



The DBE Reevaluation process launches March 2nd

Visit <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/civil-rights> or email DBE.Reevaluation@dot.ca.gov for more information.

SMALL BUSINESS PRESS

Empowering Small Businesses to Help Keep California Moving

2026, Issue 1

Civil Rights Deputy Director Welcome

Welcome to the latest edition of the Small Business Press. Our team in the Office of Civil Rights is committed to keeping you informed with updates, resources, and stories that support small, disadvantaged, and disabled-veteran-owned businesses across California.

Small businesses are essential partners in delivering a safe, reliable, and equitable transportation system. Your innovation, expertise, and resilience strengthen every project we deliver. As we move into the spring construction season, I hope the information in this issue helps you prepare, compete, and grow.

Thank you for the work you do and for the value you bring to California's communities and economy.

David DeLuz
Deputy Director of Caltrans Office of Civil Rights



Fresno HEO Academy

Life did not stop during the seven weeks that 20 underserved, ambitious Fresno County residents learned how to operate heavy highway construction equipment, and earned certifications in Hazmat, traffic control, first aid, and related skills.

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HEO Academy Shows Students High-Demand Career Paths

**Minor's last names were intentionally omitted to protect their identities.*

Fresno middle and high school students explored hands-on heavy equipment training at Caltrans' Heavy Equipment Operator (HEO) Academy on

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Fresno HEO Academy



Fresno Heavy Equipment Operator Academy graduates smile at Madera Community College on December 18, 2025.

Participants balanced full-time training with jobs, welcomed new children, and in one case made the difficult decision to withdraw from the free program.

Michelle Hernandez was due to deliver HEO Academy student Matthew Lopez's child on the December 18 graduation day, but baby Oliver Hernandez arrived early, on December 12.

"I had to leave training halfway through last Thursday, and I missed Friday to come to my son's birth," Lopez said. "It was stressful with her giving birth, but I was able to balance being a father, losing sleep, and finishing school."

Baker Technical Institute President Doug Dalton said that flexibility and perseverance will elevate his family for generations to come.

"This is generation-changing," Dalton said. "The certification you receive today can never be taken away, and it lasts your lifetime. The path you take here will make your grandchildren proud."

Dalton also recognized graduate Mayra Navarro, who completed the 40-hour-a-week academy while working up to 60 hours a week at Amazon during the holidays.

"I balanced both by sleeping on my lunch breaks and napping between classes and work," Navarro said.

Graduate Alphonso Oliver, 52, called the experience life changing.

"I learned so much—from the land lab to the math to the simulators," he said. "My goal is to become a heavy equipment operator."

Caltrans Office of Civil Rights Small Business & Workforce Development Center Office Chief Marjani Rollins partnered with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to pilot the Caltrans HEO Academy in 2023. It expanded statewide in January 2025, launching academies in San Bernardino, Humboldt, and Fresno counties.

Rollins said she is living proof that where you start doesn't define where you end up.



From left to right: Caltrans Small Business & Workforce Development Center Office Chief Marjani Rollins, HEO graduate Matthew Lopez, and Baker Technical Institute President Doug Dalton smile at the Fresno graduation on December 18, 2025.

“When I was 22, I was a single mom of three,” said the office chief over the program that will now host nine academies before 2028, with three in northern, central, and southern regions to train 180 underserved individuals. Graduates can earn up to 13 industry-recognized certifications through the union-endorsed Multi-Craft Core Curriculum (MC3).

As of December 18, 2025, 98% of all participants graduated from an academy. Of those, 80% secured employment, with 64% working in the heavy highway construction industry.

Dalton said the timing couldn't be better.

“For the first time in our nation's history, we've decided to rebuild our infrastructure at a time when we've had the least amount of trained workers EVER.” Dalton said, “When we have the least amount of workers and the most amount of work, it forces wages and benefits to rise. Now, high schools are reengaging. Community colleges are reengaging. Caltrans is engaging.”

There was a flood of interest in the Fresno cohort, with 750 of the total 1,500 applicants received for the three 2025 academies being for Fresno. The 750 were narrowed down to 319 Fresno County applicants. From that, 33 candidates were interviewed, 20 selected, and 19 graduated.

Dalton noted that Caltrans added a youth element to the Fresno academy, inviting local Scandinavian Middle School and Duncan Polytechnical High School students to see heavy equipment, learn about opportunities, and try out heavy equipment simulators. (See Students HEO Field Trip Story)

“From that, now maybe these middle and high schoolers will understand why math and science are important,” Dalton said.

Rollins reminded graduates that Caltrans will continue to support them with job leads, mock interviews, and application assistance.

“This achievement is just the beginning,” she said.

Caltrans will host six more HEO Academies in the next two years. For more information, visit <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/civil-rights/workforce-development-branch> and <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/civil-rights/workforce-development-branch/heavy-highway-construction-trades-academies>



HEO Academy graduate, Mayra Navarro, shakes Baker Technical Institute President Doug Dalton's hand as Caltrans Small Business & Workforce Development Center Office Chief Marjani Rollins smiles in the background.



From left to right: Caltrans Small Business & Workforce Development Center Office Chief Marjani Rollins, HEO graduate Alphonso Oliver, and Baker Technical Institute President Doug Dalton smile at the Fresno graduation on December 18, 2025.

HEO Academy Shows Students High-Demand Career Paths

November 14—experiencing firsthand how fun these in-demand and high-paying careers are.

Forty-four students from [Scandinavian Middle School](#) and [Duncan Polytechnical High School](#) spent November 14 at Caltrans' Fresno Heavy Equipment Operator Academy, trying out simulators, meeting instructors, and learning how HEO careers offer strong wages, job stability, and opportunities to work statewide.

The event was part of Caltrans' [On-the-Job/Supportive Services Program](#), which increases access to skilled trades for women, minorities, and other underrepresented groups. Caltrans partners with industry and education leaders to offer training that helps participants earn certifications and launch careers in the Heavy Highway Construction Industry.

Students rotated through stations featuring heavy equipment simulators—technology that allows participants to learn basic tasks 40% faster, according to Sandy Mitchell from [Baker Technical Institute \(BTI\)](#). BTI is the Caltrans Heavy Highway Construction Trades Academy training provider and brought mobile training units with simulators, which the students said felt like video games—but with real-world skills.



Caltrans Maintenance Superintendent Jarod Smith helps [Scandinavian Middle School](#) students spin for a prize during their field trip to Caltrans' Heavy Equipment Operator Academy on November 14, 2025, at the Sheet Metal Workers International Association parking lot in Fresno.



Caltrans Maintenance Superintendent Jarod Smith hands a [Scandinavian Middle School](#) student safety glasses after spinning the prize wheel during the student field trip to the Fresno HEO Academy.

"I liked that the simulator made it physically feel like I was moving the bucket, dumping the dirt, and driving," said eighth grader Zahara*. "I like this field trip."

Others said the day opened their eyes to new options. "These simulators are good. I like how realistic it is," said seventh-grader Giovanni*. His classmate, Michael*, added, "It feels like real life."

HEO Academy leaders emphasized that students could enter these careers right out of high school. "If you're interested, you can do this and get paid \$30 to \$70 an hour—or even up to \$100 an hour," said Caltrans Maintenance Supervisor Jeremy Gorman. "Operators can make over \$100,000 a year. These are real options."

Mitchell encouraged students—especially girls—to consider these trades. "You don't have to limit yourself because you're female," she said. "Technical education is huge. Contractors are having trouble finding operators, and wages are rising."

Instructors stressed that hands-on training builds confidence, opens doors, and provides viable alternatives to four-year college paths. For more information, visit <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/civil-rights/workforce-development-branch> and <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/civil-rights/workforce-development-branch/heavy-highway-construction-trades-academies>



Duncan Polytechnical High School junior Amari* smiles as she sits in a front loader. Female heavy equipment operators are in high demand.



Michael*, a student at *Scandinavian Middle School*, poses in a front loader with his classmates during their field trip to Caltrans' Fresno Heavy Equipment Operator Academy.



Scandinavian Middle School eighth grader Zahara* poses in a front loader with her classmates during their field trip to Caltrans' Fresno Heavy Equipment Operator Academy.



Duncan Polytechnical High School junior Amari* smiles as she operates a front loader on a simulator during the field trip to Caltrans' Heavy Equipment Operator Academy on November 14, 2025.



Two *Duncan Polytechnical High School* students smile as they play a Heavy Equipment Operator simulator that resembles a video game.



Duncan Polytechnical High School junior Luis* smiles as he operates a front loader on a simulator during the field trip to Caltrans' Heavy Equipment Operator Academy on November 14, 2025.

5th Annual DBE/SB Summit in Fresno March 4

Small, disabled veteran, and disadvantaged businesses are invited to attend the 5th Annual Caltrans DBE-SB Summit, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. March 4 at the Fresno Convention Center. This event connects small businesses with resources while offering invaluable networking opportunities with prime contractors and state and local government buyers. Dive into a wealth of exciting procurement and contracting opportunities available through state and local agencies—get ready to elevate your business to new heights. Don't miss out on this chance to supercharge your growth and success.



Event Details

Date: Wednesday, March 4, 2026

Time: 9:00 am - 3:00 pm

Location: Fresno Convention Center

Address: 848 M Street, Fresno, CA 93721



- Connect with the Caltrans District Small Business Liaisons and buyers.
- Network with Caltrans prime contractors.
- Connect with state and local agencies' advocates to learn about contracting opportunities.
- Bring your laptop or tablet for an interactive Cal eProcure clinic to enhance your business profile.
- Learn about Caltrans resources and Mentor Protégé programs.

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS, DISCOVER OPPORTUNITIES!

Register for the FREE, in-person DBE-SB Summit at <https://tinyurl.com/2026-SummitAttendeeReg>

Featured Speakers

California Transportation Agency Secretary Toks Omishakin

California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Director Dinal El-Tawansy

California High-Speed Rail Authority Chief Deputy Director Mark Tollefson

Caltrans Office of Civil Rights Deputy Director David DeLuz

Caltrans District 6 Director Michael Navarro

Fresno Mayor Jerry Dyer

Pull out Facts

The Caltrans Office of Civil Rights (OCR) sets small, disadvantaged, and disabled veteran business project goals, certifies Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBEs), oversees the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Infrastructure Program, analyzes data, develops the workforce, and provides outreach and supportive services to level the playing field and provide equal opportunities for ALL.

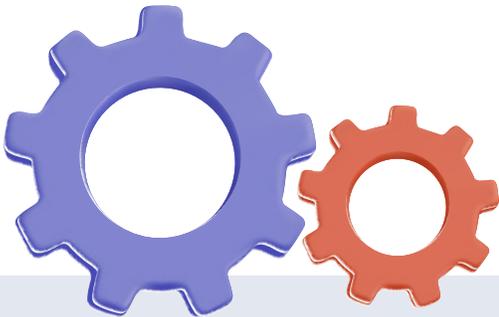
Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Program:

Caltrans has an office that certifies businesses that are eligible for the [DBE program](#). This certification helps small, disadvantaged businesses compete fairly on federally funded projects.

Data

In federal fiscal year 2024-25 (October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025), Caltrans awarded 314 Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) assisted contracts, valued at over \$4.5 billion. Of that, Caltrans committed \$970 million, or 22.15%, of its contracts to DBEs.

In state fiscal year 2024-25 (July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025), Caltrans awarded \$2.2 billion in state-funded contracts. Of that, Disabled Veteran Business Enterprises (DVBE) were awarded \$57 million or 2.5% of state-funded contracts. Certified Small Businesses (SB)s received \$891 million and participated in 38.9% of state-funded contracts, surpassing the 25% state participation goal outlined in [SB1](#) and [AB 2019](#).



Upcoming Contractor Training

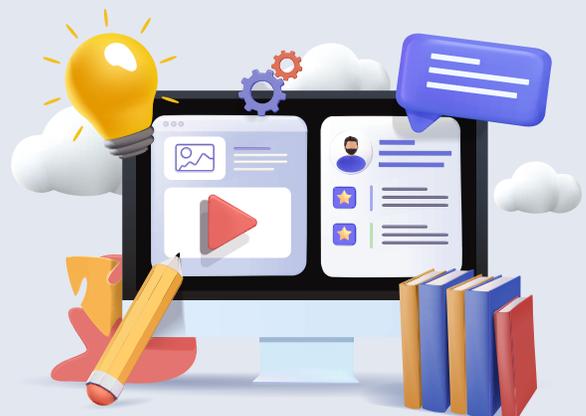
Caltrans hosts free educational [outreach events](#) throughout the state, including:

- Caltrans 5th Annual DBE/SB Summit will commence from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., March 4, 2026, at the Fresno Convention & Entertainment Center at 848 M Street in Fresno, CA.
- The California Statewide Coalition for Diversity Initiatives will host the 3rd annual California Supplier Diversity Symposium on March 18, at the Pasadena Convention Center at 300 E Green Street in Pasadena, CA.
- "Bonding, Estimating, and Labor Compliance for Subcontractors" virtual training will be from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m., April 14. Register [here](#)

Also

- Caltrans' Small Business Council will host its regular meeting virtually from 8:30 a.m. to noon, Friday, March 27. For more information, contact small.business.council@dot.ca.gov

For the latest updates, visit the Caltrans Office of Civil Rights [Calendar of Small Business Events](#).





Business Spotlight Introduction

The Road Repair and Accountability Act of 2017 (**Senate Bill (SB) 1, Beall, Chapter 5, Statutes of 2017**) required Caltrans to increase outreach to increase disabled-veteran, minority, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) contractors to increase their participation on Caltrans projects.

The bill referenced the federal [Disadvantaged Business Enterprise \(DBE\) program](#), which is designed to level the playing field for socially and economically disadvantaged contractors on a case-by-case basis.

The Caltrans [Office of Civil Rights](#) – known as OCR – strives to increase the participation of small businesses through [workforce development](#), [outreach](#), [education](#), [supportive services](#), and more. As part of this effort, please read spotlight articles on Cooper Engineering, Inc., and Albat for March, which is National Women's History Month. Also, please see the article on AYCE Consulting Engineers for May, which is National Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month.

Woman Spotlights

"Woman-Owned Firm Builds Success on Strong Foundations" 9

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Asian Pacific Spotlight

"AYCE Consulting Engineers — Local Expertise, Lasting Impact" 12



This March, in recognition of National Women's History Month, the Caltrans Office of Civil Rights highlights women-owned firm Albat as part of its ongoing series highlighting the diversity of its subcontractors.

Woman-Owned Firm Builds Success on Strong Foundations



Tatevik Janvelyan founded Albat in 2021.

Sacramento-based [Albat](#), a certified *Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE)* and *Small Business (SB)*, is quickly becoming a trusted partner on Caltrans projects statewide—proving that collaboration, integrity, and perseverance build both great teams and great infrastructure.

Founded in 2021 by Tatevik Janvelyan, a professional civil engineer and first-generation Armenian American,

Albat specializes in construction management, inspection, and materials engineering. The firm's name honors Tatevik's grandfathers—Albert and Batem—and reflects the company's roots in family and values.

Albat's mission is to create an environment where staff feel supported to learn, grow, and lead—while helping public partners deliver safe, high-quality infrastructure for Californians.

“We believe collaboration is key,” said Janvelyan. **“By working together and building trust, we keep projects moving forward at the highest level of quality.”**

Janvelyan's background includes work on landmark efforts such as the [San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge](#) and the [California High-Speed Rail](#) program. Her business partner, Justin Palmaymesa, joined in 2022, bringing deep experience in quality assurance and inspection. Together, they've built a team known for its bold approach and attention to detail.

Like many small firms, Albat faced early challenges with cash flow and staffing—but found success through supportive prime partners and word-of-mouth referrals.

“We're grateful for the mentors who helped us, especially through the [CalMentor Program](#),” said Janvelyan. “The program taught us how to navigate Caltrans contracts and build relationships that last.”



Albat crews conduct roadway rehabilitation and stabilization at Alderpoint Road in Humboldt County.

Today, Albat has staff across California, from Sacramento to San Diego, supporting projects that improve roadways, bridges, and communities. As the firm grows, Janvelyan says the focus remains clear: *balance, integrity, and building opportunities for others.*

Janvelyan advises other small, disadvantaged firms to “use the CalMentor Program. Ask questions. Everyone's willing to help—if you don't ask, you won't know.”

Learn more about Caltrans [CalMentor](#) programs on the [Caltrans website](#).



This March, in recognition of National Women's History Month, the Caltrans Office of Civil Rights highlights woman-owned firm Cooper Engineering, Inc. as part of its ongoing series highlighting the diversity of its subcontractors.

Building Strength, One Barrier at a Time

From running a family business out of her living room to leading one of California's top machine-extruded concrete firms, Denise Cooper has built Cooper Engineering, Inc. (CEI) into a thriving, woman-owned success story in the state's transportation industry.

Building Barriers and Breaking Them

Denise and her husband, Hod, founded Cooper Engineering, Inc. (CEI) in 1988 in Orange County California, with a single backhoe and a big idea. Today, CEI specializes in machine-extruded concrete barriers and paving on major public works projects, including Caltrans highways. Under Denise's leadership, CEI has become a trusted subcontractor partner to general contractors statewide.

When a prime contractor's nonpayment nearly forced the company to close years ago, Denise persevered—learning valuable lessons about resilience, financial management, and advocacy for small businesses. She went on to earn her a certificate of completion, from Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses Program,

and take full ownership of CEI in 2013. Since then, CEI's revenue has grown every year.

Leadership in Construction

Denise serves as President and CEO, overseeing business strategy, finance, safety, and workforce development. She also serves on the Southern California Contractors Association (SCCA) Board and was only the second woman in history to serve as its President. She continues to advocate for transportation funding and fair contracting opportunities through SCCA's Legislative Committee and Subcommittee on Transportation Policy. She also



Left to right: Cooper Engineering, Inc. President Denise Cooper and International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) Local 12 Operator Pablo Galvan smile at a Southern California job site.

serves on Caltrans Construction Partnering Steering Committee where she represents the only small business/subcontractor.

Her industry leadership has been recognized nationally—she received the Ethel Birchland Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Road and Transportation



Denise Cooper



Left to right: Chance, Hod, Denise, and Mitchell Cooper pose at the Southern California Contractors' Association golf tournament.

Builders Association for her decades of service and mentorship in construction.

A Family Legacy

CEI remains a family-run company—Denise works alongside her husband and two of her three adult children, who hold key leadership roles in operations, estimating, and administration. Together, they focus on maintaining a strong company culture and delivering high-quality work with integrity.

“When we drive down the highway and see the concrete barriers, we take pride knowing we built most of them,” Denise said. “It’s hard work, but it’s meaningful.”

Advice for Other Small Businesses

Denise encourages small and disadvantaged business owners to get involved with Caltrans and industry associations:

“Hold agencies accountable, stay informed, and build relationships. Caltrans has been a great partner to small businesses like ours.”

Her top tips for success:

Learn every part of your business—from paperwork to project delivery.

Partner only with contractors who value and pay their subcontractors fairly.

Create a mission, vision, and values statement—and live by it.

About Cooper Engineering, Inc.

Founded: 1988

Location: Corona, CA

Specialty: Machine-extruded concrete barriers and paving

Certifications: Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE), Woman-Owned Business

Website: <http://www.cooperconcrete.net>



Caltrans Office of Civil Rights spotlights Asian Pacific-owned AYCE Consulting Engineers for May, which is National Asian and Pacific Heritage Month. This is part of OCR's ongoing series highlighting the diversity of Caltrans' subcontractors.

AYCE Consulting Engineers — Local Expertise, Lasting Impact

AYCE Consulting Engineers has built its reputation on a simple idea: deliver high-quality civil engineering services with strong local relationships and deep technical expertise. Founded in 2015, AYCE stands for “All Your Civil Engineering,” reflecting the firm's commitment to giving clients its very best—and acting as an ace partner on transportation projects throughout Southern California.

President and Principal **David Y. Woo, Professional Engineer (PE), Envision Sustainability Professional (ENV SP)**, brings more than 30 years of transportation design and leadership experience to the firm. Before launching AYCE, he was as Vice President and Transportation Director with the Louis Berger Group (now WSP), where he helped grow major design-build programs across Southern California. His strategic insight and hands-on leadership continue to guide AYCE's work today.

Principal **Kandice Nguyen, PE**, is a recognized expert in urban freeway design-build projects. Licensed in California and Nevada, she has more than 15 years of experience leading complex corridor improvements, preparing geometric approval drawings, finalizing roadway construction documents, and coordinating multidisciplinary teams. Known for her calm approach to problem-solving, she works closely with partner agencies, contractors, and local communities to deliver compliant, streamlined designs.

Together, Woo and Nguyen founded AYCE to meet a growing need they observed at large firms: a flexible, local engineering team with strong agency relationships—particularly with Caltrans' southern districts 7, 8, and 12.

“We're the local guys,” says Nguyen, who began her engineering career as an intern in Woo's office nearly two decades ago.

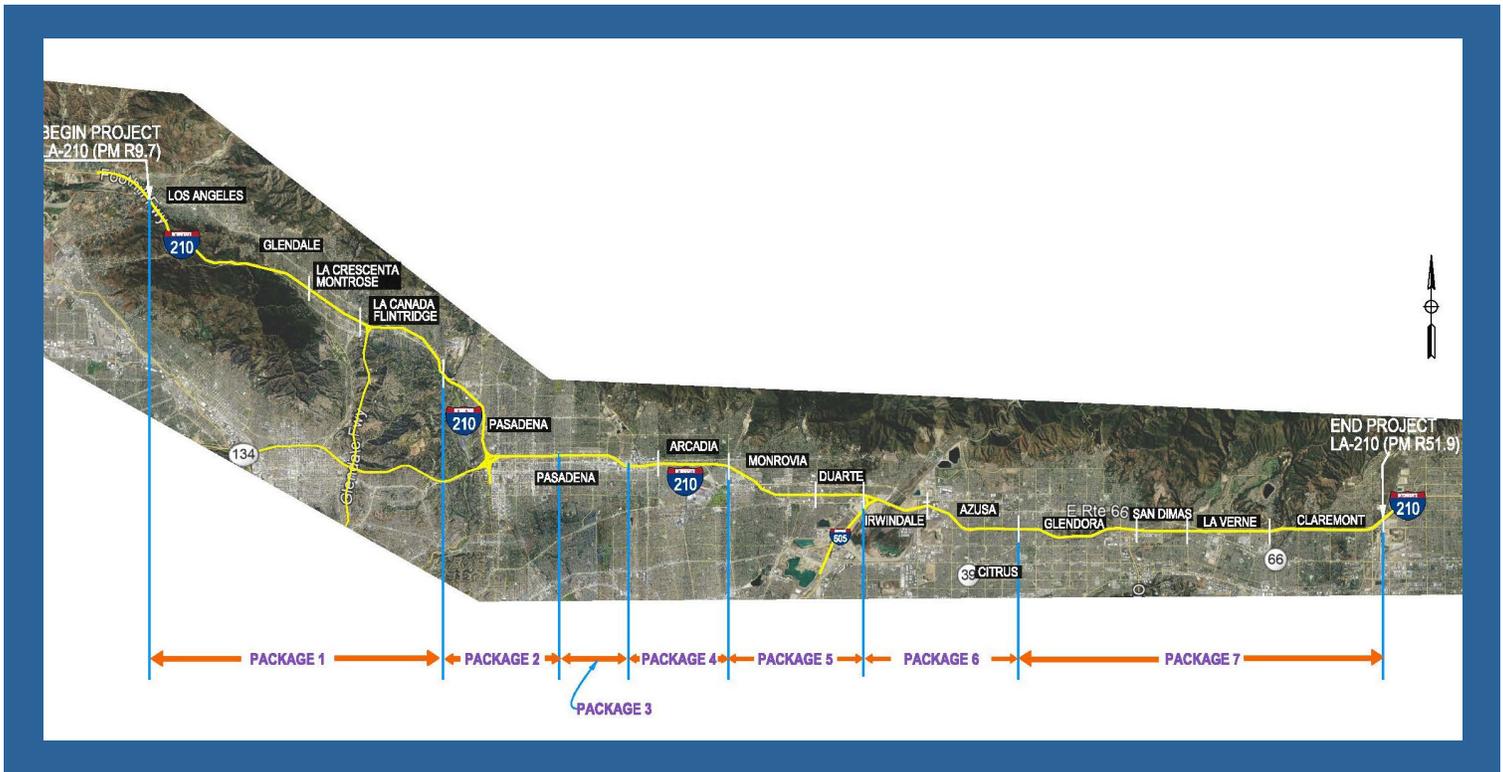


From left to right: Caltrans Los Angeles District 7 Project Engineer Wasif Bhuiyan, Inspector Juan Abad, Construction Engineer James Shih, AYCE Consulting Engineer Principal Kandice Nguyen, Sully Miller Project Manager Scott Conover, Bureau Veritas Resident Engineer Frederick Young, Sully Miller Construction Manager Paul Miller, and AYCE Consulting Engineer President David Y. Woo gather at a Caltrans partnering event.

Their shared values, cultural roots, and commitment to hard work continue to shape their leadership today.

AYCE recently completed the **State Route (SR)-210 ADA Ramps Improvement Design-Build Project**, as Sully-Miller Contractors' prime design firm. This corridor-wide accessibility effort upgraded curb ramps, pedestrian signals, and related features across 42 miles and 80 intersections within 14 cities. As a pilot design-build ADA project, it became a model for future multi-jurisdiction programs.

The team reorganized the large corridor into seven design packages, simplifying Caltrans' review process and giving the contractor greater flexibility. Their approach allowed multiple crews to work concurrently without any change orders. The design-build delivery method accelerated completion by 18 months.



AYCE completed the **SR-210 ADA Ramps Improvement Design-Build Project** 18 months early, and within budget, by breaking the large project into seven smaller packages.

“We deliver quality, cost-efficient design,” Woo said. “We took the preliminary design, refined it, and made it more constructible and more affordable.”

AYCE's Caltrans experience—built over decades—continues to fuel their growth. The firm now handles projects of varying sizes, from smaller urban design tasks to major corridor programs. They emphasize value, responsiveness, and technical excellence, especially for design-build teams that need quick, accurate guidance in the field.

With a staff of 12, AYCE remains a true small business that can take on design fees up to roughly \$5 million. The leaders say Caltrans' support for small businesses has made a real difference, helping firms like theirs compete for meaningful opportunities.

Their advice for other small businesses is, “Don't give up,” says Nguyen. “It's not always easy, but if you stay resilient and bring real value, the opportunities are there.”

Woo adds: “You must be an expert in the service you offer. When your work benefits communities—and millions

of people who use these facilities every day—there's no greater reward.”

“

“We deliver quality, cost-efficient design that improves communities and makes transportation safer for everyone.”

— David Woo

”

Building Opportunity, Logic, and Heart: Tony Lee's Journey at Caltrans

For Tony Lee, life has always been about perspective. Born in Burma (now Myanmar) to Chinese parents, Tony immigrated to the United States at age 11 with his parents and younger sister. His family arrived with just \$30 and a dream for something better.

“My parents sacrificed everything for us,” Tony recalls. “The expectation was clear—work hard, take advantage of the opportunities, and make it count.”

That sense of purpose guided Tony from his early love of math and logic to earning a degree in civil engineering from California State University, Sacramento. He joined Caltrans as a student assistant and quickly learned that public service is about more than projects—it's about people.

From inspecting construction sites in districts 3 and 10 to coordinating traffic safety and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance, Tony's path reflects both curiosity and compassion. A personal moment made accessibility hit home: “I was walking along a parade route that wasn't ADA compliant. I realized if it was that hard for me, imagine someone in a wheelchair.” That experience—and later, watching his own mother navigate mobility challenges after a stroke—deepened his commitment to making transportation accessible for everyone.

Today, as Office Chief overseeing the ADA Infrastructure Program, Contract Evaluation and Engineering Support branches, Tony leads with empathy and purpose.

“I didn't want to be a manager at first,” he admits. “But I saw the teams struggling. I took the job because I wanted to help them.”



Under his leadership, the program has grown stronger, collaboration has deepened, and team morale has flourished.

Tony's definition of success is simple but profound: “It's not about titles or achievements. Success is having a good relationship with my wife, kids, and family—and making time for what truly matters.”

Through all the turns of his journey—from Burma to Sacramento, from engineering plans to human connection—Tony embodies the Caltrans mission: building a safer, more accessible California for everyone.

Building an In-House Engine for Business Growth

How Caltrans shifted to a statewide, data-driven Business Development Program

By Marjani Rollins

Caltrans Civil Rights Small Business & Workforce Development Center Chief

Caltrans operates from a simple truth: access without support is an empty promise. The Department aims to create systems that deliver opportunity with intention—not chance.

Originally, outside contracted firms delivered coaching, technical assistance, and capacity-building services to Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE) aspiring to compete on Caltrans projects.

Those contracts laid the groundwork, but they revealed something critical: long-term, statewide equity requires an internal structure, something built, staffed, and sustained from within the organization.

That realization sparked a complex transition.

Caltrans was tasked with building a fully functioning statewide business development program from the ground up. Staff were limited, and there were no established workflows or systems. But there was an urgent need to align expectations across the districts and Caltrans partners.

Without guidance, DBEs often face steep learning curves, absorbing expensive lessons through denied bonding, insurance gaps, compliance errors, incomplete schedules, and missed bid opportunities.

So, the Caltrans Business Development Program (BDP) was born. The BDP aligned federal requirements with Caltrans' equity goals to create new processes and tracking tools, with the goal of enrolling 120 DBE firms each year.

The program offers no-cost training and individualized support that helps firms build capabilities that would otherwise require years.

Since 2024, the new Small Business Development Branch has assisted 155 DBE firms and 95 small businesses statewide. These firms are now ahead of the game.

As we move toward the summer heavy construction season, I challenge all Caltrans partners to rethink processes and make improvements, so California has a hearty pool of small business builders and innovators now and into the future.

For prime contractors, I challenge you to hire a subcontractor you've never worked with before.

I challenge community partners to rethink old processes.

And for our district leaders, I challenge you to reach out to and teach more small businesses how to navigate the government contracting process.

When we create space for small businesses to succeed, we build far more than roads—we build a stronger, more resilient California—and we show that the American Dream can **still** be realized for **all**—regardless of where they started.

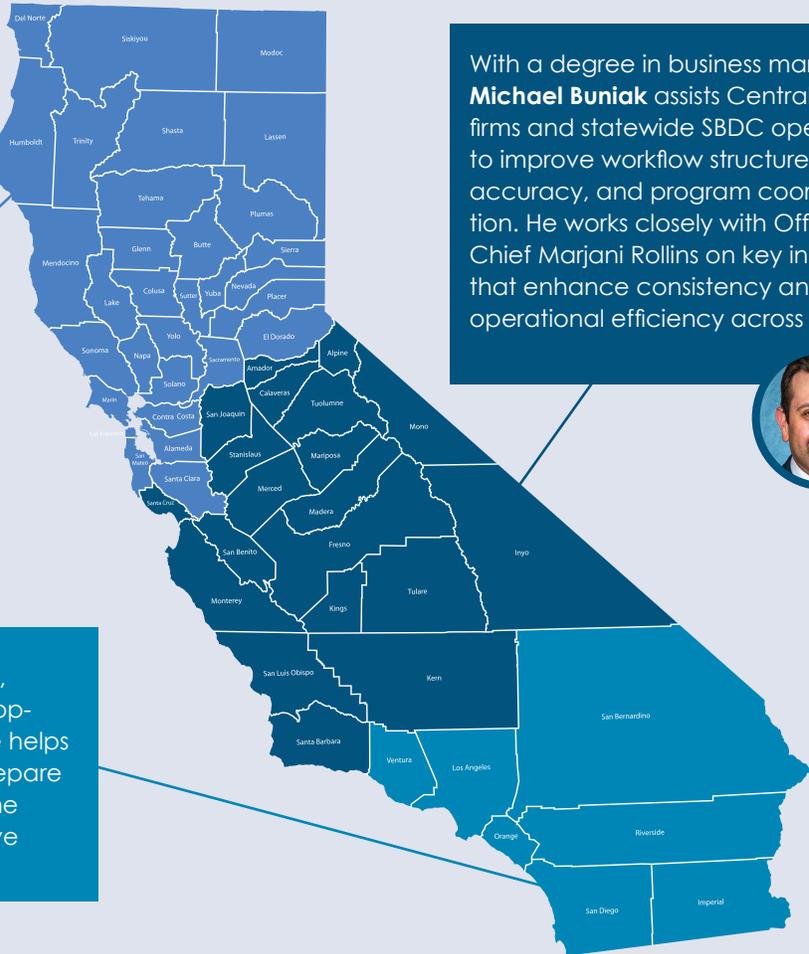
Statewide Small Business Development and Support



With 20 years of state service in contracting, strategic development, and operational leadership—built on an early career in banking—**Marjani Rollins** leads the Caltrans Small Business and Workforce Development Center. She oversees statewide initiatives that build small business capacity, expand workforce training, and create pathways for individuals from underserved communities to develop their skills, grow their businesses, and begin meaningful careers in transportation.



With more than 15 years experience supporting small and disadvantaged businesses' access to state contracts, **Damon Dorn** supports Northern California firms. Dorn offers practical guidance, and has expanded awareness of Caltrans opportunities and strengthened engagement among new and emerging contractors.



With a degree in business marketing, **Michael Buniak** assists Central Region firms and statewide SBDC operations to improve workflow structure, data accuracy, and program coordination. He works closely with Office Chief Marjani Rollins on key initiatives that enhance consistency and operational efficiency across regions.



With a degree in business administration, **Adriana Ring** leads small business development in California's southern region. She helps businesses strengthen their capacity, prepare for opportunities, and connect with prime contractors across the state's most active construction regions.



With a master's degree in business, **David Gunn** manages key tracking tools, improves data quality, and strengthens the operational structure to support Caltrans' new statewide business development systems. Gunn's ability to evaluate trends and break down complex information ensures statewide alignment and consistent support for small businesses.



With a degree in business leadership and two decades of military experience, **Nolan Speed** strengthens BDP operations. His ability to translate complex processes into clear, usable guidance—such as his outreach messaging, enrollment, and "Quick Tips"—ensures that small businesses understand how to access Caltrans opportunities.



Scan the QR code to Opt-In and receive alerts regarding upcoming Events, Training Workshops, Certification, Contract Opportunities, and much more.

Resources

- The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) Small Business and Workforce Development Center offers [On-the-Job Training](#), [Heavy Equipment Operator Academy](#), [business development](#), and [supportive services](#) FREE for all small, disadvantaged, or disabled veteran businesses. For more information, email OJT.SS@dot.ca.gov or DBE.SS@dot.ca.gov
- To enroll in Caltrans free Business Development Program (BDP) fill out the [BDP Enrollment Interest Form](#).
- To receive notifications for upcoming events, training workshops, quick tips, and contract opportunities, opt into the [mass notification system here](#).
- Caltrans offers a [Construction Mentor Protégé Program \(CMPP\)](#), which supports the growth of small and disadvantaged construction firms, teaching them to effectively compete in Caltrans construction projects. For more information, visit [CMPP](#).



Quick Links

- Learn How to [Contract with Caltrans](#)
- Visit [Caltrans' Contacting Portal](#)
- See Upcoming Architectural and Engineering (A&E) Work on the [A & E Look Ahead Report](#)
- Click Quick Links on [Cal eProcure](#) to find all small business solicitations and past state purchases.
- Find your District Small Business Liaison at this [link](#).

Additional Resources

- [Association of Procurement Technical Assistance Centers \(APTAC\)](#) provides free advice on all aspects of selling to the federal, state, and local governments. Find your local agency on the link to get started.
- [Small Business Development Centers](#) throughout California counsel and train business owners to start, run, and grow their firms. Find your local center for assistance today.
- The [Construction Resource Center](#) provides hands-on technical assistance, eLearning modules, educational materials, and mentorship programs to contractors, tradespeople, and future construction professionals.
- Builders Exchanges, including the [Bay Area Builders Exchange](#), [Humboldt Builders Exchange](#), [Sacramento Regional Builders Exchange](#), [Golden State Builders Exchange](#), and [Central California Builders Exchange](#) help business owners find more work.

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