Encourage Local Small Businesses to Bid for City Contracts

Finally, but importantly, cities can invest in the long-term future of small businesses by including them in the bidding process for city contracts. The critical step, however, is educating small business owners on how to search for contracting opportunities and prepare a solid bid application. Both San Diego and San Antonio offer direct support to small business in building their capacity to bid for city contracts.

As part of the Business Empowerment Plan in San Antonio, the city offers a mentoring program for small businesses that is designed to help owners build skills that will prepare them for the contract application process.

San Antonio: Business Empowerment Plan

In partnership with Alamo Colleges, the city of San Antonio continues its commitment to build the capacity of the San Antonio small business community through the Business Empowerment Plan, which consists of the Bonding Assistance and Mentor Protégé Programs.

The Bonding Assistance Program helps participants understand and manage their business credit in order to become bondable, and thereby increase their likelihood of participating in city contracts. On the other hand, the Mentor Protégé Program provides guidelines and a formal process for the teaming of established and successful firm owners and managers with less-established SBE firms to provide management guidance and training in areas such as office procedures, estimating and bidding, bookkeeping and accounting, management of funds, project management, supplier relationships, bonding and insurance, etc.

Both programs were designed in two phases. For both programs, Phase I consists of the completion of a course component referred to as the Small Business Bootcamp. This course component features classes that vary depending on track, which is determined by industry and program selection. Once participants complete Phase I they transition into Phase II for their respective program. For the Mentor-Protégé Program, Phase II consists of a mentor protégé relationship; for the Bonding Assistance Program, Phase II consists of further bonding consultation with ACCION.

Including the initial pilot session held in the spring of 2012, both the Bonding Assistance and Mentor Protégé Programs have successfully completed six full sessions, and a seventh session is scheduled to take place spring 2014.
“(If) you use the tools the city has provided, you definitely can gain a great and tremendous resource from this program.”

– program participant Melissa Castro Killen of Network Alliance, LLC

In San Diego, the city’s Small Business Development Program helps entrepreneurs market their products and services to the city. Specifically, the city offers educational trainings on the city’s procurement process and hosts “Meet the Buyers” networking events. In total, the program has served over 450 small businesses and certified more than 100 businesses in the city’s Small Local Business Enterprise Program.

San Diego: Small Business Development Program

The city of San Diego’s award-winning Small Business Development Program was launched as a pilot program by the Office of Small Business in 2010 to positively impact readiness levels of small businesses to bid or respond to contracting opportunities with the city, and help identify and remove barriers to city procurement and contracting opportunities. The training and outreach program serves local small business vendors, suppliers, and goods and service providers interested in contracting with the city of San Diego.

The Small Business Development Program provides participants with an in-depth understanding of “How to do Business with the city;” identifies and assesses the training needs of small businesses to better position themselves as potential bidders; offers tailored technical assistance; provides information on the benefits of the city’s Small Local Business Enterprise Program and Certification; and ultimately aims to help better position local small businesses for contract award.

Program components include needs assessments and follow-up surveys, orientation sessions, tailored one-to-one counseling sessions, training on city procurement policies and procedures, workshops based on interests and needs, and “Meet the Buyers” Networking Events to give participants the opportunity to meet with city procurement staff assigned to their type of goods or services.

The 10-month program is provided at no cost to participants through grant funding from the city of San Diego Small Business Enhancement Program, and a collaborative partnership with the San Diego Contracting Opportunities Center to implement technical assistance components of the program.

Since inception, the program has served 450 businesses and resulted in $902,000 in city contract awards to program participants. In 2012, the program was recognized by the Public Relations Society of America San Diego/Imperial Counties Chapter and received the Edward L. Bernays Mark of Excellence Award for excellence in community relations.

“Before, I had no idea how to even start doing business with the city of San Diego. Now, I have a clear path to follow when I get my certification completed. Also I met some really smart, cool people that facilitated the orientation and in meeting them, doing business with the city of San Diego seemed less formidable.”

– quote from Small Business Development Program participant