

AAR Testing: A thriving partnership

AAR Testing specializes in inspection, construction materials testing and quality management. Owners Teajalam “TJ” Gounden and Chris Christensen bought the company two years ago. Shortly after, in July 2019, the prime contractor on the SR 520 Montlake Project, Graham, hired their small company to work on the big highway project.

“Now they have grown our role to do inspection and materials documentation as well as the quality assurance testing,” Gounden said.

Working with Graham has been a boon to the company, according to Christensen. “We have doubled our number of employees. It strengthened our resumé so we can qualify for other WSDOT projects. It also allowed us to have the revenue to start a small office in Wenatchee, where we want to concentrate on government projects as well.”

Hiring staff, though, has been challenging. Each time project responsibilities increased, the two owners had to quickly find the right staff to meet the company’s growing demands. Recommendations from current staff have been key to finding new talent. “They’re excited to tell people about our company and how much they enjoy the work that we do, so they referred qualified friends,” Christensen said.

If firms want to work on big government projects, AAR Testing’s owners recommend hiring good people with the appropriate training and certifications. “And go to outreach events that design-build contractors hold and get your name to them,” Gounden said. “Then follow up with emails and phone calls. Those ‘meet and greets’ are great, but if you don’t follow up, they often don’t turn into anything.”

“You have to get the big primes that hire people like us to have confidence in you,” Christensen advises. “That is the biggest thing we have noticed. Graham has been a great start for us and helped us to grow. We went to an outreach event and stayed in touch, and they gave us an opportunity.”



AAR Testing owners Chris Christensen (left) and Teajalam “TJ” Gounden (right). Contact: chris@aatesting.com, tgounden@aatesting.com, 425-750-6953.

Reporting progress by the numbers

Diversity/ Apprenticeship / Training

Shaded projects are physically complete.

Individual companies certify on multiple TYPEs (M, S, V, W) and are calculated based on contract goals / expectations, these areas are stacked.

Data below is provided to WSDOT by its project contractors. Percentages and dollars are based on amounts paid to date.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT AND ENGINEERING (PGM & E)									
DBE	Disadvantage Business Enterprise (DBE)	Percentage		Companies			Data Date	Duration	
		Goal	Achieved	#	Applied (\$)	Paid (\$)			
		Corridor Development	N/A	8.05%	2	\$15,112,456	\$15,112,456	6/30/2014	Feb. 2009 – June 2014 (N/A – No Goal)
	SR 520 Program	9%	16.12%	8	\$8,341,036	\$8,341,036	6/30/2017	June 2014 – Dec 2016 (9% is a voluntary goal)	
	Completed Agreements	8%	9.79%	8	\$23,453,492	\$23,453,492	6/30/2017	Feb. 2009 – Dec 2016	
	DBE Program Subtotal ¹		9.79%	8	\$23,453,492	\$23,453,492			

MSVWBE	Minority, Small, Veteran, Women Business Enterprise (MSVWBE)	Percentage		Companies			Data Date			
		Goal	Achieved	#	Stacked (\$)	Paid (\$)				
		SR 520 Program Agreement	TYPE	M 10%	8.98%	9	\$9,277,642	\$9,277,642	6/30/2021	March 2016 - Present
S 5%	26.91%			23	\$27,805,378	\$8,568,097				
V 5%	0.02%			2	\$22,286	\$3,147				
W 6%	14.55%			8	\$15,031,979	\$9,956,492				
Agmt	50.47%			42	\$52,137,285	\$27,805,378				
	MSVWBE Program Subtotal ²		26.91%	50.47%	23					

PGM & E TOTAL ¹		26	\$51,258,870
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CONSTRUCTION											
DBE	DBE	Percentage		Companies			Data Date	Apprentice		Training Hours ³	
		Goal	Achieved	#	Applied (\$)	Paid (\$)		Hours % (Goal)	Data Date	Goal	Achieved
		Pontoon Construction	6%	6.05%	20	\$27,182,102	\$27,182,102	12/1/2015	17.7%		50,000
	Eastside Transit and HOV	11%	12.18%	36	\$44,161,134	\$44,161,134	6/1/2015	13.7%	8/15/2016	58,500	38,655 *
	West Connection Bridge	3%	3.83%	5	\$848,460	\$848,460	11/1/2014	18.8%	10/1/2014	1,200	1,200
	Floating Bridge and Landings	7%	7.83%	46	\$59,993,946	\$59,993,946	9/30/2017	21.4%	10/31/2017	74,600	113,931
	West Approach Bridge North	12%	14.62%	17	\$29,177,122	\$29,177,122		20.0%	5/26/2018	15,000	28,051
	Completed Projects ⁴	8%	8.97%	77	\$161,362,764	\$161,362,764	2/5/2019	18.6% (15% Goal)	5/26/2018	199,300	237,597
	DBE Program Subtotal ¹		8.97%	77	\$161,362,764	\$161,362,764		18.6%		199,300	237,597

MSVWBE	MSVWBE	Percentage		Companies			Data Date	Apprentice		Training Hours ³		
		Goal	Achieved	#	Stacked (\$)	Paid (\$)		Hours % (Goal)	Data Date	Goal	Achieved	
		Completed Projects ⁵	Varies	32.12% 50.88%	9		\$3,623,870		15.6% (15% Goal)	11/30/2018	NOT REQUIRED	
	Montlake Project (currently in construction)	TYPE	M 10%	2.05%	17	\$9,340,678	\$9,340,678	7/6/2021	15.4% (20% Goal)	7/6/2021	NOT REQUIRED	
S 5%			4.17%	42	\$18,968,282	\$3,682,854						
V 5%			0.12%	4	\$551,500	\$472,213						
W 6%			1.35%	12	\$6,165,015	\$5,695,955						
Project			7.69%	75	\$35,025,476	\$19,191,700						
	MSVWBE Program Subtotal ²		4.89%	8.74%	50							

CONSTRUCTION TOTAL ¹		113	\$184,178,335
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SR 520 PROGRAM TOTAL ¹		137	\$235,437,205
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¹ For DBE Program Subtotal, PGM & E TOTAL, CONSTRUCTION TOTAL (two firms worked in both PGM & E and CONSTRUCTION), and SR 520 PROGRAM TOTAL; the calculation for these are based on each individual company on the SR 520 Program.

² Individual companies certify on multiple TYPEs (M, S, V, W) and to eliminate duplication, the 'MSVWBE Program Subtotal' only calculates the overall %, total # of Companies', and total 'Paid (\$)' to Companies' to date based on each individual company and total paid on the SR 520 Program (exception - highlighted cell is stacked %).

³ Once Training Goals are achieved, they are no longer tracked or reported.

⁴ Completed federally funded construction projects to date: Pontoons, Eastside, West Connection Bridge, Floating Bridge and Landings, West Approach Bridge North. Total percentage DBE achieved ranged from 3.83% - 14.62%, totaling 8.97% overall. Total percentage Apprentice achieved ranged from 13.7% - 21.4%, totaling 18.6% overall.

⁵ Completed state funded construction projects to date: Grass Creek, Evans Creek, Union Bay Natural Area, Truck Aprons, Eastside Culvert Repair Project. Total percentage MSVWBE achieved ranged from 0.00% - 64.74%, totaling 32.14% overall. Total percentage Apprentice achieved ranged from 12.0% - 24.1%, totaling 15.6% overall.

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