

BY KRISTINA TANASICHUK

Small and Medium Businesses Can Lead the Way



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OUR CURRENT BUDGET WOES WILL MAKE THE NEXT FEW YEARS TOUGH ON EVERYONE. OUR FISCAL CRISIS IS NOT A “REPUBLICAN” OR “DEMOCRATIC” ISSUE AND SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED BUSINESSES WORKING WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT KNOW THIS.

They are battenning down the hatches to prepare for the inevitable cuts, cancellations and postponements. And they all understand that the old cliché “do more for less” has become the new reality. Luckily they’ve lived it since they opened their doors.

As policymakers reassess spending priorities, we must think creatively, work together more closely and focus on our goals to better innovate, better deliver and increase our agility. Part of the solution lies in our small and medium business community.

Congress legislated that certain contracts should be set-aside for small businesses in five categories: general small businesses; businesses located in Historically Underutilized Business Zones, known as HUBZones; businesses that are owned or controlled by service-disabled veterans; 8(a) businesses, which are owned or controlled by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals; and woman-owned businesses. The federal government’s overall set-aside goal is 23 percent with specific goals in each category. Some question if, how or whether these goals are being met. However, among federal agencies the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has established an excellent record.

DHS AND SMALL BUSINESS

In Kevin Boshears, director of DHS’ Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization, small business has a staunch supporter and ally. Boshears has been recognized for his work several times and achieved an “A” on the Small Business Administration’s 2009 Small Business Procurement Score Card. Since assuming his position in 2003, he has worked with the business community and the department to meet the required 23 percent set-aside for government contracts. He has helped DHS exceed the goals for small business generally and the goals for woman-owned and small disadvantaged business by 5 to 10 percent. DHS has also developed a mentor-protégé program to encourage large business prime contractor firms to help small businesses improve performance of contracts and subcontracts, among other goals.

Under Tara O’Toole and her predecessor, Jay Cohen, DHS’ Science and Technology Directorate has worked to improve commercialization and leverage research innovation by universities and emerging companies through the mandated Small Business Innovation Research pro-

gram and the larger Small Business Technology Transfer Program. Both O’Toole and Chief Commercialization Officer Tom Cellucci have worked to further leverage the value and innovation of small business to the benefit of the DHS mission and budget. Programs to that end include FutureTECH, as well as System Efficacy through Commercialization, Utilization, Relevance and Evaluation.

Programs like these do two things: They support the economy and make smarter use of our resources.

SUPPORT THE CONTRIBUTION OF SMALL BUSINESS

The truth is, budget cuts, delays and an ailing economy disproportionately affect small and medium companies. While they continue to contribute to both the homeland security mission and to the economic recovery of the nation by delivering exceptional value and quality—as well as jobs and support for communities—their survival is constantly threatened. Their ability to absorb losses from delays, postponements, cancellations and insourcing is limited. Decisionmakers must continue to recognize the tremendous savings and efficiencies these businesses offer, as well as their focus on exceptional performance and mission results. Many people within DHS understand this.

The reality is that creativity, inventiveness and innovation are still born of necessity. Small and medium companies are close enough to their own missions that they really understand what can be done—and at what cost. Their perspective is not only critical, it is invaluable. To realize that something can be done smarter, better and for less is the space in which small and medium businesses thrive.

QUALITY IS JOB ONE

The initial version of the DHS fiscal year 2012 budget passed by the US House of Representatives reduced the department’s funding to 2009 levels. But all is not lost. These cuts are an opportunity for government to realign and partner with the small and medium business community to find creative ways to accomplish its mission and eliminate waste. For these companies, success, reputation and follow-on contracts depend on superior results.

Despite the set-asides and allies within DHS, we must steadfastly support small and medium businesses. The economy will only recover if we continue to uphold the economic drivers that assure high-quality jobs, increase economic growth and contribute to our overall recovery. Small and medium businesses are instrumental to DHS’ mission and provide exceptional value, creative solutions and cost savings at a time when they are desperately needed. Small and medium businesses are the fabric of our nation; they are the fabric of economic recovery and the foundation of our homeland security. **HST**