



SMALL BUSINESS PRESS

Empowering Small Businesses to Help Keep California Moving

2026, Issue 2



Hello, Caltrans' small business community.

Welcome to the summer 2026 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 vital Caltrans partners, and we cannot rebuild California's transportation system without you. We hope you find this information useful and informative as you continue through the heavy summer and fall construction season.

David DeLuz

Deputy Director, Office of Civil Rights

What the First Phase of the DBE Reevaluation Tells Us — and Where We're Headed

By David DeLuz

Deputy Director, Caltrans Office of Civil Rights

California's Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) community is navigating one of the biggest shifts in program history. With the U.S. Department

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From Second Chances to Steering Wheels:

Caltrans Program Drives New Careers in Trucking

He spent nine years behind bars. Now, Jordan Junious is behind the wheel—building a new future.

"This has been life-changing," said Junious, 30.

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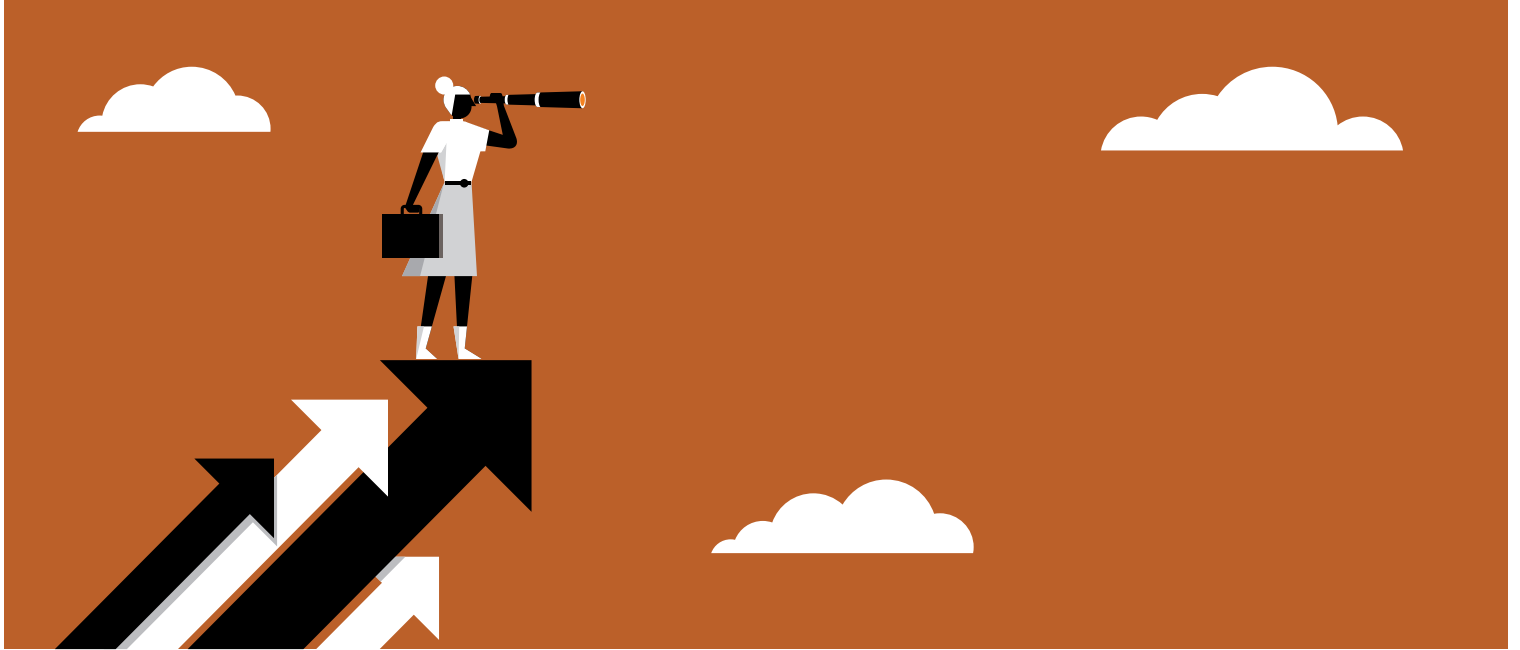
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What the First Phase of the DBE Reevaluation Tells Us — and Where We're Headed



of Transportation's Interim Final Rule (IFR) now in effect, every certified DBE must undergo a new, individualized assessment of social and economic disadvantage. The IFR eliminates group based presumptions of disadvantage and replaces them with individualized reviews for every applicant, marking a significant change in how firms demonstrate eligibility.

This first round of data offers a preliminary look at how firms are responding. The early numbers are lower than hoped, but they represent only the starting point of a long, statewide reevaluation process. Caltrans and its partners fully expect participation to climb as firms gain clarity, receive support, and adapt to the new requirements.

A Statewide Effort Across the CUCP

California's DBE certification is administered through the California Unified Certification Program (CUCP), a coalition of nine certifying agencies—Caltrans plus eight local transportation agencies. Before the IFR, the CUCP included more than 6,000 certified DBEs statewide, with Caltrans directly certifying about half of them, at roughly 3,200 firms.

The IFR reevaluation affects the entire CUCP ecosystem. Every DBE certified before October 3, 2025, must be reevaluated under the new individualized standard, regardless of which CUCP agency originally certified the firm. This makes the effort one of the most extensive statewide DBE initiatives ever undertaken.

The First Snapshot: A Tough Start, but Only the Beginning

Caltrans' preliminary analysis through June 12 shows that 25% of Caltrans certified DBEs submitted their Personal Narrative (PN)—new documentation required under the IFR. More than 2,500 firms have not yet filed, and among Caltrans certified firms currently performing on active contracts, 35% still need to submit a PN.

These figures are understandably concerning, but context matters: this is the very first tranche of filings after a major federal policy shift. Many firms are still learning what the PN requires, gathering documentation, or preparing questions for CUCP staff. Early turbulence is expected in a transition of this scale.

As firms gain experience with the process, and as more guidance and outreach become available, Caltrans expects filing rates to rise in the coming months.

A Temporary Contraction in the DBE Pool

The early filing challenges have led to a temporary reduction in Caltrans' active DBE pool. Before the IFR, Caltrans had 305 DBEs performing on active contracts. As of May 22, Caltrans received reevaluations from 188 DBEs on active contracts. Sector specific attrition is also notable: Professional Services lost 971 firms, and Construction lost 567 during this early phase.

These shifts matter for project delivery, competition, and goal attainment. But they are best understood as early indicators—not outcomes. Many non filing firms remain active, interested, and fully capable of submitting once they have the right support.

Meeting Firms Where They Are: Caltrans' Immediate Actions

Recognizing the early challenges, Caltrans has already launched several support measures:

- Direct outreach to non filing firms with active contracts.
- Simplified PN guidance for sole proprietors and microbusinesses.
- Supportive services webinars for sectors with the steepest drop offs.
- Coordinated CUCP wide materials to ensure consistent instructions across all nine agencies.

These efforts are designed to help firms understand the process, reduce confusion, and submit accurate, complete PNs. As outreach expands, Caltrans anticipates a meaningful rebound in submissions.

Long Term Strategy: Strengthening the Program for the Future

As reevaluation continues, Caltrans will provide guidance, webinars, and one-on-one support to help firms meet IFR requirements. The department will also revise its goal-setting to reflect the updated pool of DBE firms, ensuring targets are realistic and data-driven. Additionally, Caltrans and CUCP are committed to expanding opportunities for small businesses by improving access, technical assistance, and partnerships to help them grow and compete statewide.

Looking Ahead with Optimism

This early data reflects a challenging start, but it's only a first glimpse at a process that's just beginning. As firms become more familiar with the IFR requirements and receive more personalized support, Caltrans fully expects participation to increase and the DBE pool to recover.

The path forward will take continued communication and collaboration, but Caltrans and its CUCP partners remain confident: California's DBE community is resilient, capable, and ready to adapt.

Now is the time for DBEs to engage, get informed, and submit their Personal Narratives — your participation strengthens the entire program



From Second Chances to Steering Wheels: Caltrans Program Drives New Careers in Trucking



Russell Calvan, from Caltrans Headquarters Talent Acquisition, discusses how to pursue a state job with newly certified commercial driver's license holder Jordan Junious during the program's April 7 employer day event.

Just a few years ago, Junious was serving a nine-year sentence for assault with a firearm. Today, he is part of a workforce training cohort preparing for a commercial driver's license (CDL) and a new career.

"With that much time, you reflect," he said. "You either grow from it or go the other way. This showed me what I'm capable of."

Junious is one of a select group chosen for a joint training effort between Caltrans and the Sacramento Employment and Training Agency (SETA), designed to prepare participants—including individuals with barriers to employment—for careers in trucking and transportation. More than 700 people applied for the program. Caltrans sponsored seven participants, and SETA funded six – including Junious.

The program combines hands-on CDL training through 160 Driving Academy with direct connections to employers, including Caltrans, private carriers, and local government agencies.

At a recent employer day in Sacramento, participants met recruiters, explored job options, and learned what

comes next after earning their licenses.

"You're not just getting a license. You're getting a pathway," said Caltrans Workforce Development Branch Chief Gisela Everhard, who helped launch the partnership.

The demand is real. California is projected to have more than 18,000 truck driver openings each year, driven by retirements, turnover, and continued freight demand. Nationwide, the industry faces a shortage estimated between 60,000 and 80,000 drivers.

For participants like Kourtney Butler-Rishton, 34, the opportunity is both professional and personal.

"I saw the ad on Facebook right after Christmas," she said. "I didn't get in at first, but when they called me back, it gave me hope."

The only woman in training, Butler-Rishton said the experience has been challenging, but empowering.

"I don't just want to do the job. I want to know the job," she said. "Women can do this work just as well as men."

Others echoed the impact.

"It's been awesome," said Joshua Cagibula, 27, who applied after a friend shared the opportunity.

Roger Keith, 37, said the one-on-one instruction stood out. "It's a lot," he said. "But if you're passionate about it, it doesn't feel like it."

The training also connects participants directly with employers ready to hire.

Capital Express Lines, a Sacramento-based carrier with more than 100 trucks, is among the companies recruiting new drivers. The company offers opportunities for both team and solo drivers, with benefits and the potential to be home on weekends.

"We're one of the few companies that will hire brand-new drivers," said Senior Account Manager Andy Raks-tad. "Here, you're not a number. You're a name."

Public sector employers are also hiring.

At Caltrans, entry-level maintenance positions can lead to long-term careers, with opportunities to advance into leadership roles without a college degree.

"You will always be able to rely on the license you are earning today," said Maintenance Area Superintendent RJ Hickman. "And you'll be home every night."

Sacramento County is facing similar workforce needs, with hundreds of driver positions to fill as its workforce ages.

Behind the program is a broader goal: connecting people to stable, well-paying careers while helping meet California's growing workforce demands.

Six months ago, SETA and Caltrans began building the partnership that made the cohort possible.

"This is just the beginning," said SETA Workforce Development Manager William Walker. "It's about creating real opportunities and long-term careers."

For Junious, the impact goes beyond employment.

"It changed how I see myself," he said. "Not just my career—my future."

As new cohorts launch in Humboldt and San Bernardino counties later this spring, Caltrans and its partners hope to expand that impact—one driver and one opportunity at a time.



Victor Osborne practices driving a big rig as part of the Caltrans, Sacramento Employment and Training Agency (SETA), and 160 Driving Academy partnership, which provided free commercial driver's license training to 13 underserved Sacramento residents.



(Left to right) Students Jordan Junious and Elias Camarillo identify big-rig components during their commercial driver's license training program this spring in Sacramento.



Superintendent Sean Crawford explains the application process for the Sacramento County Department of Waste Management & Recycling to newly certified commercial driver's license holder Kourtney Butler-Rishton.

More than 500 Attend Caltrans Business Summit in Fresno

More than 500 attendees gathered March 4 at the Fresno Convention Center for the fifth annual Caltrans Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) and Small Business (SB) Summit, a key event focused on expanding opportunity and strengthening connections across California's small business community.

The summit brought together Caltrans buyers and liaisons, state and local agency representatives, primes, and others to offer small business owners a day of networking, learning, and access to contracting opportunities. The event provided practical tools and resources to help small, disadvantaged, and disabled veteran business enterprises compete for and succeed in public works projects and government contracting and procurement opportunities.

A highlight of the summit was the panel, ["From Barriers to Bids: Small, DBE & DVBE Experiences,"](#) where business owners shared firsthand accounts of navigating challenges and finding success through programs like the Caltrans Construction Mentor-Protégé Program. Panelists discussed overcoming barriers, building relationships, and gaining the experience needed to secure contracts.

Another featured session, ["How to Work with Caltrans,"](#) offered step-by-step guidance on navigating Caltrans systems, including where to find contracting opportunities and how to effectively engage with the department.

Speakers included Caltrans Director Dina El-Tawansy, High-Speed Rail Authority Chief Deputy Director Mark Tollefson, Caltrans District 6 Director Michael Navarro, Caltrans Office of Civil Rights Deputy Director David DeLuz, and Jerry Dyer. Their remarks emphasized the importance of small businesses in delivering infrastructure projects and driving local economic growth.

Organizers said the summit continues to serve as a vital platform for collaboration, helping small businesses build capacity, connect with partners and access new opportunities across the state.

Caltrans is now planning the sixth annual DBE-SB Summit, scheduled for Southern California in early 2027.



Caltrans staff help Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) and Small Business (SB) owners sign in at the fifth annual DBE/SB Summit in Fresno, California.



Caltrans Director Dina El-Tawansy shared tips during the "How to Work with Caltrans" panel at the fifth annual DBE/SB Summit in Fresno.

Director's [Video](#) to small, disadvantaged businesses.



From a Small Business Owner's Daughter to Caltrans Director — El-Tawansy is a Lifelong Small Business Champion



Dina El-Tawansy

Before she ever led California's massive transportation system, Dina El-Tawansy was a young woman watching her father chase a dream. Her family had immigrated to the United States in 1990 with big hopes, and her father longed to start a small business. When El-Tawansy landed her first stable job at Caltrans years later, that paycheck finally gave her father the chance to launch his medical supply company — an experience that would go on to shape her entire career.

Now, as the recently appointed Director of Caltrans, El-Tawansy says that early lesson in small businesses' economic vulnerability fuels her determination to ensure small and disadvantaged firms have a fair, fighting chance in California's transportation industry.

"Small businesses are part of the very fabric of economic prosperity in California," El-Tawansy said in an interview with the Small Business Press. "They bring innovation, community based solutions, and resilience to the infrastructure Californians rely on every day."

El-Tawansy's work with small businesses began in the Bay Area District 4, where she was a young project manager asking questions few others were asking: What contracts can small businesses handle? What are the barriers? How can Caltrans expand opportunities for these small firms?

In one early example, she split a major project into smaller ones to increase access for small businesses. She and her technical team hosted quarterly outreach meetings to brief contractors and subcontractors on upcoming work — a practice she later incentivized across the region when she became a regional manager.

Her experience deepened in 2013 when she became closely involved in the Construction Mentor Protégé Program (CMPP), a Bay Area initiative that would eventually grow to become one of the state's most influential tools for equity in contracting.

California is currently investing heavily in clean energy, digital infrastructure, multimodal mobility, and climate resilient construction. El-Tawansy says small firms — particularly minority-owned and disadvantaged businesses — are critical players in that transformation.

"When local and diverse businesses deliver public infrastructure, the benefits stay local," she said. "That means stronger economies, good jobs, and projects that reflect the needs of our communities."

She notes that minority-owned businesses bring cultural insight, lived experience, and connections that improve equity and outcomes across the state's transportation network.

Challenges: Capital, Complexity — and How Caltrans Is Tackling Both

Small businesses often face steep barriers: complex contracting processes and the daunting challenge of securing early capital. Caltrans has spent years strengthening its support systems to fix that.

Among the biggest advancements:

- A statewide expansion of the [Construction Mentor Protégé Program](#), which has graduated more than 250 firms, each equipped with technical skills, business systems, and hands-on experience.
- Stronger financing support, including Success, Capital Access and Leadership for Entrepreneurs ([SCALE](#)), and the Treasurer's Office Loan Participation and Transportation Line of Credit (TLOC) programs, which can reduce capital barriers.
- A robust Office of Civil Rights, led by Deputy Director David DeLuz, offering DBE reevaluation support, webinars, and detailed guidance.
- District-level Small Business Liaisons in all 12 districts who personally help firms navigate the process.
- The new [Caltrans Contracting Opportunities Portal \(CCOP\)](#) — a statewide hub created directly from contractor feedback.

These efforts, El-Tawansy says, are part of a coordinated system that helps small contractors compete, get paid, and grow California's workforce.

Success Stories: Persistence, Partnerships, and Generational Growth

Across California, dozens of businesses credit Caltrans programs for significant growth — sometimes life-changing.

- **Steve Rhoades**, a contractor who started with almost no capital, used DBE certification and federal programs to build skills until prime contractors took notice.
- **Roger Schnorenberg**, a Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise owner, traveled statewide to meet buyers and expand reach, showing that certification is only the beginning.
- **Chris Post** of 2M General Engineering secured six Caltrans contracts with a combination of traditional bidding skills and new tools like artificial intelligence (AI) and the CCOP.
- **Jessica Ascensio** of Premier Sign Service has earned more than \$13 million in Caltrans signage contracts since graduating from the mentorship program.

The throughline? Persistence, access, and targeted support.

Looking ahead, El-Tawansy wants more than incremental progress — she wants expansion.

“We are meeting and exceeding our goals, but we can grow the pie,” she said. “The future will bring even more opportunities.”

Her vision includes:

- Broader mentorship and supportive services
- Expanded partnerships across local and regional agencies
- Improved access to capital
- Modernization of programs and compliance tools and
- Seamless previews of contracting opportunities statewide

She notes that Caltrans has already surpassed \$1 billion in small business participation and witnessed strong small business involvement in California's disaster recovery efforts — momentum she intends to build on.



Caltrans Director Dina El-Tawansy stands with her family at her Oath of Office Ceremony on July 1, 2025, where she was sworn in as the 35th Director of Caltrans.

Small Business Expenditures

As of May 31, 2026, Caltrans awarded 155 Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)-assisted contracts in Federal Fiscal Year 2025–26 totaling \$4.1 billion.

As of March 31, 2026, Caltrans spent nearly \$1.6 billion on state contracts and purchasing for State Fiscal Year 2025–26. Small Businesses received more than \$604 million of that, equaling 37.9 percent of those contracts. Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise (DVBE)s received nearly \$25 million, or 1.6 percent of those contracts.

Advice for Minority and Disadvantaged Contractors

El-Tawansy offers straightforward guidance:

- Know your community's needs.
- Stay connected to the business world.

- Keep networking.
- Use Caltrans as a resource.
- Don't lose sight of longterm goals; no challenge lasts forever.

"It's Not Just About Contracts — It's About Who Gets to Build California's Future"

El-Tawansy said California is entering a historic era in which clean transportation, sustainable mobility, and digital transformation will redefine infrastructure.

And she's determined that small businesses, immigrant-owned firms, minority contractors, and disabled-veteran enterprises will not just participate — they will lead.

"This is about building careers, generational wealth, and a workforce that reflects the California we serve," she said. "Small businesses are essential to building the future of California."



Accessible ramps benefit more than wheelchair users. In this photo, a Sacramentan waits for the signal before pushing his daughter's stroller across Capitol Mall. — Photo Courtesy of Caltrans

Accessible Infrastructure

Caltrans' [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\) Infrastructure Program](#) strives to give every person equal access to travel within California. The program is housed in the Caltrans Office of Civil Rights to protect the Department's most vulnerable users.

Most of California's 50,000-lane-mile transportation system was built more than half a century ago, and many rural highways are historic main streets. Wheelchairs must often navigate newsstands and utility poles on minimal strips of uneven sidewalks between storefronts and cars whizzing by at upwards of 55 miles an hour.

Caltrans owns 56,000 curb ramps and 4,000 miles of sidewalk along state highway right-of-way land. Ensuring that the transportation system complies with the ADA is an ongoing endeavor.

Each year, Caltrans dedicates an average of \$35 million towards improving Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Infrastructure access. Since 2010, Caltrans has spent nearly \$650 million on ADA improvements, providing 7,539 curb ramps and more than 42 miles of ADA-accessible sidewalk. In 2024-25, Caltrans committed nearly \$88 million for the ADA Program, exceeding the \$35 million baseline. These projects installed pedestrian push buttons, sidewalks, and upgraded curb ramps in San Diego, Stanislaus, Riverside, Inyo, Los Angeles, Monterey, and Alameda counties.

In 2025-26, Caltrans plans to spend nearly \$69 million to complete seven ADA improvement projects throughout the state.

The Caltrans ADA Infrastructure Program works with District ADA Program Advisors to develop projects within each district. These advisors also work with Headquarters divisions, including Project Delivery, Construction, and Traffic Operations, to provide policy direction, design guidance, and training that support ADA compliance and improve access for California's disability community.

ADA accessibility is the responsibility of Caltrans as an organization. The ADA Infrastructure Program in the Office of Civil Rights orchestrates Caltrans statewide efforts to ensure persons with disabilities can use California sidewalks and facilities with ease.

The public can notify Caltrans of ADA access barriers at: <https://adapt.dot.ca.gov/grievance/newRequest>.

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2028

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237990 Other Heavy and Civil Engineering Construction
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238910 Site Preparation Contractors
238990 All Other Specialty Trade Contractors

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Scan the QR Code for
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Contacting at Caltrans



To Register, please [click here](#)
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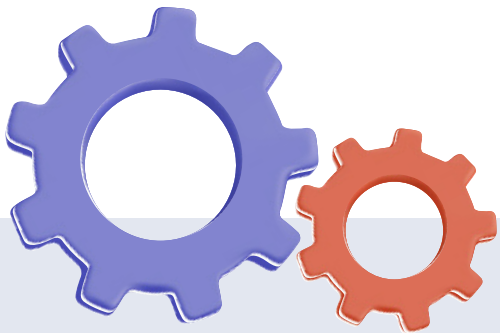


Pull out Facts

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, 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.



Upcoming Contractor Training

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

Register [here](#) for Caltrans' virtual How to do Business with San Diego and Imperial counties District 11 from 10 - 11:30 a.m. July 8.

Register [here](#) for Caltrans' virtual Northern Quarters Small Business update from 12:30 to 12:45 p.m. July 16.

Register [here](#) for Caltrans virtual Small Business Resource training from noon to 1 p.m. July 22.

Also

Caltrans' Small Business Council (SBC) will host its regular meeting virtually and in Santa Ana from 8:30 a.m. to noon, Friday, July 17, 2026. The SBC will meet again virtually and in Sacramento from 8:30 a.m. to noon, Friday,

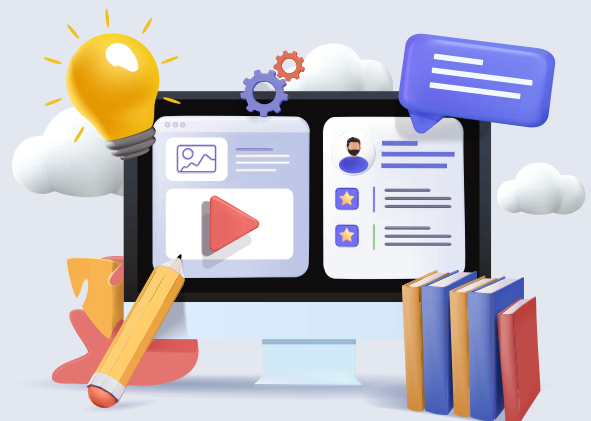
Data

As of May 31, 2026, Caltrans awarded 155 Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)-assisted contracts in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2025–26 totaling \$4.1 billion. The percentage of work committed to Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) firms is currently listed as 0 percent due to the [Interim Final Rule \(IFR\)](#). The program will re-launch, without consideration of race or gender, once Caltrans reevaluates its DBE goals under [49 CFR §26.11](#).

As of March 31, 2026, Caltrans spent nearly \$1.6 billion on state contracts and purchasing for State Fiscal Year 2025-26. Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise (DVBE) s received nearly \$25 million, or 1.6 percent of those contracts. Certified Small Businesses (SB)s received more than \$604 million of that, equaling nearly 38 percent of those contracts, surpassing the 25% state participation goal outlined in [SB1](#) and [AB 2019](#).

September 11, 2026. 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 Alpiba for South Asian Heritage Month, July 18 through August 17, and Bayside Engineering Construction for Hispanic Heritage Month.

July South Asian Heritage Month

"Betting on Herself: Roopa Bansal Builds Alpiba to Support Small Businesses"

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September Hispanic American

"Navigating a Changing Contracting Landscape"

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Caltrans Office of Civil Rights spotlights Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Alpiba owner Roopa Bansal as part of a series showcasing Caltrans' subcontractors' diversity.

Betting on Herself: Roopa Bansal Builds Alpiba to Support Small Businesses

After more than 20 years with global firms including Accenture and Sony, Roopa Bansal made a decision that reshaped her career. She walked away from stability to start over.

Today, Bansal is the founder and CEO of [Alpiba](#), a San Diego-based managed services firm that helps small and mid-sized businesses navigate complex technology with clarity and confidence. She is currently the company's sole employee, managing every aspect of the business from strategy to client service.

Her journey began in Ajmer, India, a vibrant city in India where life is layered with culture, complexity, and constant change. It's where she learned to adapt and solve problems. At 22, she left everything familiar behind and moved alone to the United States to pursue a master's degree at [Fairleigh Dickinson University](#).



Roopa Bansal — Photo by Caltrans District 11 Photography

As she graduated, the job market tightened in the wake of the September 11 attacks. On a student visa and far from home, she faced years of uncertainty. Back home, her father had invested his savings in her education, believing the opportunity would change her life.

"It wasn't just my dream on the line," Bansal said. "It was my family's belief in me."

She persisted, eventually building a successful career in technology and reaching a long-held goal of working at Accenture. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she led teams supporting public sector technology efforts, helping agencies maintain essential services.

Those experiences shaped her view of technology as a tool to support people, not just systems.

Still, challenges remained. In a male-dominated field, Bansal said she often had to prove her value in decision-making spaces. Over time, that experience fueled a new goal.

"I didn't want to keep asking for a seat at the table," she said. "I wanted to build my own."

She launched Alpiba to address what she saw as a gap in the market: small businesses overwhelmed by fragmented technology and limited support. The firm offers services from cybersecurity to long-term IT strategy, with a focus on building relationships and providing clear direction.



Roopa Bansal, founder of Alpiba, said the most meaningful moments are when a frustrated small business owner finds relief after her help. — Photo by Caltrans District 11 Photography

“We don’t just fix problems,” Bansal said. “We sit with our clients, understand their goals, and help them get there.”

Since launching Alpiba full-time in 2026, Bansal has taken on the demands of entrepreneurship, from client development to long hours. She said the most meaningful moments come when she can reduce stress for business owners and help them move forward.

Now a certified Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) and Small Business Enterprise (SBE), she is expanding into

“

“I didn’t want to keep asking for a seat at the table,” she said. “I wanted to build my own.”

— Roopa Bansal

”

public sector work and exploring artificial intelligence solutions tailored for small and mid-sized firms.

Her advice to other entrepreneurs is direct: show up, build relationships, keep learning, and don’t give up.

Her journey reflects a broader truth for small business owners. Success is not linear. It is built through persistence, especially in moments of uncertainty.

Sometimes, she said, the boldest step is deciding to bet on yourself.

For more information about [DBE certification](#), visit the Caltrans Civil Rights Program [webpage](#) or the Department of General Services [Cal eProcure](#) site for [Small Business Certification](#).



Caltrans Office of Civil Rights spotlights Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Bayside Engineering Construction Inc. owner Luis Rivero as part of a series showcasing Caltrans' subcontractors' diversity.

Navigating a Changing Contracting Landscape



Luis Rivero

Bayside Engineering Construction Inc. owner Luis Rivero, a Hispanic small business leader whose path from immigrant student to federal contractor reflects the opportunities and challenges facing Disadvantaged Business Enterprises in California.

Rivero, born in Caracas, Venezuela, moved to Washington with his family in 1980. After

earning an engineering scholarship from the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, he completed bachelor's and master's degrees in civil and environmental engineering at Washington State University.

He later relocated to San Diego, managing projects for the Department of Defense, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Department of Energy before launching Bayside in 2018. The firm is certified as a Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE), Minority Business Enterprise, and is part of the federal SBA 8(a) program.

A Caltrans Business Services Manager helped introduce Bayside to state contracting opportunities, connecting the firm with the Calmentor MentorProtégé Program. Bayside went on to support construction, natural resources, hazardous materials, and abatement projects across several Caltrans districts.

During the COVID19 pandemic, Rivero pivoted his business to nationwide disinfection services, developing health and safety protocols aligned with CDC and OSHA guidance. Bayside completed nearly 200 task orders—many for Caltrans facilities and federal installations—while maintaining a zero incident safety record.

Rivero has also returned to his academic roots: the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, which once awarded him a scholarship, later elected him vice president of corporate affairs for its San Diego chapter.

But even with these successes, Rivero says the landscape for DBEs is shifting.

He notes that Bayside has not yet experienced operational impacts from the ongoing DBE program reevaluation. In fact, Bayside participated as a teaming partner on a Caltrans contract after the new federal rules took effect, leveraging its DBE certification to secure opportunities and build relationships with prime contractors.

Rivero said he believes the expanded definition of eligible economically disadvantaged firms may make it harder for “traditional” DBEs to compete.

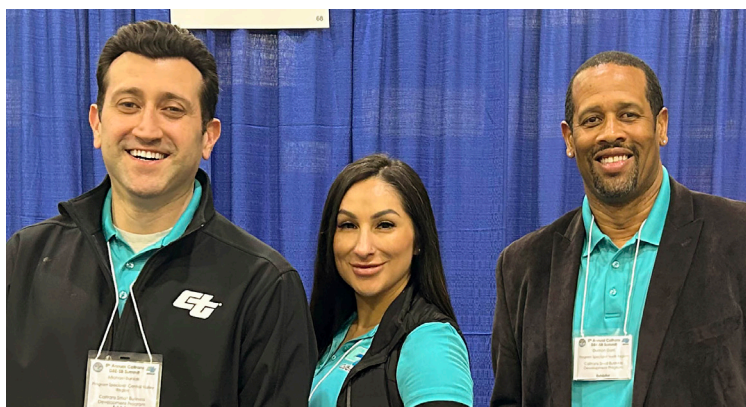
“I understand the inclusion of all types of economically challenged firms,” Rivero said, **“but primes may opt for the new, nontraditional DBEs, because there is still stigma associated with firms owned by various races or genders.”**

Before Bayside, most of Rivero's experience was in federal contracting, where he continues to secure 8(a) competitive and direct award work with agencies such as the Navy, HUD, BLM, and USACE. Today, Caltrans contracts make up about 11 percent of Bayside's revenue—growth he attributes largely to the firm's District 7 oncall contract with Geosyntec.

Rivero said pursuing Caltrans work requires significant time spent on marketing, proposal development, and administrative compliance. But he hopes the experience will help expand Bayside's share of the state transportation market.

“My goal has always been to find ways to keep our crew working and to continue growing,” he said. **“I'm proud of my heritage, and I try to do everything I can to help my community succeed.”**

For more information about [DBE certification](#), visit the Caltrans Civil Rights Program [webpage](#) or the Department of General Services [Cal eProcure](#) site for [Small Business Certification](#).



From left to right, Caltrans Small Business Development Specialists Michael Buniak, Adriana Ring, and Damon Dorn share a smile at the 2026 DBE/SB Summit, where they offered tools, resources, and support to firms pursuing transportation contracts.

Caltrans Specialist Michael Buniak Focuses on Access, Support for Small Businesses



Michael Buniak

Ask Michael Buniak what drives his work, and the answer is simple: helping people navigate complex systems and succeed.

Buniak serves as the Caltrans Office of Civil Rights Central Region Small Business Development Program Specialist, where he supports firms pursuing and performing on transportation contracts. Since joining the department in January 2020, he has focused on making state processes more accessible and ensuring businesses feel supported.

"I want businesses to know they're not in this alone," Buniak said.

Raised in Fairfield, Buniak comes from a Ukrainian and Jewish background. Growing up as one of the few Jewish students in his community, he said the experience shaped his ability to connect with people from different backgrounds—an approach that now defines his work.

Buniak initially pursued film, inspired by Steven Spielberg movies, before earning a degree in business marketing from California State University, Sacramento. While his career path shifted, he said that his creative mindset continues to influence how he approaches challenges and problem-solving.

At Caltrans, Buniak helped establish the Small Business Development Branch, expanding support services for firms statewide. He said the work is meaningful, but acknowledged ongoing challenges in ensuring resources reach businesses quickly.

"We want to see benefits reach businesses effectively and faster," he said.

His boss, Small Business and Workforce Development Center Chief Marjani Rollins, describes Buniak as 'solid'.

"He's thorough, he cares about the work, and he leads with a strong sense of integrity," she said. "He's been a big part of building this branch, and he connects with people in a way that makes them feel supported and understood."

Buniak said his approach centers on customer service, building relationships, and helping firms navigate requirements with greater confidence. He encourages small businesses to take advantage of available resources and stay engaged throughout the process.

Buniak credits his father, a longtime businessman, with teaching him how to build relationships and understand customer needs. Today, he said his two young daughters motivate his work and decision-making. "I want them to look back on any decision I make and be proud of their dad," he said. "I want to be their ultimate hero."

Looking ahead, Buniak aims to expand equitable opportunities for small businesses and improve systems that create barriers to participation. He said progress depends on both effective policies and consistent, relationship-driven support.

Outside of work, Buniak said listening to music, cooking, traveling, and playing guitar keeps him grounded.

Through his work, Buniak continues to combine empathy, creativity, and practical guidance to help small businesses move forward with confidence.

Lived Experience, Lasting Impact: The Story of Adriana Ring



Adriana Ring

Adriana Ring brings a lived understanding of resilience, hard work, and community to the firms she supports as the Caltrans Office of Civil Rights Southern California Small Business Development Program Specialist.

Born in Santa Ana and raised in Sacramento, Ring is a first-generation Mexican

American whose upbringing was grounded in sacrifice and determination. Her parents, both from Mexico, worked multiple jobs throughout her childhood, setting an example that continues to guide her approach to challenges.

"We didn't have much, but we had a strong sense of family and perseverance," Ring said. "Hard work wasn't optional—it was part of life."

Ring was the first in her extended family to earn a bachelor's degree, a milestone she describes as both a personal achievement and a reflection of her family's sacrifices.

"My early experiences taught me to stay grounded, remain grateful, and carry forward the work ethic my parents instilled in me," she said.

Ring initially planned to become a teacher but later shifted to business, a decision that opened the door to broader opportunities and ultimately led her to small business development work.

Ring entered state service in 2014 and joined the Caltrans Office of Civil Rights in 2023, seeking work that aligned with her values.

"I've always wanted to make a meaningful difference," she said. "As a minority myself, I felt connected to the mission—helping create access and opportunity for others."

A defining influence was her experience as a former woman-owned small business owner. For nearly a decade, Ring operated a meal prep business in Sacramento, delivering healthy, locally sourced meals throughout the region. The demands of running a business—managing operations, serving customers, adapting to uncertainty—gave her firsthand insight into the barriers many entrepreneurs face.

"It taught me resilience, adaptability, and what it really takes to sustain a business," she said. "That experience helps me support others with empathy and understanding."

In her current role, Ring works with businesses that often have the skills to succeed, but face barriers in navigating procurement processes, certifications, and contracting requirements. She connects them to resources, provides technical assistance, and helps them prepare to compete.

"A lot of businesses want the opportunity," Ring said. "The key is being ready for it—understanding the process, knowing your capacity and continuing to improve over time."

Ring is proud of her role in strengthening outreach and support efforts that help small and disadvantaged businesses better understand requirements and access Caltrans opportunities. She said the most rewarding part of her work is seeing firms gain confidence and make measurable progress.

Ring's dedication has not gone unnoticed by leadership. Small Business and Workforce Development Center Chief Marjani Rollins said Ring has become an essential part of the branch's growth and success.

"Adriana is sharp, quick, and reliable," Rollins said. "She's someone you can count on to get things done, and she's played a key role in helping build this branch. She connects with people in a way that feels real, and that goes a long way."

Rollins' perspective reflects what many partners and colleagues have observed—Ring's combination of lived experience, technical knowledge, and genuine connection with people strengthens the support Caltrans provides to small and disadvantaged businesses.

Looking ahead, Ring hopes to improve how information and resources are delivered to small businesses by making systems more streamlined and accessible.

"The more clearly we can lay out the path, the more businesses we can help succeed," she said.

As California continues to invest in infrastructure, Ring's work helps ensure those opportunities are accessible to a broader range of businesses, strengthening both the workforce and the communities they serve.

Caltrans Civil Rights Specialist Damon Dorn Finds Purpose in Supporting Small Businesses



Damon Dorn

For Damon Dorn, helping disadvantaged businesses gain a foothold in California's transportation industry isn't just part of the job—it's the work he says he was meant to do.

Dorn serves as the Caltrans Office of Civil Rights Northern California Small Business Development Specialist. Born and raised in Sacramento, he credits his self-employed

father for shaping his work ethic and sense of responsibility. Summers spent helping at his father's shop reinforced those early lessons.

"My father taught my eight siblings and me the value of hard work and believing in yourself," he said.

Before joining state service, Dorn worked as a Class A truck driver in the late 1990s. As he started a family, he realized life on the road was not sustainable. Encouraged by his mother, a longtime Employment Development Department employee, he pursued a state career.

In 2000, Dorn joined Caltrans District 4 in Oakland as an Office Assistant, later transferring to headquarters in Sacramento—an experience that set the stage for his long-term career growth.

From 2007 to 2011, he served as a Training Officer in the Equal Employment Opportunity Program. During that time, he became interested in small business programs and successfully applied for a role as a Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Certification Analyst.

The transition, he said, was transformative.

"My first supervisor, Sanjay Singh—who is now our Assistant Deputy Director—made sure we understood the DBE regulations inside and out," Dorn said. "Working in the DBE Program has been a learning experience from day one."

Fifteen years later, Dorn describes the program as the most meaningful work of his career. What he values most is watching firms thrive after certification.

"The DBE Program has changed the lives of so many small business owners," he said.

His boss, Small Business and Workforce Development Center Chief Marjani Rollins, said she appreciates Dorn's knowledge and initiative.

"Damon came in with strong DBE program knowledge and a deep outreach background," she said. "Even being newer to the team, he stepped up and took on a lead role in our DBE reevaluation support services. He knows how to connect with people and meet them where they are, which is important in this work."

Dorn often encourages subcontractors to prepare thoroughly before seeking work with prime contractors.

"It's not enough to ask for an opportunity," he said. "You need to show prime contractors that partnering with you is to their advantage. References and verifiable experience speak louder than requests."

One challenge Dorn continues to see is the lack of public awareness about government funded small business programs. "There are so many opportunities out there, but people can't take advantage of them if they don't know they exist," he said. "When I first became a Certification Analyst, I told my manager that we should have television commercials about the DBE Program. Here we are in 2026, and I still feel the same way."

Reflecting on the twists and turns of his career, Dorn acknowledges the serendipity of ending up in the small business development branch of the Office of Civil Rights. Had he known in 1997 what opportunities the DBE Program offered, he believes he might have pursued business ownership rather than state service.

"I probably would have bought a truck and started my own logistics company," he said with a laugh. "But I'm grateful for the path I took. Every DBE success story and every person I've met along the way has meant something. It's funny how life works out."

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 CaltransBizSupport@dot.ca.gov
- To enroll in Caltrans' free Business Development Program (BDP) fill out the [BDP Enrollment Interest Form](#).
- To help the Small Business Development Branch (SBDB) better assist, firms may fill out the [Small Business Development Branch Service Request Form](#). Once the SBDB receives the submission, a team member will respond to the inquiry within 48 hours.
- To receive notifications for upcoming events, training workshops, quick tips, and contract opportunities, opt into the [mass notification system here](#).
- The [DBE Reevaluation page](#) provides resources and tools for firms seeking DBE reevaluation and certification.
- 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](#).
- [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.

Additional External Resources

Disclaimer: The organizations and programs listed below are not Caltrans resources. They are independent, external entities provided solely for informational purposes. Inclusion does not constitute endorsement by Caltrans.

- [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.