



# How Holt Construction Exceeded Small and Certified Participation Goals on a Major Airline Project

33% MWBE participation. 100+ qualified firms sourced. Zero delays. See how Holt Construction hit its participation targets—and how you can too.



## SOURCING CERTIFIED SUBS:

# Tough Leaf Helps Holt Exceed Small And Certified Participation Goals On Major Airline Project

## Background: The Project

One of the largest airlines in North America selected Holt Construction as the construction manager for its 230,000 square foot catering facility at Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH).

What takes place at the catering facility? The airline prepares all the food it serves on its flights out of Houston in the catering facility.

**// If more estimators were aware of Tough Leaf, they'd be lining up to work with you—even if it meant using their own funds to make it happen," said Taylor Tiefenthaler, an estimator in Holt's Houston office who led the preconstruction.**

Construction on the two-story tilt wall structure began in late 2024. The massive facility represents a step forward for Holt as it's the most significant individual project Holt has performed in Houston.

The contract the airline and the other stakeholders created stipulates that the contractor must meet a 30% minority participation goal.

## Challenges: Complex Bid Process

Putting together a bid on a large project, like the one for the IAH Catering Kitchen, is always laborious and time-consuming. There were external factors that made this bid process particularly demanding.

**// It can be hard to find subs who like working in the airport because of the restrictions and the difficulty; everything's just harder at the airport," said Tiefenthaler.**

Because Holt regularly works at airports, they have a stable of subcontractors who are adept and comfortable working at airports. However, multiple projects are going on simultaneously at IAH, including a \$1 billion program at the main terminal.

So, Holt had to compete for subs who may have been attracted to the more glamorous billion-dollar project. "All the usual suspects who work at the airport were already filled up with backlog for those other projects," Tiefenthaler said.

Getting down to the nitty gritty details was also necessary so Holt could lay out the scope of work and ensure the subs would pick up everything shown in the drawings and beyond. Otherwise, surprises could arise while on the project that impact the bottom line and schedule.

*continued... Challenges: Complex Bid Process*

The intense exercise created significant time constraints for the team. While Holt typically makes follow-up calls to subs, the compressed timeline made this standard practice unfeasible. These two elements – a limited number of subs comfortable and experienced working at airports and the demanding schedule that required focused resource allocation – made putting together an effective team that met all the requirements, including MBWE, a tall task.

When bidding on a project of this size, general contractors must cast a wide net to ensure they have a team that works. Holt turned to Tough Leaf to help.

The main draw to Tough Leaf was that we could give the company our pre-qual application, and they would then give us subs for the different scopes of work," said Jessica Rondash, Director of Business Operations & Performance.

Because Tough Leaf weeded out those who were inappropriate, i.e., not the proper insurance, poor safety record, etc., Holt didn't need to go through the usual hundreds of subs that they would need to on a large project. Tough Leaf was a significant time saver.

Because Tough Leaf prequalified the subcontractor candidates, Holt could send out the bid packages and be confident about the numbers they got back from the subs. "It meant that we wouldn't get stuck in a situation where we carried a number and then the sub turned out not to meet the requirements," Rondash said.

Another benefit of turning over the task of finding certified subs to Tough Leaf was the company's ability to consider a more thorough list of subcontractors due to its accredited network of over 300,000 active vendors nationwide.

**// Tough Leaf made sure that the subs would at least meet our minimum requirements," Rondash said. "The real value for us was knowing that Tough Leaf vetted the subs."**



One of her primary responsibilities is dealing with compliance, subcontractor diversity outreach programs, and getting as many diverse and local subcontractors onto Holt jobs.

"Tough Leaf made sure that the subs would at least meet our minimum requirements," Rondash said. "The real value for us was knowing that Tough Leaf vetted the subs."

The extensive network allows Tough Leaf to go beyond the typical places contractors search to find subs and gives us a more direct route to them.

With the help of Tough Leaf, Holt's team met and exceeded the airlines' requirement for MBWE participation. The team reached 33%.

**// A goal of ours is to always be able to tell our clients that we can exceed whatever goals they put down," Rondash said. She believes it makes Holt more competitive.**

## Benefits: Saving Time and Expanding the Partnership Pool

GCs tend to use certain small contractors that they know and trust repeatedly. However, there are only so many jobs small contractors can take on.

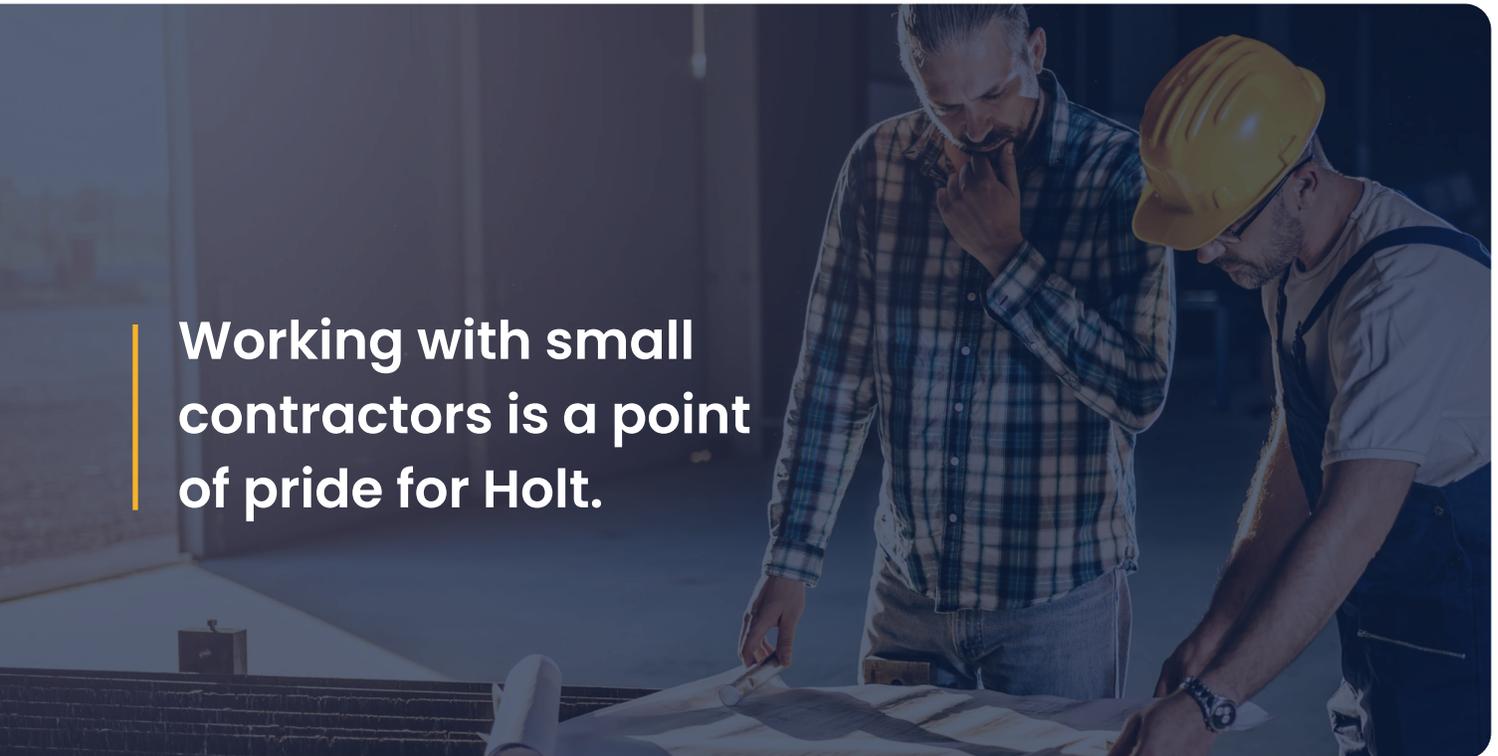
Holt is well aware of this challenge and wants to add more to their roster. Therefore, they broke up the packages into small pieces that a small contractor could manage. "It gets them in the door, and the more we work with the subcontractor, the more comfortable we get. It builds our subcontractor base," Rondash said.

Working with small contractors is a point of pride for Holt. The firm's leadership recognizes that it started as a small contractor. They grew because others gave them chances to do larger and larger work.

Holt's determination to pay it forward is admirable. However, making it a reality is time-consuming. Tough Leaf made its pre-qualification vetting process simple to ensure subcontractors met requirements.

Holt met and exceeded subcontractor diversity figures and expanded its pool of subcontractors beyond its existing network. Instead of taking on this task and being overwhelmed by the time commitment, Holt farmed it out to Tough Leaf. Bringing on a partner saved time, allowing Holt's estimating team to focus on more technical work.

**// The only way to give back and help other businesses is to do the same thing," Rondash said. "We've had subcontractors that have grown with us, and we're always trying to get new, smaller subcontractors in, because that's how we got here."**



**Working with small contractors is a point of pride for Holt.**

## Growing Partnership

Holt is an established name in the Northeast, and owners there know them for their top quality work. The company has worked with the airline previously on other airport projects, including one at Newark Liberty International Airport.

However, Holt's Houston and Dallas divisions are still cementing their reputation. So, this project, their largest in Texas to date, has extra meaning as it can advance Holt in the region.

**// I think being able to work with the clients that we work with in the Northeast, bring them down to Texas and show them we can give them the same quality of work there is really big for us," Rondash said.**

The current project is just the second catering kitchen Holt has landed. They hope to land more and will point to the current project as a showcase.

One of the reasons the current project can be viewed as a success is that it meets and exceeds the MBWE requirement. Meeting all the requirements was more difficult than usual because this is an OCIP (Owner Controlled Insurance Program) job.

Holt is client-focused, and their clients recognize that, as evidenced by 80% of their work being with repeat clients. That's where exceeding expectations come in and why going beyond 30% MWBE-certified business was meaningful. Tough Leaf delivered.

"I'm looking forward to working with you guys again," Tiefenthaler said. "If more estimators were aware of Tough Leaf, they'd be lining up to work with you—even if it meant using their own funds to make it happen.

Rondash also expects to work with Tough Leaf again. "You guys offer something that people like me in my position really need," she said. "You see the numbers on a regular basis. What are we doing on each job? What is our percentage even on those jobs that don't require it? So, I only see us doing more and more work with you as time goes on."

### About Holt Construction • [holtcc.com](http://holtcc.com)

Founded in 1919 just outside New York City, Holt Construction is in its third generation of family ownership. The full-service construction management and general contracting firm began with a focus on residential construction before moving into commercial and industrial.

Today, the firm has over 300 employees and is involved in over 10 market sectors. Holt started in the Northeast – New York, New Jersey, Boston – and expanded in Texas (Houston and Dallas) in the early 2020s.

Holt is no longer a small family-owned business, as it made ENR's Top 400 Contractors in 2021. The company recognizes that it grew because others allowed it to work on large projects. This generosity inspires them to pay it forward and help small businesses do the same.

### About Tough Leaf • [toughleaf.com](http://toughleaf.com)

Tough Leaf helps construction companies find qualified vendors and manage compliance requirements through our certified subcontractor network and industry expertise. Our platform automatically matches vendors to your project requirements while navigating federal, state, and local compliance standards.

Our comprehensive compliance solution combines real-time certification monitoring with automated documentation. The platform tracks vendor certifications throughout your project, maintains detailed records, and generates required reporting – all while connecting you with qualified firms from our network of over 300,000 active vendors.

Access our platform directly or leverage our full-service support team to manage your vendor outreach. Our clients see an average of 3.5x more competitive bids, helping reduce procurement time while improving project pricing and win rate.