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On-Site UC Consultants Ease Workload

By Randy Sanborn * Assistant Director/Senior Project Manager * Vinnie LaVallette * Assistant Director/Senior Utility Coordinator * TBE Group

With our nation's infrastructure aging and deteriorating, state Departments of Transportation (DOTs) are feeling the burden of an increasing workload, and their district office staffs, including utility coordinators, are being stretched very thin. Some districts have taken a creative approach to finding a staffing solution in order to effectively meet their community's transportation and roadway safety needs. They're hiring outside consultants to ease their utility coordination workload, and the consulting firm's utility coordinators often work on site at district offices as an extension of the district's staff.

One case in point - a success story - can be found at the Florida DOT's District One office in Bartow. The district found itself with an increasing workload without adequate in-house staff to handle the volume of work. The district decided it could increase its work capacity without increasing actual staff by hiring external consultants and having their utility coordinators work on site at the district office. These utility coordinators are employees of the consulting firms, but they function as district staff.

Walter Childs, District One's District Utility Administrator, has been using utility coordination consultants for the past four or five years to augment his staff. "we could not handle our work volume without additional staff," Childs said. "Our outside consultants offer us qualified, expert individuals who can perform all of the levels of work needed on the projects we are clearing. The on-site coordinators allow us to handle one-third more work and meet work schedules that otherwise would have been impossible to maintain."

Childs has found additional benefits to having consultant utility coordinators on site. "it's a much more efficient use of their time and ours," he said. "First, if the work is being done off site, there's a chance for delay or of something unintentionally slipping through the cracks and not getting done at all. Second, if the utility coordinators need my input on something, they can just walk over to my office and ask. They don't have to call and leave a message or get in the car and drive over to show me."

The beauty of the arrangement is that as extensions of Childs' staff, his consultant utility coordinators are in the district office eight hours a day, five days a week. "Not only do they work on projects, but they're available to work on whatever else i need done," Childs said.



"The coordinators' responsibilities are not totally project based, so they are available as staff for anything that comes up," said Mark Pitchford, Vice President/Southern Region Manager, Utilities, for TBE Group. "If they need to run reports or get permits, they're there to perform those functions."

Two of District One's on-site consultant utility coordinators are TBE Group's Ray Mercer and George Radford. While Mercer and Radford are on TBE's payroll, under the direction of Senior Utility Coordinator Vinnie

LaVallette, they work at the district office and report to Childs for their daily assignments.

Both Mercer and Radford understand the numerous benefits of working on site. "We're right here where everything is happening," Mercer said. "When paperwork or responses come in from the utilities, we're immediately available to respond, answer questions, locate documents... whatever is needed."

Working on site is so much more efficient and convenient," said Radford. "The people we need to deal with are right here, and if something comes up for us to handle, we're here instead of being on the other end of the phone line. For example, some agreements need to be hand-delivered for sign-off. We're available to do that. The assignment doesn't have to wait until later."

"Our contacts at the utility companies see us as part of the DOT staff, and we're able to establish productive relationships with them," Mercer added. "In addition, all of the people at the District One office are very knowledgeable and helpful. It's a pleasure to work here."

"Having well trained staff increases our effectiveness," Childs said. "Using on-site consultants, such as Ray and George, helps us meet the demands of our work programs. It's a winning arrangement for everyone."

Credits

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