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April 6, 2014

Organization Helps Businesses Procure Government Contracts

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A business owner who believes the federal, state or local government could use his product or service often has little clue about how and where to make a pitch.

Gil Torres found himself in this situation when he purchased Sigma Science in 2013 and wanted to expand the Los Alamos company's reach beyond the work it did providing risk management and environmental safety and health services for Los Alamos and Sandia national laboratories.



Torres needed specific certifications to bid on certain government contracts. He began his search on the Small Business Administration website, where he discovered the New Mexico Small Business Development Center network's Procurement Technical Assistance Program. PTAP is a federally and state-funded organization that helps small businesses obtain certifications and develop the capabilities and sophistication needed to compete for government contracts.

Torres requested help from Elaine Palin, the PTAP adviser based in Santa Fe, to obtain 8(a) certification as a disadvantaged business enterprise based on his financial qualifications and ethnicity. He also wanted information about bid matching services and counseling to help him market his company to the Army, Navy and Air Force.

Six months after embarking on the process, Torres received 8(a) certification. "Although we have not obtained any new contracts yet, our overall revenue has increased by greater than 25 percent due to increased assignments at Los Alamos National Laboratory and Sandia National Laboratories," he said. Sigma Science, for example, now provides nuclear technical services and engineering support at Sandia's Technical Area V nuclear facilities, where radioactive materials are routinely handled.

"We believe the 8(a) certification will help us expand our core capabilities into other Department of Energy facilities, such as the Nevada Test Site and Oak Ridge National Laboratory," Torres said. "Our existing contracts have helped us to maintain 10 full-time core staff" and provide work for independent contractors.

PTAP has helped more than 2000 businesses like Sigma Science since its inception in 2009. The organization offers seminars and individual counseling to help clients become better vendors. PTAP services are free of charge.

When a prospective client first visits a PTAP office, for instance, she receives information about its services, including individual counseling and training in all aspects of government contracting. PTAP offers Bid Match — a data mining service that links clients to potential opportunities based on a profile that specifies what products or services the business can provide. Relevant opportunities are delivered directly to the client’s email.

PTAP advisers typically inquire how long the client has been in business. While two years is the usual minimum for federal contracts, not all levels of government are so stringent, and new tech businesses aren’t subject to the same restrictions. Advisers then determine how financially stable the business is, as this suggests how likely it is to fulfill contracts.

Advisers can help the client obtain a nine-digit identifier called a DUNS number that’s essential for government contract procurement. Adviser and client work together to figure out what category the client’s goods or services fit into within the North American Industry Classification System coding framework. If the client isn’t registered with the System for Award Management, advisers walk him through the process to get that done.

The client can sign up for further help with federal certifications, for a review of her Statement of Qualifications, or for assistance performing market research. PTAP, for example, can help qualified clients acquire certifications as an Economically Disadvantaged Small Business, Woman-Owned Small Business, Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business and/or as a business located in a Historically Underutilized Business Zone.

PTAP advisers work statewide from seven New Mexico offices, including Las Cruces, Alamogordo, Clovis, Santa Fe, and three in Albuquerque. For more information about PTAP and access to a wide variety of resources related to government procurement, visit www.nmptap.org.

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