

Shell, Women's Business Enterprise Alliance Pursue Operational Excellence, Continuous Improvement



It's an Effort to Maximize Opportunities, Eliminate Waste among WBEs

With the long-term goal of ensuring greater efficiency and clarity, Shell and the Women's Business Enterprise Alliance (WBEA) are collaborating to harness Shell's knowledge and the concepts associated with "Operational Excellence" and "Continuous Improvement" to strengthen opportunities for women-owned businesses (WBEs) in the Houston area. The WBEA is an affiliate of the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) and serves as a third-party certifying organization for WBEs across Texas. With nearly 800 certified members across 64 counties in Texas, the WBEA has grown to be one of the nation's leading certifiers of WBEs. WBEA also has more than 40 corporate members, one of which is Shell.

Both Shell and WBEA officials express high expectations about their ongoing project. The Shell-WBEA alliance more rapidly connects WBE vendors with business opportunities that match their competencies, skills and products, says WBEA President April Day. This is achieved in part by ensuring the WBEA and WBEs understand the needs of potential customers (e.g., business and governmental entities) and also ensuring that WBEs "operationally" optimize to meet customer expectations. As a part of the WBEA's effort to achieve its vision of becoming "the organization that women-owned businesses rely on for growth and success," and also in response to feedback from WBEA members, the WBEA commissioned an "Operational Excellence" committee in 2012, led by Otto Meyers, General Manager at Shell, current chair of the WBEA's Board of Directors.

Meyers saw an opportunity to leverage some of the knowledge and Continuous Improvement concepts associated with Shell's Operational Excellence journey in the WBEA. "It is imperative that non-profit organizations like the WBEA operate as efficiently as possible. Every penny saved through eliminating waste and optimizing service delivery provides more opportunity to invest in programs that drive value to the WBEA's members (both WBEs and corporations," Meyers says. Meanwhile, at the WBEA, Day is seeing considerable changes. "Through the Operational Excellence and Continuous Improvement initiatives, we've achieved significant improvements in the way the WBEA operates," Day says. "We've been able to eliminate waste in multiple WBEA processes, from the handling of incoming contacts (e.g. e-mail and phone) to reducing the certification cycle time."

One added value arising from the Shell-WBEA project has been its "people benefit" for the WBEA. Meyers collaborated with Michael Washington, a Continuous Improvement and "Lean" expert at Shell, and Latoya Wall, CEO and President of the Bulsard Group LLC, an agency widely recognized for helping businesses make substantial progress towards reaching Operational Excellence. Together, the three designed an Operational Excellence/Continuous Improvement training session for the WBEA staff. One of the key tenants of the Continuous Improvement tool "Lean" is to have the people who actually perform the work involved in determining how the work can be done more efficiently.

Shell and WBEA are setting a tremendous example of how corporate resources and WBE innovation can combine for mutual, long-term benefits. What is your company's outlook with regard to operational excellence and continuous improvement? Is it time for a corporate partnership?

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