

In search of the ‘big one’: Seminar teaches business owners how to bid for government contracts

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Staff photo by Evan Lewis Colin Johnson, with the Department of Transportation, talks with ARS owner Steve Morse about service bids Wednesday morning at a small-business seminar at Texarkana College. Morse said the workshop offered new avenues for acquiring government contracts.

Nearly 100 people came to Texarkana College on Thursday to find out how to land the “big one”—governmental job contracts.

“I already work with Red River Army Depot, Barksdale and Little Rock Air Force bases. It’s all work under \$3,000. I’m trying to find out how to land the bigger jobs,” said James Taylor, president of Industrial Polymeric Solutions.

Taylor’s business specializes in coatings for machinery, roofs and industrial flooring.

With the help of Arkansas Procurement Assistance Center, the North Texas Small Business

Development Center, Texas A&M University-Texarkana's College of Business and the Red River Defense Complex, Taylor and other business owners learned how to get their small businesses into the ring when bidding for governmental jobs.

Sue Coates, director of the Arkansas Procurement Assistance Center, alerted participants to three important things to help get them in the government's door.

"Have a line card. It should list your business name and contact information and a bullet list of what your company offers or does. Most buyers don't have time to talk, and this is a quick way to get their attention," Coates said.

She also said having an Internet connection is very important because most agencies conduct business through electronic transactions these days.

"And to help you get governmental contracts, go to the private sector first. Get jobs there—as an example, if you pave driveways, pave your Uncle Joe's driveway, then bid for a public sector job. The more private sector jobs you do and do well, the more experience and a better chance you have in bidding in the public sector," Coates said.

Knowing what the agency is specifically looking for also helps a small business get the job.

"If they're looking for a specific business type, like a woman-owned or minority-owned business, or one with special skills, don't try to bid if you don't have those things. Be sure to read what they're looking for and what the contract is requiring," Coates said.

It was exactly what some small-business owners wanted to hear.

Chuck Firmin with Firmin's Office City said with so many different agencies within one industry, like RRAD, the information is helpful.

"I'm looking at the different avenues to doing business. RRAD is so big, I want to attack each agency and business one at a time," Firmin said.

With RRAD, Don Kennedy, complex director of contracting, said it's small businesses they like doing business with.

"It's nice to have a personal relationship with small-business owners. Where big businesses like to dictate, small businesses give us personal attention and service. While it's our job and defense policy to support all U.S. small businesses, we prefer to deal with as many local small businesses as we can," Kennedy said.

"It's a big misconception with small-business owners to think only big businesses can bid for governmental or federal jobs. It's the smaller businesses that mow the state rights of way or clean the post offices," said Tim Wilson, business development specialist with TAMU-T's Small Business Development Center.

In telling small-business owners how to bid big, all business owners are now on the same level for the jobs.

“We’re inspiring the small-business owners, who are always competing, that the playing field is now level, the doors are open,” said Felicia Bozeman, training coordinator with Arkansas Small Business and Technology Development Center.

Businesses that would like more information on how to bid for governmental jobs, or other help, may call Wilson at 903-223-1370 or Bozeman at 870-235-4007. Contact also can be made at these Websites: sba.gov, ntsbdc.org and asbdc.ualr.edu. The sites can guide businesses to regional **Procurement Technical Assistance Centers** for more help.