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Certified Firms Offer Advice at DGS Technology Fair

If your business is trying to break into the government market, certified small and DVBE (Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise) firms who have done business with the State can offer some important advice. We spoke with some of these experienced firms when the Department of General Services hosted “Technology Solutions Day” in September, in West Sacramento.

Technology Day brought together prime suppliers and some of their small business/DVBE partners to showcase the computer equipment and photocopiers now available to State and local agencies on new contracts reached through the California Strategic Sourcing Initiative (CSSI)

State government spends an estimated \$150 million on computer hardware and photocopiers each year. Under the new strategically sourced contracts, small and DVBE firms will play an important role in filling those orders. Prime suppliers for most IT products are committed to subcontracting at least 25 percent of the contracts to certified California small businesses and three percent to DVBEs.

We asked some of the certified businesses at Technology Day what advice they’d offer to other firms trying to break into the government market. Here’s what they told us:

Go Beyond Certification

Getting your firm certified with the State of California is just the first step. “Don’t think you’ll get State business just because you’re certified,” advised Rob Landerman, from the Statestore, a certified small business. If you want to do business “you need to understand State departments and their needs.” Landerman says his firm’s been certified more than five years, and was recently selected by both Hewlett-Packard and Gateway to serve as a small business partner on the State’s new computer hardware contract. The Statestore, along with other small business and DVBE partners will add value to the contract by procuring products, interfacing with the customers, project management, and anything else it takes to get the job done.

Staff at the Department of General Services’ Office of Small Business and DVBE Services (OSDS) echo Mr. Landerman’s advice: According to Mariel Dennis, Chief of OSDS, “Once you’re certified, your firm’s information is entered into an online database. The database can be searched by State agencies and others looking for certified firms to meet their needs. But remember: California has more than 15,000 certified firms. If you want your firm to get noticed and get business, you must go beyond certification and market your services to the appropriate State agencies. We recommend firms update keywords so that state and local government buyers, as well as prime contractors can find firms easily. It is a free service and only used by a few firms



Sandra Castro and Allen Duncan of CPO, Ltd, a certified small business, cite “experience” and “persistence” as important factors in being selected as a small business partner on the Sharp copier contract

so many are missing opportunities to do business..”

Market Your Business

Nearly all the small business representatives we spoke with cited the importance of marketing to the State. “It’s all about marketing,” said Sandra Castro of the certified small business, CPO, Ltd. “Our firm wanted to capture a piece of the State pie,” Ms. Castro continued, “and we committed staff and resources to make that happen.” In fact, CPO, Ltd. even hired a professional telemarketer for a short period of time to help identify appropriate State contacts. CPO, Ltd. is a small business partner on the statewide Sharp copier contract. Like all the authorized dealers on this strategically sourced contract, their small business delivers and sets up the copiers, trains State department operators, and provides follow-up service.

And identifying the right people was just the first step in their marketing efforts. “After we identified the right people, it was our persistence and face to face contact that made the sales,” said Ms. Castro’s associate, Allen Duncan.

Marc Cimmet from A2Z Business Systems had a similar approach, committing a dedicated individual from his small business to work on State marketing. “We read through everything we could to help us understand the various State programs and certification process,” Mr. Cimmet said. His company’s efforts paid off and A2Z Business Systems is now a small business partner on the strategically-sourced Sharp copier contract.

Establish Your Firm’s Value

A common theme among the businesses we spoke with, was the importance of establishing the value of your small or DVBE business and making it clear to potential customers. According to Rob Landerman, “it’s important to provide a value to the state customer. It’s not just about price.” Bob Schoon, of the certified small business, Schoon Corporation, agrees with Landerman. “We’re State certified and we sell copiers, but we make sure our customers know that we offer so much more than just copies. The machines today offer scanning, automatic document filing, and software that can be customized to meet customers’ needs.”

As a certified small or DVBE business, certification will help you “get your foot in the door,” but it will be your ability to offer best value to State customers that will ultimately help make a sale.

Opportunity Exists for Your Business

During fiscal year 2003-2004 (the latest year for which published statistics are available), the State of California awarded contracts worth \$2.2 billion to certified small business, and \$149 million to DVBEs.

There is opportunity for your small business or DVBE. If you’ve been certified but haven’t done business with the State yet, or if you’d like to do more business, we hope you’ll take advice from the business owners we talked to.

For more information, visit the Procurement Division’s Small Business and DVBE Services Web site at <http://www.pd.dgs.ca.gov/smbus>.