

Beacon system improves city's small and minority business contracting outreach

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By Christian Morrow



Doris Carson Williams

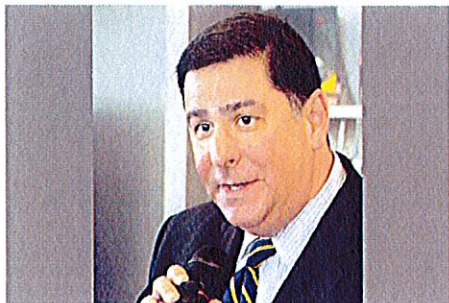
In September, the city of Pittsburgh quietly launched an online service called Beacon as part of its Roadmap for Inclusive Innovation with the intent of improving opportunities for small and minority businesses to contract with the city.

Last month, the city celebrated the fact that more than 350 businesses have signed up for the automatic online service that alerts them to contracts, noting that the Department of Parks and Recreation got 10 times the response it normally does to contracting announcements.

The system, along with two complimentary internal systems, were developed through a Code for America Fellowship partnership and underwritten by a \$300,000 grant from the RK Mellon Foundation supporting \$100,000 in city finding.

African American Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Doris Carson Williams said the feedback she's heard from business owners has been positive.

"I'm hearing from people who are looking forward to using the system," she said. "The feedback I'm getting is that people are optimistic. Whether that turns into contracts will have to bear out."



MAYOR BILL PEDUTO

Mayor Bill Peduto thanked all involved.

“The Code for America Fellowship has played an important role in our efforts to transform procurement,” said Peduto. “Thanks to the efforts of our fellows and OMB staff, we have made the process more efficient, equitable, effective and accessible than ever before.”

Director of Management and Budget Sam Ashbaugh also praised the system for streamlining the city’s procurement process.

“The Beacon procurement application will help OMB to fulfill its vision for the procurement organization,” he said.

“Our goal is to establish a customer-focused process to achieve increased procurement effectiveness, efficiency, and compliance. The result is significant financial benefit for taxpayers by reducing the costs of acquiring goods and services and increasing competition and opportunities for vendors to do business with the city.”

Beacon is a free online service that notifies businesses about city contract opportunities and provides information about how to apply for them. It will act as a centralized web resource for business owners looking for opportunities to sell goods and services to the city. Individual department staffers develop contract criteria, while OMB manages the system.

The two complimentary internal systems, Scout and Conductor, allow city personnel to quickly locate any current contract information. Conductor can connect and integrate separate databases. Any changes made to a contract in Conductor are automatically updated to the Scout system, thus notifying any staff associated with the contract of the changes.

The OMB also asked the National Institute of Government Purchasing consulting program to conduct a review of procurement policies and make recommendations for improvement to reflect leading public sector procurement practices.