

Organization Name: Tampa-Hillsborough Expressway Authority (THEA)

Project or Program Name: (no official name)

Goal that best reflects your Project or Program's achievements: Provides professional growth or leadership opportunities for People of Color through our policies, projects, hiring practices, or actions

Launch date for the Project or Program

8/1/2007

How many months of proven experience is this submission based upon?

155 months.

Is this Project or Program complete? If no, when will it be completed?

No. This program is ongoing and part of the core values of the Tampa-Hillsborough Expressway Authority.

Briefly describe the Project or Program

The Tampa-Hillsborough Expressway Authority (THEA) lives and breathes its core values, including its emphasis on people from serving its diverse customer base to attracting, developing, and nurturing diverse talent within the organization and supporting the diversity of employee skills and strengths. THEA's other core values of community focus, regional leadership, and efficiency complement this objective by: ensuring the money and investment earned from toll assets goes back into the communities it serves; being a leader in advancing mobility in the region and implementing innovative and practical solutions to transportation challenges; and proactively solving issues, pursuing opportunities, and embracing innovation as a versatile and agile organization. THEA's other core values of safety and service, economic development, and being a local resource uphold opportunities for People of Color by: being a collaborative partner and provider of safe, reliable, and financially sustainable transportation services to its customers and community; supporting economic development in the Tampa Bay region through its services and products; and engaging partners and stakeholders with THEA's unique, diverse perspective and expertise. From this solid foundation, THEA makes significant contributions to advance racial justice, equity, inclusion and meaningful opportunities in society on an ongoing basis. Of special note, THEA has provided professional growth and leadership opportunities for all of its staff. It takes bold, steady leadership and a spirit of continuous improvement to solve significant mobility problems. By fostering creativity and confidence, every THEA employee and external collaborator is focused on tapping into innovation and inclusiveness to bring roadway infrastructure projects online sooner and leading the charge to create viable, state-of-the-art transportation options on a local and national level. With its mission, vision, and goals, THEA has the ability to impact and shape local and regional mobility like never before.

What objective(s) was the Project or Program designed to accomplish?

THEA's focus on its top core value of people is demonstrated through the objectives of providing professional growth and leadership opportunities to all and especially People of Color through its policies, hiring practices, projects, and actions. THEA also upholds this people-first objective with its goals of serving a diverse customer base and attracting, developing, and nurturing diverse talent within the organization, and supporting the diversity of employee skills and strengths. THEA policies include Title VI/Nondiscrimination Programs to ensure THEA and its sub-recipients prevent discrimination and ensure nondiscrimination in all programs and activities, whether those programs and activities are federally or non-

federally funded. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin in programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance. Presidential Executive Order 12898 addresses environmental justice in minority and low-income populations. Presidential Executive Order 13166 addresses services to those individuals with limited English proficiency. The rights of women, the elderly and the disabled are protected under related authorities. These Presidential Executive Orders and the related authorities fall under the umbrella of Title VI. THEA's Title VI Program is responsible for providing leadership, direction and policy to ensure compliance with Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and related authorities. THEA is proud of its longstanding policy to ensure that social impacts to communities and people are recognized early and continually throughout the transportation decision-making process. It is the policy of the THEA, under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; Age Discrimination Act of 1975; Section 324 of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1973; Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987; and related statutes and regulations, that no person in the United States shall, on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability/handicap, or income status, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination or retaliation under any federally or non-federally funded program or activity administered by the THEA or its sub-recipients. To comply with this policy, THEA as well as the THEA's sub-recipients, are responsible for making a good faith effort to ensure that this policy is carried out in their respective program areas. The authority to develop, maintain, implement, and monitor this policy is delegated to THEA's Administrative Services Manager. The mission of THEA is to provide effective quality service at a reasonable cost with courtesy, integrity and accountability in a manner that protects and enhances the quality of life of our diverse population.

How did the Project or Program accomplish the stated objectives?

Through the core value of people, THEA accomplished the stated objectives by:

- Attracting, developing, and nurturing talent within the organization by empowering individuals to create meaningful change in society that advances racial justice, equity, and inclusion; THEA's Contracts and Procurement Manager Man Le saw a void in opportunities for Asian Americans in Tampa Bay for professional networking, leadership development and community service that was uniquely tailored to Asian Americans. Mr. Le seized this opportunity to create the Tampa Bay Chapter of the National Association for Asian American Professionals (NAAAP). NAAAP is the premier leadership organization for Asian professionals and upholds the values of leadership, education, accountability, and diversity. THEA has been supportive in giving the organization a "home base" and providing space for regular meetings for more than three years. NAAAP Tampa (NAAAP TPA) is also broadening its reach and connecting with other associations and chambers to provide a united front for collaboration, education, and support that is inclusive of culture and diversity. The Asian American population has been growing in the Sunshine State, including the Greater Tampa area. NAAAP TPA is proud to be a representative for this diverse group of Americans in the area. NAAAP TPA is an all-volunteer, Pan-Asian American professional nonprofit organization that promotes the career advancement and leadership development of Asian American professionals in all fields through networking, promoting Asian multiculturalism, and supporting diversity and community service. Over the last three years, the NAAAP TPA has continued to grow and includes people from all different arenas of employment and of various Asian American cultural heritage. More than 16 countries are represented by its group members. Members are focused on the mission to cultivate and empower leaders for professional excellence, connect accomplished professionals for mutual success, engage and participate with the community-at-large, and inspire leaders to make a meaningful difference in government, education, business, and society. THEA has supported this by allowing NAAAP TPA free meeting space, sponsoring employees to attend the yearlong Leadership Tampa Bay, including Mr. Le who was a Leadership Tampa Class of 2017, to increase the prosperity and vitality of the Tampa Bay region by giving individuals access to businesses and community leaders to enhance the knowledge of regional assets

and issues, as well as to delve into issues facing our region and explore ways to bridge differences.

- Supporting the diversity of employee skills and strengths, as well as with vendor and contractor relations, by creating and maintaining programs and policies that provide opportunities to People of Color and disadvantaged populations; for example, THEA's Small Business Enterprise (SBE) policy, including disadvantaged businesses (DBE), and minority and women-owned businesses (MWBE), provides mechanisms to enhance procurement contracting opportunities in all its projects; Mr. Le serves as THEA's Contracts & Procurement Manager as well as its SBE Liaison, and has developed and implemented an active SBE outreach plan to increase SBE participation and has personally successfully negotiated and managed more than \$365 million in construction, engineering and professional services during his time with THEA.

- THEA Executive Director/CEO Joseph Waggoner helped co-found the Conference of Minority Transportation Officials (COMTO) Central Florida Chapter to provide a forum for minority professionals in the transportation industry. COMTO is the leading national advocate for employment diversity, inclusion and contracting opportunities in the multi-modal, multibillion-dollar transportation industry. In recognition of difficulties encountered by SBE, DBE, and MWBE businesses in the transportation construction contracting industry, THEA has a policy to provide mechanisms to enhance procurement contracting opportunities in all its projects.

- As part of the Minority Enterprise Development Corporation, Mr. Le is a member of the group's Executive Board of Directors, currently serving as secretary. With his leadership and THEA support, the Minority Enterprise Development Corporation brings together diverse businesses to provide opportunities to grow personally and professionally.

- In addition, THEA supports and collaborates with the National Association of Black Women in Construction (NABWIC) for their events to increase the national awareness of African American women in the construction industry. Support also includes helping members maintain awareness of industry developments, improve skills and knowledge, and make a contribution to other women in the construction industry.

- With the development of pocket parks and beautifying underpasses, THEA has collaborated with diverse, minority artists to create site-specific art, including sculptures and murals, that recognize and honor the diversity of Tampa's different neighborhoods and communities.

What were the successful, demonstrable results of the Project or Program that positively affected the customer, agency and/or the community?

By focusing on the core value of people, THEA achieved the following successful, demonstrable results of its commitment to providing professional growth or leadership opportunities for People of Color:

- NAAAP TPA has continued to grow and includes people from all different arenas of employment and of various Asian American cultural heritage. More than 16 countries are represented in the group, and they have successfully cultivated and empowered leaders for professional excellence, connected accomplished professionals for mutual success, engaged and participated with the community-at-large, and inspired leaders to make a meaningful difference in government, education, business, and society. For example, their regular meetings have been an opportunity for people relocating to Tampa Bay to meet other Asian Americans and make the transfer to a new community less difficult. One new member is moving from Cincinnati for a job opportunity in Tampa and is looking forward to having a networking space that can

connect him to people living in his new town. The group also recently held a hiring mixer connecting the latest Asian American college graduates with employers seeking well-rounded, qualified, and diverse staff. Companies at this event included Amazon, Target, Tampa Electric Company, Tampa General Hospital, WellCare Health Plans, and other employers. Already there has been a return on investment for this event, with one candidate being hired by their employer of choice and one student attending the University of South Florida who landed an internship with a CPA firm.

- NAAAP TPA's membership currently encompasses 16 diverse Asian cultures, languages and heritage. The available language bank is a resource that has been offered to the City of Tampa, the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office (HCSO), and the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office (PCSO) as needed. With Mr. Le's leadership and THEA's support, the City of Tampa and the HCSO are in the process of starting an Asian American & Pacific Islander (AAPI) advisory committee for the first time. This has given a voice and a platform for Asian Americans, especially in light of all the attacks perpetrated recently across the United States. Mr. Le has been interviewed by local media on these national incidents and demonstrates the sense of community and purpose that all at THEA rally around to advance racial justice.

- Another outcome of these collaborative efforts is that NAAAP TPA collaborated with local Tampa community leaders, including the Mayor of Tampa, resulting in the City of Tampa officially recognizing and celebrating AAPI Heritage month in 2021 for the first time in the City of Tampa's history. As a refugee, Mr. Le knows directly how growth and leadership can be nurtured or stifled. He, THEA, and now the City of Tampa rally around his model of excellence, "My shape and view of the world is I choose to see the best of people, the best of Tampa Bay, and the best of America."

<https://www.wfla.com/news/for-the-culture/tampa-bay-celebrates-aapi-heritage-month-house-passes-anti-asian-hate-bill/> and <https://twitter.com/cityoftampa/status/1398021849083256833>

- With a vision of developing and inspiring future leaders, NAAAP TPA gives a voice to Asian Americans. NAAAP TPA member Barbara Poon is a software developer at Nielsen Communications and has stepped into a leadership role at NAAAP TPA by using her IT skills to manage their meetings. These leadership roles help to build effective leaders outside of the organization and benefit the community at large.

- THEA has been closely involved as an active member and sponsor of COMTO to eliminate barriers to industry participation for minority individuals, veterans, people with disabilities and certified MWBE businesses through leadership training, professional development, partnership building, networking opportunities, and more.

- Collaboration with the Minority Enterprise Development Corporation involves supporting minority business leaders through numerous initiatives and events, seminars and workshops, lunch and learns, and business matchmaking events.

- Collaboration with the National Association of Black Women in Construction (NABWIC) involves providing a forum for its members to network, strategize, and exchange information, ideas and solutions on a local, regional and national level.

- THEA partners with community organizations on everything from beautification to economic development to education and is committed to enhancing the community and activating urban spaces. From sculptures to murals and other public art, these efforts employ and celebrate Tampa's diverse citizenry and remind us that we can do all things as a city when we work together. Taking into consideration the personality of Tampa, the art transforms the spirit of the city into an iconic statement that reflects a universal human experience.

Is your Project or Program relevant and applicable to the overall toll industry? If so, how?

Yes, this program is applicable to the overall toll industry as people are vital to the creation and usage of toll roads. From focusing on the needs of the diverse people that THEA serves as well as attracting, developing, and nurturing diverse talent within the organization and supporting the diversity of employee skills and strengths, daily operations and progressive solutions to transportation issues are better when they are built from a diverse set of individuals.

As the industry matures and innovates, THEA is contributing to the conversation and helping with best practices by listening to the communities it serves and people it hires to address inequities caused by racial and social injustice. With THEA's projects, actions, policies, and hiring practices, the organization's working model implements programs and practices that uphold racial and social justice in the community and inspire others in the toll industry.

- From giving a voice to People of Color to empowering them to create organizations and have a safe space for dialogue, THEA's programs, activities, and collaboration can be replicated to create more inclusion and partnerships throughout the toll industry. Employment equity and business supplier diversity are worthwhile actions that take daily stewarding, and it is THEA's honor to reflect its community and increase the progress that can be made when underserved populations are given a seat at the table.

- From professional growth and leadership opportunities to THEA's actions, the toll industry can benefit from THEA's model to standardize industry practices to provide best-in-class hiring, retention, and customer outreach programs. THEA's collaborative model helps to build a future based on forums to discuss and invest in ideas from diverse groups, flexibility to stay open to emerging needs, and preparing and investing in the people that work behind the scenes to provide outstanding transportation solutions.

- From daily advocacy, thought leadership and extending opportunities to People of Color internally and externally, state-of-the-art, user-based transportation solutions can address the critical infrastructure challenges of the 21st century in better and deeper ways. With the growth and adoption of THEA's diversity practices, the toll industry can improve relationships, mobility, and safety for all. THEA partners with diverse community organizations and business associations on everything from beautification to economic development to education and is committed to enhancing the community and activating urban spaces. From revenues collected on THEA's tollways, money gets reinvested back into its diverse community, and inspires residents and visitors. With regional growth increasing due to Florida's economic climate and great weather, THEA has been recognized for its collaborative efforts to uphold opportunities for People of Color with the City of Tampa, Hillsborough County, neighborhood and business groups, and organizations in the transportation vanguard. Diversity is key to the toll industry's success, and THEA's efforts have deepened and expanded to meet the needs of the area's explosive growth demands. The toll industry can only benefit from making significant contributions to advance racial justice, equity, inclusion and meaningful opportunities in society like THEA has demonstrated for many years.

How did this Project or Program achieve or demonstrate excellence?

By providing opportunities for People of Color from THEA's internal talent to its diverse customer base, the ongoing program of upholding its core value of people demonstrates excellence by:

- providing progressive solutions to help employees create diversity groups, have a safe space to meet, and develop business associations that lift up minority professionals in the transportation industry

- focusing on its customers and providing more access to the AAPI community; according to the Pew

Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau population estimates as well as the Bureau of Economic and Business Research at the University of Florida, the AAPI community is the fastest-growing racial group in Florida, grew by 122.5% between 2000 and 2019, and is projected to almost double by the year 2060; with more than 1 million AAPI individuals residing in Hillsborough County according to Census data with more than 25 minutes of commute time to work, and a large percentage soon to enter the workforce and driving, outreach remains an acute need in Asian American communities; by providing a home base for NAAAP TPA, THEA helps to provide critical communication and news for both the professional and personal aspects of this community

- creating outstanding policies that enhance procurement contracting opportunities for all projects for SBE, DBE, and MWBE businesses that exponentially help People of Color and their businesses to succeed professionally and financially; through networking and involvement with the Tampa Bay business community, THEA has for the past six consecutive years increased its contracting expenditures with SBE, DBE, and MWBE businesses from \$2 million to over \$38 million at the present time
- setting the example for toll agencies and government organizations to role model diversity in action, from providing professional growth and leadership opportunities in the community and industry to finding creative ways and resources to raise the bar of excellence for agency policies, projects, hiring practices, and actions
- encouraging internal talent to give and become their best, not anyone else's version of best, and empowering talent to share and develop their unique qualities that will benefit both the team, industry and community
- being solution-oriented in every situation, doing what is needed to make decisions even under tough circumstances, and aligning diverse viewpoints with a common goal that advances racial justice, equity, inclusion and meaningful opportunities
- achieving high performance internally as THEA develops colleagues with the result of inspiring, investing in, mentoring, and helping them get access to opportunities, and externally to help connect communities to resources and their daily goals faster and more efficiently
- committing to outreach to ensure THEA is listening to internal and external needs, and being able to pivot to create a win-win for all that is built on mutual respect, fairness, and objectivity
- carrying out every action with integrity and creating a culture that exceeds expectations to champion underserved people, promote diverse partnerships and collaborations, and implement forward-thinking approaches
- showing up and persevering despite challenges to attain higher levels of self-mastery, creating a culture that helps to move visions forward, and evoking others to do the same to make the workplace, toll industry, and community better and more inclusive
- giving back both internally and externally to show how people are truly valued, increasing confidence in public agencies, and advancing opportunities for growth and increased quality service

Describe any innovative aspects of your Project or Program

Upholding People of Color through THEA's policies, hiring practices, projects, and actions has resulted in the following innovative aspects of its program:

- Most organizations take their internal talent and customers for granted. In contrast, THEA has implemented internal policies that raise the bar to give access to training, networking, and professional growth and leadership opportunities. THEA has regular conversations, touchpoints, and evaluations to ensure talent goals are being nurtured and that its projects and actions tap into the creative energy of its employees to surface and execute the best ideas. Supporting the diversity of employee skills and strengths helps to create innovation internally and spur original and creative thinking for its customer base. For example, investing in Mr. Le and the AAPI community empowered him to develop and implement an active SBE outreach plan to increase SBE participation and created a pathway for him to successfully negotiate and manage multimillion-dollar contracts during his time with THEA - opportunities that would not have occurred if a culture of innovation and inclusion were not present.

- THEA has been able to improve how roads and bridges are built with its commitment to community outreach. With innovation that introduces new ways to incorporate community outreach - from creating and having a Construction Engineering Inspection and Public Involvement Team visit local businesses that are within the agency's footprint, contests that engage the public to vote on design ideas for roads and bridges, to developing marketing campaigns that help businesses and organizations thrive throughout construction and afterward - THEA is on the forefront of original and creative thinking that advances equity, inclusion, and opportunities in society.

- By including SBE businesses in contracting opportunities, THEA has been able to introduce new methods of construction, maintenance, and business processes. These methods have helped cut costs and build times, drive efficiency and sustainability, and create increased revenues. Design thinking drives everything and with a focus on inclusion helps THEA get ahead of potential disruptors and changing consumer demands as the population grows.

- Since September 2015, THEA has been working with the United States Department of Transportation as a Connected Vehicle (CV) Pilot site. As it works with auto industry manufacturers from Honda R&D Americas, Hyundai America Technical Center, and Toyota Motor North America to deploy vehicles with connected vehicle technology already installed, each of these original equipment manufacturers (OEM) have selected DENSO, a leading mobility supplier with over 15 years of vehicle-to-everything (V2X) experience, as its onboard unit provider. DENSO is committed to advancing diversity and inclusion, a principle that brings unique perspectives together, bolsters innovation, and pushes all agencies and businesses forward. This collaboration is among the first of its kind where multiple OEMs are coming together in an existing CV deployment. The OEM vehicles will not only interact with one another but also the existing CV Pilot participants. Building on the CV Pilot apps, DENSO will develop a common set of CV apps for the OEMs, enabling the rapid communication between vehicles and surrounding infrastructure, and directly creating more access and inclusion for People of Color. This is an important step in continuing the testing of transportation safety applications to provide drivers with the best information possible. THEA's CV Pilot applications have proven that information from connected infrastructure can benefit drivers, automakers, and road operators as a means to transmit crucial safety information. In the past 18 months, the THEA CV Pilot has warned 14 wrong-way drivers on interchange ramps, nine potential trolley crashes, and has given over 1,500-speed advisories a month on freeway exit ramps.

- From business and industry model innovation to raise funds for projects from toll revenues versus taxpayer dollars, to product innovation with first-of-its-kind building and maintenance techniques, to process innovation to lessen the disruption to the traveling public when building, to organizational innovation that promotes equity when dealing with external vendors and contractors, THEA hits all the innovation marks. For example, with THEA's new Selmon West Extension it was able to build this bridge within a few years, whereas the FDOT did not succeed for 25 years with a community solution. By being flexible, agile, and inclusive, THEA was able to launch this new bridge and is now attracting even more

customers and increasing their return on investment. This helps THEA to remain relevant, unique, yield significant results, and keep its promises to always view opportunities and challenges from diverse perspectives.

List individuals worthy of special recognition for this Project or Program

Man Le, THEA Contracts and Procurement Manager, deserves special recognition for his tireless efforts and commitment to expanding opportunities for People of Color. From his colleagues to external contacts and beyond, Mr. Le exudes equity and inclusion. "Man Le is an incredibly intelligent, creative powerhouse that creates success and high-level results," noted a colleague on LinkedIn. "He is a diligent manager and boss that enables his employees to reach goals and deadlines. He develops a professionalism within everyone he manages and taps into people's strengths and talents. He is a successful individual that has always brought value, pride, and a level of class and priority to the workplace." Local media have also featured him as one of the six Asian-American leaders you should know in the Tampa Bay Area.

<https://www.83degreesmedia.com/features/Tampa-Bay-local-Asian-American-leaders-speak-out-against-hate-051121.aspx>

In addition, THEA Executive Director/CEO Joseph Waggoner should be praised for his exemplary service and dedication to minority professionals in the transportation industry. After 14 years of service to THEA and the community, Mr. Waggoner is retiring in February 2022. In the media alert announcing his retirement it is noted that, "Waggoner has built a legacy of organizational leadership, fiscal acumen, and innovation throughout his distinguished career...Joe has been an incredible steward at THEA and a community leader. Under Waggoner's leadership, THEA gained financial independence, expanded its jurisdictional service area, restructured its debt, and was able to produce its first-ever 10-year work program with just over a billion dollars worth of projects in the program...Waggoner has been a community champion, known for his progressive solutions to transportation issues, and a critical leader in promoting partnerships for multi-modal transportation, transit-oriented development, and walkable neighborhoods." With his vision and support, THEA has accelerated diversity in the workplace and the industry, as well as innovated and improved mobility and safety for all throughout the Tampa Bay region.