# *Business Profile: San Diego-based ASL Project Management Consultants*

Aviation is ASL Project Management Consultants' focus, yet the small, minority-owned San Diego business has expanded into the education and IT support services markets, and continues to identify new markets amid the COVID pandemic.

"Our goal has always been to be broaden our markets that we serve, and we continue to reinforce that decision," says Saad Ilyas, who worked his way up from interning at the firm to purchase the company and become its President, all in less than two decades.

ASL Project Management Consultants has long offered project management and construction management services to airports, providing resources to help them expand and implement programs and projects.




Among the clients are the City of Los Angeles and the City of San Francisco, where ASLPM supports the City Aviation Program expansion at both airports.

When passenger revenue declined due to coronavirus, airports began putting upcoming projects and programs on hold. "Because of that we've had projects and programs that came to a screeching halt," Ilyas says. "That equated to reducing our resources temporarily."

But the company adjusted accordingly. It morphed to support the Education market on development work, such as building upgrades, and has forayed into the IT Support Services market, where it is growing its presence there further, despite the radical changes from the pandemic.

The company is also eyeing expansion into the transportation industry, including helping develop bus depots and light rail systems, as well as to the healthcare industry.

"We need to continue to remain flexible and always ready for change, always be ready to become better at what we're doing," Ilyas says.

***The company expanded into the education and IT support services markets, and continues to identify new markets amid the COVID pandemic, such as transportation and healthcare.***

Most of the company's clients are public agencies, such as city municipalities. While there is concern over the economic uncertainty caused by the pandemic, the company closely monitors and collaborates with its client agencies so they can plan accordingly.

"We talk to our clients weekly, check in with them, what their needs are and what their challenges are," Ilyas explains. "We need to proactively understand their challenges, to provide solutions, and innovative ways to resolve those challenges."

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company focuses on managing stakeholders, ideas and expectations. It assists clients in managing costs, schedules, the scope of work and most importantly, the needs of the client, "which requires a high level of people skills," Ilyas adds.

"You need emotional intelligence to work alongside other team members. When we come into someone's agency, we're now working alongside the agency members, designers and contractors, to manage everybody, to manage ourselves. You need much more than technical skills, or technical knowledge. You need to get along with people."

Ilyas carefully vets potential team members to ensure they have the emotional intelligence to work well with others, to focus on the client's needs and to be proactive problem solvers,

"We do things without walking over bodies," he says. "It has to be a team approach. There should be no ego there of 'me and me alone' or 'I can do it best.'"

Ilyas was born in India and raised in Nigeria, where his parents work as professors of pharmacy. From a young age, "I learned the value of serving others with integrity." It's no coincidence that the company's tagline is "Service. Integrity. Collaboration."

Those characteristics have served Ilyas well after immigrating in his early 20s to the U.S., where he earned a master's degree in architecture in San Diego before interning at ASL Project Management Consultants. He was the first employee 22 years ago and he learned the trade from the owner and from another great teacher – "experience."

One valuable lesson he's learned is that "everyone is expendable."

"People cannot assume the world will stop if they are not there. One thing you cannot do is be too comfortable with the client, thinking it's your own office, your own agency. You have to continue to remember that you are a guest there and your purpose is to continually provide an added value each day. "

Being a small business has both advantages and disadvantages. "Due to our size, we don't always have the financial capacity to keep team members 'on the bench' waiting for work to come in. That's challenging because agencies may prefer to receive support from companies that have resources available immediately."

Yet ASL's size also enables the company to work quickly and be more flexible than larger companies that often have to go through time consuming internal processes to processes to bring in resources to support its respective clients.

"We pride ourselves on being small, nimble and react quickly to dynamic changes. The challenge is to continue to remain nimble as we grow in size. That's a challenge I relish to take on."

While ASL Project Management Consultants is on the path to growth, Ilyas is cognizant that it should be strategic, especially amid these uncertain times.

"Of course, I would want the world," he says with a laugh. "But seriously, I look at growth and it has to be sustainable. It has to be logical. It has to make a difference." — By Brenda Gazzar, California Business Journal.

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