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GSA Expo Bringing Opportunity to San Diego's Minority-owned Businesses

Next week, San Diego hosts the GSA Expo, an annual conference for businesses and government contractors. The GSA (General Services Administration) is an independent U.S. agency responsible for billions of federal government procurement dollars. This yearly conference includes more than 200 hours of training for active and possible government contractors as well as an exhibit floor of more than 600 vendors.

What does this mean for minority-owned, small, and wo-man-owned businesses? GSA Expo provides a significant opportunity to meet and network with government contractors, for either subcontractor or teaming possibilities. Moreover, educational training sessions offer something for everyone, from the specialized (e.g., An Overview of the Federal Gov-ernment's Small Business Programs), to the ultra-specialized (The Air Force Small Business Show and Tell). Representatives from companies selling everything from office furniture to professional engineering services to computer products to landscaping attend the GSA Expo to increase or initiate government sales. Throughout the actual GSA Expo and in private conversations, government personnel advise that businesses looking to enter the federal marketplace first obtain a GSA Schedule contract. In fact, companies are only allowed to exhibit at GSA Expo once they have a GSA Schedule contract.

Businesses with GSA Schedule contracts can offer their products and services to any department or agency in the U.S. federal government (as well as many state and local governments) for up to 20 years on an IDIQ (indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity) basis. Many small companies, some of which would never have considered trying to enter the government arena, find that the GSA Schedules are the perfect instrument for opening their business to the U.S. government's \$800 billion marketplace. Quite likely, someone in the federal government has purchased or has plans to purchase your particular product or service soon.

The GSA Schedules are somewhat similar to a giant shopping mall. Each store represents a different Schedule: information technology has its own Schedule, as does unmanned air vehicles, business consulting, sporting goods, draperies, advertising services, laboratory equipment, etc. There are more than 60 GSA Schedules, but your business's core offerings probably fit under one or two Schedules at the most. Once you have been awarded the Schedule, the government buyer can walk through the shopping mall and pick and choose your product or service as s/he needs it, purchasing with a credit card or even on-line. Basically, the GSA Schedules make it much easier for the government to acquire your product or service.

Obtaining a GSA Schedule contract is, in some ways, similar to other government contracting vehicles. For

instance, GSA requires that your company register with Dun & Bradstreet, have a federal tax identification number, report your sales quarterly, and certify the size of your business. In other ways, though, the GSA Schedules are a contract unto themselves. GSA asks you to: reveal how you sell your goods or services commercially, provide discounts for all GSA sales, prove that you have offered the proposed products or services previously, and accept government credit cards.

Nevertheless, a GSA Schedule contract is well worth your time and effort. As more and more government agencies require that their buyers utilize only businesses on the GSA Schedule, your company's investment will prove itself ... with increased sales and revenue.

The GSA Expo will be held on Friday, May 6, 2005, from 8:30am - 4:30pm, at Hilton San Diego in the Gaslamp Quarter. For more information visit EZGSA website at:

http://www.ezgsa.com/sub_index/index.htm.

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