819-6277

### **Illinois Department of Central Management Services**

100 W Randolph St 3-300, Chicago, IL 60601  
Alexandria Wilson  
312-814-4190  
Alexandria.wilson@illinois.gov

### **Chicago Department of Procurement Services**

121 N La Salle St Ste 806, Chicago, IL 60602  
Shannon Andrews  
312-864-6000  
Shannon.andrews@cookcountyhealth.org

### **Chicago Department of Aviation**

10510 W Zemke Cir, Chicago, IL 60666  
George Coleman  
(312) 316-1161  
george@gcoleconsulting.org

### **Illinois Tollway**

2700 Ogden Ave, Downers Grove, IL 60515  
Cassandra Rouse  
(708) 539-4131  
crouse@getipass.com



## Affirmative Action Hiring Policy



## Ponder Diversity Group – Affirmative Action Plan

Ponder Diversity Group takes great pride in being a diverse and inclusive company, wholly owned and controlled by Anita Ponder, a dedicated and accomplished Black woman. Our team is a reflection of our commitment to diversity, composed of individuals from a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. Furthermore, we are proud to announce that we are a certified Minority Business Enterprise (MBE), Women's Business Enterprise (WBE), and Women-Owned Small Business (WOSB), underscoring our dedication to promoting diversity and inclusivity within our organization and the wider business community. At Ponder Diversity Group LLC, we have successfully implemented our affirmative action hiring policy, which has been instrumental in promoting inclusivity during the hiring process and fostering a diverse workforce. Our policy focuses on a range of key elements to ensure equal opportunity and diversity within the organization:

- **Clear Diversity Goals and Objectives:** We have set and achieved specific diversity goals and objectives, which serve as a driving force for our commitment to diversity and inclusion. These measurable and time-bound objectives provide a clear direction for our hiring process.
- **Equal Opportunity Commitment:** We proudly uphold our commitment to providing equal employment opportunities for all individuals, irrespective of their race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, or other protected characteristics.
- **Diverse Hiring Committees:** Our hiring committees are intentionally diverse, representing a wide array of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. This diversity reduces bias in the selection process and helps ensure that the best candidates are chosen based on merit.
- **Anti-Bias Training:** All employees involved in the hiring process have received anti-bias training, enhancing their awareness of unconscious biases and reinforcing our dedication to fair and equitable hiring practices.
- **Outreach and Recruitment:** We actively seek out diverse candidates through various recruitment channels, including historically underrepresented communities, educational institutions, professional organizations, and community outreach programs.
- **Inclusive Job Descriptions:** Our job descriptions have been carefully reviewed and revised to eliminate gender or culturally biased language and requirements, making job postings welcoming to candidates from all backgrounds.





## Ponder Diversity Group – Affirmative Action Plan (cont'd)

- **Diverse Interview Panels:** We ensure that diverse interview panels are an integral part of our hiring process. These panels not only assess candidates more objectively but also underline our commitment to inclusivity.
- **Equal Opportunity Statements:** Clear equal opportunity statements are included in all our job postings, on our website, and in all our other communication materials to convey our unwavering commitment to diversity and inclusion.
- **Data Collection and Reporting:** We diligently collect demographic data on job applicants and employees to monitor progress in meeting diversity goals and regularly report on our diversity efforts and achievements.
- **Mentoring and Support Programs:** We have established mentorship and support programs, providing employees from underrepresented backgrounds with the resources and guidance they need to thrive within our organization, furthering their career development and retention.
- **Employee Resource Groups:** We actively encourage the formation of employee resource groups and affinity groups, fostering a sense of community and support for employees with similar backgrounds or interests.
- **Regular Evaluation and Improvement:** We continuously evaluate the effectiveness of our affirmative action policy, making necessary adjustments based on feedback, data, and evolving best practices to ensure that inclusivity and diversity remain at the forefront of our operations.

PDG's established affirmative action hiring policy has made a significant impact on creating an inclusive and diverse workplace that reflects our values, and it continues to contribute to a more equitable and thriving workforce.



# Ponder Diversity Group MBE/WBE/WOSB Certificates



WOMEN'S BUSINESS ENTERPRISE  
NATIONAL COUNCIL

JOIN FORCES. SUCCEED TOGETHER.

## HEREBY GRANTS WOMAN OWNED SMALL BUSINESS (WOSB) CERTIFICATION TO

### Ponder Diversity Group LLC

The identified small business is an eligible WOSB for the WOSB Program, as set forth in 13 C.F.R. part 127 and has been certified as such by an SBA approved Third Party Certifier pursuant to the Third Party Agreement, dated June 30, 2011, and available at [www.sba.gov/wosb](http://www.sba.gov/wosb).

The WOSB Certification expires on the date herein unless there is a change to the SBA's regulation that makes the WOSB ineligible or there is a change in the WOSB that makes the WOSB ineligible. If either occurs, this WOSB Certification is immediately invalid. The WOSB must not misrepresent its certification status to any other party, including any local or State government or contracting official or the Federal government or any of its contracting officials.

Majority Female Owner: Anita Ponder

NAICS: 541110  
UNSPSC: 80120000

Certification Number: WOSB230971

Renewal Date: June 30, 2024

WOSB Regulation Expiration Date: 6/30/2026



Emilia DiMenco, Women's Business  
Development Center - Midwest President &  
CEO

Pamela Prince-Easton, WBENC President & CEO

LaKesha White, Vice President, Certification



WOMEN'S BUSINESS ENTERPRISE  
NATIONAL COUNCIL

JOIN FORCES. SUCCEED TOGETHER.

hereby grants

# National Women's Business Enterprise Certification

to

Ponder Diversity Group LLC

who has successfully met WBENC's standards as a Women's Business Enterprise (WBE).  
This certification affirms the business is woman-owned, operated and controlled and is valid through the date herein.

Certification Granted: June 27, 2023

Expiration Date: June 30, 2024

WBENC National Certification Number: WBE2301735

WBENC National WBE Certification was processed and validated by Women's Business Development Center - Midwest, a WBENC Regional Partner Organization.

Authorized by Emilia DiMenco, President &  
CEO Women's Business Development Center -  
Midwest



NAICS: 541110  
UNSPSC: 80120000





CITY OF CHICAGO



DEPARTMENT OF PROCUREMENT SERVICES

**JUL 28 2023**

Anita Ponder  
Ponder Diversity Group, LLC  
233 South Wacker Drive, Suite 9305  
Chicago, IL 60606

Dear Ms. Ponder:

We are pleased to inform you that **Ponder Diversity Group, LLC** is certified as a **Minority-Owned Business Enterprise ("MBE")** and **Women-Owned Business Enterprise ("WBE")**, by the City of Chicago ("City"). This certification will remain effective for as long as your firm continues to meet all certification eligibility requirements and is contingent upon the firm affirming its eligibility by filing an **annual No-Change Affidavit** each year. In the past, the City has provided you with an annual letter confirming your certification; such letters will no longer be issued. Therefore, we require you to be even more diligent in filing your **annual No-Change Affidavit 60 days before your annual anniversary date of August 1<sup>st</sup>**.

It is now your responsibility to check the City's certification directory and verify your certification status. As a condition of continued certification, you must **file an annual No-Change Affidavit by your anniversary date of August 1<sup>st</sup>**. Please remember, you have an affirmative duty to file your No-Change Affidavit 60 days prior to the anniversary date for timely processing. Failure to file your annual No-Change Affidavit may result in the suspension or rescission of your certification.

It is important to note that you also have an ongoing affirmative duty to notify the City of any changes in ownership or control of your firm, or any other fact affecting your firm's eligibility for certification **within 10 days** of such change. These changes may include but are not limited to a change of address, change of business structure, change in ownership or ownership structure, change of business operations, gross receipts and or personal net worth that exceed the program threshold. Failure to provide the City with timely notice of such changes may result in the suspension or rescission of your certification. In addition, you may be liable for civil penalties under Chapter 1-22, "False Claims", of the Municipal Code of Chicago.

Please note – you shall be deemed to have had your certification lapse and will be ineligible to participate as an **MBE/WBE** if you fail to:

- File your annual No-Change Affidavit within the required time period;
- Provide financial or other records requested pursuant to an audit within the required time period;
- Notify the City of any changes affecting your firm's certification **within 10 days** of such change; or

- File your recertification within the required time period.

Please be reminded of your contractual obligation to cooperate with the City with respect to any reviews, audits or investigation of its contracts and affirmative action programs. We strongly encourage you to assist us in maintaining the integrity of our programs by reporting instances or suspicions of fraud or abuse to the **City's Inspector General at [chicagoinspectorgeneral.org](http://chicagoinspectorgeneral.org), or 866-IG-TIPLINE (866-448-4754).**

Be advised that if you or your firm is found to be involved in certification, bidding and/or contractual fraud or abuse, the City will pursue decertification and debarment. In addition to any other penalty imposed by law, any person who knowingly obtains, or knowingly assists another in obtaining a contract with the City by falsely representing the individual or entity, or the individual or entity assisted is guilty of a misdemeanor, punishable by incarceration in the county jail for a period not to exceed six months, or a fine of not less than \$5,000 and not more than \$10,000 or both.

Your firm's name will be listed in the City's Directory of Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises in the specialty area(s) of:

**NAICS Code(s):**

**541110 - Offices of Lawyers**

Your firm's participation on City contracts will be credited only toward **MBE/WBE** goals in your area(s) specialty. While your participation on City contracts is not limited to your area of specialty, credit toward goals will be given only for work that is self-performed and providing a commercially useful function that is done in the approved specialty category.

Thank you for your interest in the City's Minority, Women-Owned Business Enterprise, Veteran-Owned Business Enterprise and Business Enterprise Owned or Operated by People with Disabilities (MBE/WBE/VBE/BEPD) Program.

Sincerely,



Tammi Morgan  
Contracting Equity Officer

TM/sl

