



ADVISORS TO THE PRESIDENT,
CONGRESS AND THE SBA

Accessing Government Markets: An Issues Roundtable Discussion Summary Report

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Prepared by
BETAH Associates, Inc.
7910 Woodmont Ave., Suite 1450
Bethesda, MD 20814
301-657-4254

Accessing Government Markets: An Issues Roundtable Discussion

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Summary Report

Introduction

In February 2004, the National Women's Business Council (NWBC), together with the U.S. Department of Commerce and Project Tsunami, co-hosted an experts' roundtable on Access to Markets, including corporate, international, and governmental markets. At this roundtable, several challenges and best practices were identified. In particular, questions arose about the Offices of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU), and their levels of support, experience, and effectiveness. The OSDBUs provide oversight on federal rules and regulations pertaining to small business contracting and on targets and goals established by congressional and administrative decrees, such as the goal of awarding at least five percent of all prime and subcontract dollars to women-owned businesses. The purpose of this roundtable was to gain insight into how to increase the access of women-owned businesses to the federal government market.

Following the results of this discussion, the NWBC felt strongly that additional discussion on access to government markets was needed. The NWBC convened a special meeting, "Accessing Government Markets: An Issues Roundtable Discussion," on September 13, 2004. The afternoon event highlighted OSDBU "best practices" as well as experiences of women business owners in the government marketplace. Challenges and issues were further expanded through a lively discussion between Council members and audience participants. The discussion brought out several ideas and recommendations for actions that both OSDBUs and women business owners could take to streamline the government procurement process.

The format for the Issues Roundtable Discussion was an introduction to the topic by NWBC Chair Marilyn Carlson Nelson; presentations by two select panels (Panel #1 composed of representatives from OSDBUs who addressed best practices to support women-owned small business and Panel #2 composed of women business owners with different experiences and degrees of success in the government marketplace); Council and audience discussion; and a summary and wrap-up by the NWBC chair.

The report is divided into three sections: the first is a summary of the major ideas and issues related to improving access to federal government markets which were brought out during the meeting; the second section summarizes the roundtable presentations and discussions that were discussed; and the third and final section is an Appendix, which includes a list of roundtable participants and a complete transcript.

Summary of Major Ideas and Issues

The September issues Roundtable offered a venue for focusing the discussion on the role of federal OSDBUs and their interaction with women-owned businesses. Many challenges were raised, such as access to useful resources, quality control, OSDBU effectiveness, large budgets/small staff, use of GSA schedule, contract bundling, access to capital, and impact on the level of success in accessing government markets.

Members of Panel #1 presented best practices used by their respective OSDBUs to reach out to and support women business owners' access to individual federal agency markets. Panelists also shared their observations on the efficacy of these events and commented on the need for more market research and preparation by women-owned small businesses, and the need for this group to be more proactive.

The women business owners on Panel #2 shared their varying levels of success with government procurement, agreeing that preparation was key but that the procurement process was often times too time consuming, expensive, and frustrating. After both panel presentations, Council and audience participants added and expanded upon the challenges and recommendations introduced. Council members highlighted and stressed the need for more information: easy to access, available nationwide (i.e., not just within the D.C. metro area), and up-to-date.

The following major ideas, themes, and issues emerged.

Failure to Meet the Five-Percent Goal: While some federal agencies have done an excellent job of including women-owned businesses in prime and subcontracts, the overall, legislation-mandated, five-percent goal has not been reached in 16 years. This failure appeared to some as a lack of commitment on the part of federal agencies, but women-owned businesses share some of the responsibility for not aggressively pursuing certification, information, relationships, and contacts to gain contracts or subcontracts. Incentives could be offered to procurement officials to take the risk of contracting to new suppliers and provide greater access to women-owned businesses.

Role of the Federal Offices of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization: The OSDBU representatives clearly stated the actions taken by their agencies to increase the utilization of women-owned businesses. Some of these best practices were developing conferences and roundtables to describe programs and provide one-to-one contacts; providing incentives to prime contractors to sub-contract to women-owned businesses; holding training programs; developing Web sites for communication; establishing vendor outreach and mentoring programs; de-bundling large contracts into smaller sub-contracts; and providing a wealth of written materials.

Evaluation of Federal Agencies and Prime Contractors to Ensure Compliance: The OSDBU offices provide oversight of contractors and their own agencies for the inclusion of women-owned businesses. Agencies have SBA procurement-center representatives who provide oversight for the small business set-aside program and audit small business offices. Contracts should be analyzed before the re-application period to see if prime contractors are using women-owned businesses as subcontractors. Another agency monitors their prime contractors and, if they do not use their subcontractors, they will not be allowed to compete for additional work. Automated systems are used to track low-goal contractors. Automated systems should have a box related to small, women-owned business contracts.

Need for a Budgetary Set-Aside to Ensure Meeting the Five Percent Goal: Several OSDBU representatives and women business owners promoted the idea of having a budgetary set-aside for women-owned businesses similar to the one for veteran-owned businesses and small businesses in general. The competition for bidding on some requirements could then be restricted to small, women-owned businesses.

Methods of Gaining Access to Government Contracts: Women business owners need to take responsibility for positioning their businesses to take advantage of opportunities for contracting by getting on the GSA Schedule; targeting the appropriate agency by matching their services to needs; attending conferences, forums, classes, etc., to establish relationships and become informed; using Web sites to learn about contracting opportunities and the goals and structures of various agencies; and marketing directly to prime contractors or to the federal government. Businesses have the responsibility to register on corporations' diversity supplier list. Hiring a consultant might be necessary for some federal agencies and to save time and money. Marketing requires continual effort, time, and monetary expenditures.

Role of Women's Business Organizations to Provide Linkages and Information: The Women Presidents' Organization (WPO) offered to use their email contact list to pass along information from agencies and OSDBU offices. NWBC could serve as a portal for information and provide linkage between organizations. NWBC could offer an event for women business owners to learn about various agencies and establish contacts. The Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) annual conference reaching 2,000 certified women business owners could be used by agencies and OSDBU offices to provide information and contacts.

Summary of Presentations and Discussions

Welcome

Julie Weeks, Executive Director, National Women's Business Council, welcomed everyone to the Roundtable Discussion on Access to Government Markets. The purpose of NWBC roundtables is to gain input from the women's business community to help NWBC fulfill its mission. NWBC's mission is to inform the U.S. President, the U.S. Small Business Administration, and Congress what policies and programs could be changed, implemented, or improved to better support women's business enterprises at all stages of development.

Introductory Remarks

Marilyn Carlson Nelson, Council Chair, informed the group that the NWBC was bi-partisan, federally funded, and advisory in nature. The Council conducts research, promotes roundtable discussions, contacts individual women business owners, and holds conferences and other meetings on policy issues of importance to women business owners.

Women-owned businesses are growing at twice the rate of those owned by men. If agencies and large corporations work with these small businesses, the economy could be re-vitalized by their innovation, job creation, and ingenuity. The quality and effectiveness of services could be improved, and the tension around outsourcing could be reduced by improving access of small, women-owned businesses to agencies and their purchasing operations. This roundtable would be a way to learn about the issues, the best practices, and the barriers related to small businesses.

While the federal contract dollars spent on women-owned businesses have significantly increased over the past few years, the goal of five percent has not been achieved government-wide, although several OSDBUs have exceeded the goal. An updated report about federal contracting with women-owned businesses will be issued soon. Members will be notified by email, and the report will be on the NWBC Web site WomenBiz.gov. The Web site has helped to make the procurement process more understandable, provides links to information about gaining access to federal markets, and links with each member organization.

It was clear from the previous experts' roundtable that the roles of OSDBUs are important points of entry for small business owners, both male and female. This roundtable would focus on the role of OSDBUs in reaching out to women business owners, how best practices could be shared and improved, and what preparations women business owners could take to build relationships with OSDBUs. Representatives from OSDBUs and women entrepreneurs would share their experiences, successes, and challenges in opening access to the government market place.

Panel #1: OSDBU Representatives

Susan Wilson Solovic, CEO, Small Business Television (SBTVD), Moderator, introduced the panel members, who discussed contracting with the OSDBUs.

Karen Conti, Vice-President, Epsilon Systems Solutions, Inc., Arlington, Virginia, and the U.S. Navy's Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA) Program.

Mary Ellen Dorsey, Small Business Advocate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Shirley Perez, Small Business Advisor, National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Sherry Cohen, Program Analyst, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Karen Conti, NAVSEA, described the U.S. Navy's NAVSEA program as one of the Navy's five-system commands that is responsible for one-fifth of the Navy's budget – approximately twenty billion dollars. The Program Executive Office Submarines has approximately 509 military and civilian employees at NAVSEA Headquarters in Washington, D.C.; 205 employees at SUBMEP in New Hampshire; and numerous other programs, shipyards, and warfare centers that support the building of submarines. For the first four Virginia Class Submarines, the prime contractors had goals for women-owned businesses in their contract, but said they could not find women-owned businesses to help build the submarines.

To remedy this situation, **Richard McNamara**, PEO Submarine Deputy of Team Submarine, developed a two-day, women-owned business conference at Sweet Briar College, Lynchburg, Virginia, in October 2004. The conference's purpose was to describe the program and to provide one-on-one contact with the program's staff, contractors, the shipyards, integrators, and some service providers. Approximately 100 women attended and had contact with 20 staff from different organizations. In addition, in the contract for the next batch of submarines, incentives were increased for women-owned businesses, and award fees were offered to shipbuilders for meeting those incentives.

Team Submarine also has another program called the Small Business Innovative Research Program (SBIR) that provides opportunities for women-owned businesses to obtain contracts worth \$100,000 to several million dollars. Team Submarine provides training on the SBIR Program, because they recognize that by bringing in small businesses, costs will be lowered. The next conference will be held in October 2005, and NWBC members can get on the mailing list and obtain information from the SBIR Web site. Bookmarks were distributed with names and contact information on key Team Submarine contract managers and prime contractors.

Mary Ellen Dorsey, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), encouraged the members to visit the DHS website, www.dhs.gov/openforbusiness, that provides information on acquisitions, small business procurement assistance, state and local government grants, and the SBIR program. The Web site describes the department and lists small business specialists, program managers, and prime contractors as sources for sub-contracts. One of the best practices is their vendor outreach session. Appointments can be made with small business specialists, information technology program managers, and prime contractors. DHS representatives are available at many conferences. A yearly March event is set aside for women-owned businesses to speak with DHS representatives. The DHS Web site provides information on the vendor outreach program and conferences where DHS has representatives.

Shirley Perez, Small Business Advisor, National Air and Space Administration (NASA), addressed three concerns:

1. NASA efforts to meet the five-percent target
2. How issues are addressed and the target met
3. Specific new programs or initiatives

First, NASA has achieved its women-owned business goal of 5.5 percent, including 2.5 percent in direct contracts and 3.0 percent in subcontracts. Eighty-five percent of NASA dollars are awarded to large companies. For procurement, a uniform methodology is used to achieve aggressive goals; and for acquisition, a management strategy process is followed. For large procurements, both large and small businesses are invited to Washington, D.C., to discuss issues. Recently, two large contracts—the space station contract and the SEESAW contract—were de-bundled. The space station was a \$20,000,000 contract that was divided into five smaller contracts of which two were for small businesses. The SEESAW contract was divided into five smaller contracts.

Secondly, issues that need to be addressed are developing a set-aside for women-owned businesses and bringing more businesses into the high-tech area in existing programs. NASA provides a wealth of programs, which are available to women-owned businesses, as follows:

- An aerospace technology forum is held quarterly.
- Three aerospace centers—Dryden Flight Research Center, Glenn Research Center, and Langley Research Center—hold forums each year to which five small businesses are invited to make presentations to NASA end users and prime contractors.
- A semi-annual forum sponsored by the Goddard Space Flight Center brings small business owners together with NASA technical end users and prime contractors.
- The JPL High Tech Conference is held every March for large and small businesses.
- The Small Business Solution Conference is held in the early fall.
- The Small Business and Advanced Technology Support training program is held four times a year and teaches small businesses how to work with NASA.
- Supplier diversity training teaches procurement people to consider small businesses when writing contracts.
- A Mentor Protégé Program provides points to the mentor when they have a protégé.
- Award ceremonies recognize women-of-the-year contractors.
- A Minority Business Advisory Committee advises the NASA administrator on how to improve access for small businesses.

A major new program or initiative is the development of a Web site that will list women-owned businesses and provide information about their projects, services, and officers. A new publication, *The Role of Small Businesses and The Return to Flight Initiative*, is underdevelopment. A list of small business specialists available nationwide would provide a way to get in touch with end users and learn about new requirements.

Sherry Cohen, Program Analyst, U.S. Department of Agriculture, reported that USDA made their five-percent goal last year for contracts to women-owned businesses. The OSDBU office would like to see a set-aside or restrictive competition in the procurement process for women-owned businesses. Small, women-owned businesses could take advantage of the food-commodity expenditures program that makes up 50 percent of the procurement budget. Outreach activities consist of a vendor outreach program on the second Wednesday every month and a roundtable discussion of representatives of associations and small businesses on the first Tuesday of every month.

In the OSDBU office, contracts are reviewed, along with the SBA Procurement Center Representative, to ascertain why set-asides are not directed towards the small business community. Procurement forecast documents provide another way to learn what the department is interested in purchasing. Suppliers should educate themselves on the department's functions, structure, and mission to be able to tell buyers how their business might be able to supply the department's needs. The department also has an award program that recognizes small and women-owned businesses that have provided exemplary products and services.

Questions and Comments to OSDBU Representatives from Council Members

The moderator, Susan Wilson Solovic, opened up the question and comment period by offering to disseminate information from the OSDBU offices to the audience of SBTV's Small Business Television, 52 percent of which are women business owners. The email address is Susan@SBTV.com. Questions and comments from council members and the audience evoked the following information and issues.

How to Gain and Improve Access to a Government Services Administration (GSA) Schedule

The GSA has classes in the Washington, D.C., area and the regions, as well as classes on-line, which help businesses understand the process. If businesswomen do not have the time to spend attending classes, they could contact the GSA local Procurement Technical Assistance Programs. Information also can be obtained from GSA.gov about getting on the schedule.

In response to a query, OSDBU representatives did not know how many women-owned businesses were on the GSA Schedule.

The Department of Homeland Security uses the GSA Schedule, and the procurement process is reviewed by the OSDBU office. NAVSEA has a rule that out of every three contracts, one must be solicited from a women-owned business. The Women Presidents' Organization (WPO) offered to use their email contact with a thousand women business owners to pass along information from agencies and OSDBU offices. The DHS vendor outreach sessions are on their Web site and on vendorbids.gov, where there is a list of women-owned business advocates. The OSDBU.gov Web site has links to all of the agency Web sites and a listing of outreach activities. One-on-one counseling is available at NASA by appointment. Vendors need do some pre-screening by visiting Web sites and learning which agencies have a need for their products and services. In addition to agency OSDBU Web sites, the best overall Web site for women business owners is WomenBiz.gov.

NWBC could serve as a portal for information from government agencies to improve access to the federal procurement process. The Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) annual conference has 2,000 attendees every year who are certified WBEs and are the perfect target group for OSDBUs.

Making Tools Available to Women-Owned Business that are Available to Small Businesses in General, including the Use of Set-asides

At present there is a set-aside for small businesses, but not one exclusively for women-owned businesses. Forums are for all small businesses and cannot be restricted to women-owned only. For some requirements, the competition for bidding can be restricted to small businesses. If there are small businesses that can respond to the requirement, the department should use the set-aside. OSDBU offices oversee buying activities to ensure compliance with the law relating to Federal acquisition regulations. USDA has an SBA procurement center representative, who also provides oversight for the small business set-aside programs.

Women-owned businesses should be at least seven percent of the twenty-three percent set-aside for small businesses. To improve the situation, an incentive is needed for procurement officials to take the risk of using a new supplier and provide greater access to women-owned businesses. On recent multi-year procurement in the NAVSEA submarine program, the goal has been raised to 45 percent for all small businesses, including women-owned and minority-owned businesses, on all subcontracted amounts. A large incentive fee for shipbuilders has increased sub-contracting to small businesses

Analysis at End of Three-Year Average Length of Contract

The average length of a contract is three years, but if the procurement official picks the same supplier, then it would be another three years before any change can be made. An analysis of the supplier list at the time of re-application, focusing on being inclusive to women-owned businesses, would be helpful. At the Department of Agriculture, the OSDBU Director evaluates agency administrators on their participation, outreach, and achievement of the goals.

Evaluation of Prime Contractors for Actual Inclusion of Small Women-Owned Businesses

The concern was whether prime contractors are evaluated or scored based on the actual inclusion and employment of subcontractors at the time of renewal as opposed to those who merely provide lip service. NAVSEA responded that prime contractors are looking for women-owned and other small businesses because of the requirements and to see if they can add value to the team. Both the Defense Department and the SBA do compliance reviews every year on defense contracts. A new electronics subcontracting reporting system is under development that will improve reporting.

Mr. Kevin Boshears, Vice Chair of the OSDBU Council and Director of the OSDBU at the Department of Homeland Security, responded that there are several efforts to ensure the effectiveness of their sub-contracting plan in using small businesses. The first is the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) that provides guidance on how contracts are put together and strengthens the sub-contracting pool. The second is the Mentor Protégé Program that is a business development program for small businesses. Thirdly, at a meeting with prime contractors, it was learned that small businesses market directly to the federal government, and lastly, small businesses could market directly to the prime contractors. In addition, DHS monitors subcontracts with SBA, commercial market representatives, and various audit agencies.

Timing of the RFPs to Avoid Late Applications

In relation to RFPs and announcements on the Web site, are decisions already made so that new businesses are too late in applying? At NAVSEA, the decision is not made at the time of the RFP announcement; however, contractors learn about new contracts from procurement forecasts, conferences, and Web sites. Subcontractors need to contact OSDBUs about a year in advance to learn who the current contractor is and position themselves to become part of their team.

Strategies of Successful Small Businesses in the Federal Marketplace

DHS recommended four avenues to achieve success in obtaining subcontracts:

1. Reviewing all of the applicable background information.
2. Understanding the vehicles of communication and contracting such as open market buying, FedBizOpps, use of pre-existing contracts, and the GSA Schedule.
3. Participating in small business outreach efforts on a selective basis.
4. Evaluating all of the methods of contracting including prime contracting, sub-contracting, team arrangements, and mentor protégé relationships.

Responsibilities of Women-Owned Businesses to Gain Access

The National Women's Business Council could offer an event for women-owned businesses to learn from various agencies about contracting opportunities and building relationships, but women business owners need to take responsibility for gaining access. Business owners make the process more efficient by being selective, gathering information, and being realistic. All of the RFPs are measured against the same criteria including technical capabilities, management, and past performance. Finding out about major opportunities by visiting

Web sites, attending procurement opportunity days, and networking with prime contractors is essential to obtain advance notification. Hiring a consultant might be necessary with the Defense Department. Entering into team agreements with prime contractors with carefully defined roles and guarantees is another avenue.

Questions and Comments: Audience Discussion

Additional concerns and ways to gain access to federal government contracts were contributed by the panel and the audience as follows:

- The Minority Business Research Advisory Council under NASA provides an opportunity for small businesses to make recommendations to the NASA Administrator. The same type of Council for women business owners might be helpful.
- A radio show, called Business and Technology Insider Radio, interviews OSDBUs from agencies. The show can be reached at www.btiradio.com from 1:00-2:00 p.m. or later from the archives.
- Paladin International will hold a conference on Marketing to the Federal Government from November 2–4, 2004. Departments such as Homeland Security, Commerce and the Army would be profiled.
- Using a consultant to help with the GSA Schedule can be a savings in time, labor and lost opportunities. The process should be simplified.
- Being included in a prime contractor's team is not difficult, but getting a subcontract is more problematical.
- The U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) monitors contracts and if the prime contractor does not use their subcontractors, they will not be allowed to compete for additional work.
- If solicitations have award-fee type contracts that state they have to achieve their women-owned business goal or they will lose money, then the chances are higher that they will use women business subcontractors.
- NASA uses an automated system to track the activity of contractors and subcontractors. The nation-wide system can be accessed by every contract officer and the OSDBU office. If there are low-goal reports, the OSDBU contacts the small business specialist to find out the reason. Procurement management surveys are used to perform audits of the small business offices. A performance evaluation form is completed by the contractor at the end of the contract. In the future, the form will have a box related to achieving the goal of sub-contracting to small businesses. The actual prime contractors and subcontractors can be identified on the automated system.

Panel #2: Women Business Owners' (WBO) Representatives

Mary J. MacRae, Moderator and Owner MJM Enterprises, representing the National Association of Women of Women Business Owners (NAWBO), recognized several leaders of the NAWBO who have been working on issues important to women entrepreneurs, such as procurement. In 1988, HR. 5050 was signed into law to increase access to federal contracting opportunities, and included the establishment of the National Women's Business Council, federal requirements for procurement, and access to capital requirements. Yet, 16 years later the goal of five percent for women-owned business contracts has not been met.

The following panel members were introduced as having had government procurement experiences:

Mildred Boyd, Ph.D., President, Edutech Ltd. Inc., Silver Spring, Maryland

Deirdre Magee, Vice President of Operations, Career Management International, Inc., Reston, Virginia

Claire Gastañaga, Principal, CG2 Consulting, Richmond, Virginia

Dr. Mildred Boyd, Edutech, stated that there were four things that are important in being a business: 1) be prepared, 2) develop relationships, 3) be well educated and 4) find a niche. Edutech has worked with higher education institutions to help universities with career programs for minorities and with NASA on outreach to minority institutions. NASA helped them become certified in one of the SBA programs. The company is featured in *Minority Women and Business Owners* magazine. Their niche was knowledge and sharing. At present, they perform program management training to help certify program managers.

The process is one of continual marketing and continually developing relationships, which leads to contracts with other agencies or other contacts. It is important to have vehicles that agencies can use. For example, they are on the GSA Schedule, are a certified 8a, and have a small, woman-owned business certification. Edutech does both prime contracting and subcontracting.

Deirdre Magee, Career Management International, Inc. (CMI) provided her views on marketing and sales in the government marketplace. The company is on the GSA Schedule now, but had three government contracts through the Department of Defense and from being registered on PRO-Net. These contracts were obtained through contacts who invited them to bid competitively on one contract; and also to become a sole source contractor on two contracts, because of their personnel security clearances. Just being on the GSA Schedule does not bring contracts, it is necessary to establish relationships, promote your services, fill an agency need, and attend conferences. CMI has not been successful with RFPs.

GSA provided CMI with useful marketing material about local Procurement Technical Assistance Programs. CMI has done OSDBU shows for the Army, the State Department, and the Department of Energy. The relationship with NASA proved helpful by introducing them to a large North American corporation. This contact evolved into a teaming agreement and a sub-contract. Contacts made at OSDBU shows have to be followed up continuously. The OSDBU representatives introduced them to the human resource staff that actually purchased their services.

Claire Gastañaga, GC2, a consulting firm that specializes in business and public policy advocacy services for women- and minority-owned businesses, brought to the audience a strategic perspective on government procurement, as a member of NAWBO's National Procurement Taskforce. She stated she spoke on the panel as a private businessperson and not as a spokesperson for NAWBO. She shared information about a NAWBO national member survey showing that 50 percent did not choose to get SBA certification because they did not see a return on the investment. Another problem is the selection of majority women business owners over minority ones.

Women business owners have a perception that the federal government lacks a commitment to contract with small, women-owned businesses. For an SBA study of the need for set-asides, it has taken three years just to get a statement of methodology from the National Science Foundation. By contrast, it only took six months to obtain a set-aside for veteran-owned businesses—not 16 years, as for women-owned businesses. This reinforces the perception of a lack of commitment.

The differences between big-dollar and small-dollar initiatives need to be addressed. In Virginia, even though all contracts under \$100,000 are defined as an automatic set-aside for small businesses, 97.7 percent of all businesses are small businesses, so this does not favor women-owned businesses. An SBA pilot study to see if the set-aside would be helpful for small businesses that are under 15 employees and one million dollars has yet to be completed. Much procurement in federal and state governments is done through informal procedures, such as buying from GSA or with a request for a quote, and these have the least amount of

oversight for performance. For many women-owned businesses, \$50,000 is a big contract, so they need to be aware of these informal procedures. In Virginia, 80 percent of the money is committed to 20 percent of the actions, but even the 20 percent for smaller contracts represents a lot of money. In 2002, Housing and Urban Development (HUD) had the best record for the highest percentage of both actions and dollars.

Questions and Comments from the Council

The following topics and issues were expressed by Council members and Panelists.

Role of NWBC in Assessing Business Capabilities

NWBC could help to assess the capabilities of its member businesses, search out opportunities, and match businesses with existing contracting opportunities. Businesses have to register with large contractors on their diversity supplier list. NWBC could develop a capability statement and a list of services used by different organizations. It would help women-owned businesses to target agencies that could use their services. Both the NAWBO and the WBENC could help to streamline access to business opportunities. NWBC also could provide the SBA with existing opportunities to communicate with their members to avoid overlap and conflicts. Businesses have the responsibility to register on corporations' diversity supplier lists.

Demonstration of Past Performance and Viability

A certain level of past performance is needed to demonstrate viability for entering the governmental contracting system. Businesses may need NWBC's help in progressing to the second and third stages of business proficiency. However, past performance could be assessed from small purchase contracts. NWBC could help businesses obtain the small purchase contracts to meet the requirements of the GSA schedule. The GSA Schedule serves as a pre-qualification mechanism.

Edutech documents its employment by large contractors, so this can be used as past performance. An evaluation form is used to document the services. Businesses need to update their information in PRO-Net, because federal OSDBUs use that system to ascertain past performance.

Investment in Women-Owned Businesses

Information should be disseminated to women's organizations about the need for capital, so they could invest in women-owned businesses.

Conversion of Relationships to Contracts or Projects with the OSDBU

It is important that applicants comply with the requirements in the GSA Schedule. Technology is used to determine whether businesses have actually performed certain services.

Tracking the Size of Contracts in Relation to Agencies' Total Budgets

The systems for accountability and tracking are available, but are not being used on the front end as much as possible. It is important to make sure that the subcontracting system actually works. For businesses to move from start-up to sustainability, getting into the lower levels is very important.

Difficulty of Building Relationships between Federal Agencies and Businesses outside the Washington, D.C., Area

One business spent an incredible amount of time trying to get on the appropriate GSA Schedule and to contact the proper persons in various departments. A lot of misinformation was provided. It is extremely difficult and time-consuming to build relationships unless your business is located in the area. However, websites were very helpful in finding information. Also, a one-day meeting is held every July and October to allow businesses to meet with agencies. Registration is on-line.

DHS recommended using the yellow pages in the local telephone directory to find government agencies in the same community. PTAPs can help to locate the proper contact persons. Attendance at agencies' vendor outreach sessions is vital. Some of the ways to reach federal agencies regionally or locally were provided:

- NASA has regional offices that can be contacted.
- USDA has both state and county offices, some of which provide contracts.
- The Navy's Seaport Enhance Contract is de-centralized into seven geographic areas that issue RFPs to prime contractors.

Businesses need to figure out their niche, target the market, obtain the necessary information, and establish relationships and team up with prime contractors or submit an application as a prime contractor.

Efficient Dissemination of Information

Several women's business organizations, such as NWBC, NAWBO, WPO, Shan Industries, and WBENC, disseminate information on business opportunities, vendor days, and seminar schedules, but a tighter network of dissemination is needed. Women business owners should use these information resources.

Procurement Budget Information

It is difficult to determine what procurements are being budgeted by departments. In-depth knowledge of a department is required. At NAVSEA, the Seaport Web site is in the public domain, and a Quarterly Forecast indicates upcoming procurements. Prime contractors are listed and these contracts can be tracked for five years. To reduce the overwhelming number of opportunities, businesses should focus on those that are geographically close or that are a good match for their services. Registration on the SADBUs Web sites provides automatic notification.

A panel member cautioned that not all of the contracts are in the Quarterly Forecast. If you wait for the FBO, the request for quote, or the solicitation, it will be too late. Historical information on what happened to a submission also is difficult to track. However, every business that bids on a federal contract has the right to get a de-briefing in person on the reasons they were not selected. The awarded contracts are proprietary and not available to other contractors, so the debriefing is the best way to learn about the differentiating factors.

Centralization of Information about Potential Contracts

There is no one place that provides step-by-step information on government contracts. For DHS, the website www.dhs.gov/openforbusiness provides information on prime and subcontract opportunities, as well as grant money funded by state and local governments. Other DHS programs are the SBIR program, Broad Agency Announcements, and Science and Technology. Ideally, information on existing contracts, including contractors and length of contracts, should be listed alongside new opportunities.

At the USDA, there are many different points of contact including agencies, bureaus, and divisions. Purchases are made at different locations, vary in procedures, and can be open competition or set-asides. Almost every federal department has a document that describes how to do business with that department. The Federal Procurement Data Setup, FPDS.gov, is a compilation of what every federal department is buying. The GSA Web site lists products and services federal departments are buying.

Tools to Help Businesses Understand the Process

A flow chart or pamphlet that describes how to approach doing business with the Federal government would be helpful. Having a mentor who is knowledgeable about the process would save a lot of time, energy, and effort.

Return on Investment

It is important to determine if the profit margin allowed by the federal government is worth the time and expenditure to become a contractor. One company's expenditure for a part-time staff was \$9,000, and lots of

paperwork and calling was needed to find out what was happening, just to get on the GSA Schedule. The GSA schedule has not provided a return to the company at the present time. Large contracts were obtained through PRO-Net or from the Department of Defense.

Questions and Comments: Audience Discussion

The following ideas and concerns were expressed by members of the audience:

- The Department of Defense has done an excellent job in contracting to women-owned businesses.
- To reach the five-percent level for all agencies, it is necessary to have more accountability, oversight, and penalties for not subcontracting to small, women-owned businesses.
- Businesses should start with one agency and learn everything about that particular agency.
- PRO-Net, now the Central Contracting Registry (CCR), is useful for marketing information and it is required to register there for any government contract. CCR does not replace contacting agencies directly or meeting people at trade shows.
- WBENC has had an enormous impact in the past seven years in communicating with corporate purchasers and their suppliers.
- NWBC needs to supply coordination and leadership through a coordinating committee that meets more than once a year.
- A procurement handbook, on-line or printed, is needed to provide basic information on the commonalities in procuring government contracts.
- Linkages should be established between the WBO groups and the OSDBUs on an on-going basis. This could be done at the state and local levels also.
- OSDBUs could create WBO advisor councils staffed by the women-owned business advocates in every agency.
- Small businesses should team up with a prime contractor and learn how to procure contracts from them.
- NWBC could provide a resource of screens, consultants, and organizations that would work with women-owned businesses that want to get into government contracting.
- Involvement with the National Contract Management Association can provide access to government representatives and contractors.

Closing Remarks

Marilyn Carlson Nelson, Council Chair, concluded the meeting by thanking the OSDBU representatives and the audience for their participation. The common goal is to improve the economy by producing innovative ideas, allowing accessibility, inclusiveness and competitiveness. The Council has historically encouraged more access to information, streamlining of the application process, simplifying of the paperwork, and clarifying of the meaning of bundling. The Council did a study of mentoring and how it increases the chances of success and should be able to facilitate specific mentoring of government contracts. The Council's model programs for the public and private sectors have increased contract awards to women-owned businesses.

The next step will be a report of the meeting, which will be available around the first of the year. Participants were encouraged to send a written statement of examples, ideas, or clarifications for the report by email to

the Council. The meeting report should continue the learning process and growth to create jobs and career opportunities for women.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Following September 13, the NWBC held two teleconferences to review the points raised during the roundtable and to discuss future actions. Based on the issues discussed, the following actions are being undertaken:

- Disseminate notices on Government procurement activities and events to the Council and others to be more proactive in linking women business owners to government contracting offices and OSDBUs.
- The womenbiz.gov site will be updated and revised to be even more dynamic and inclusive. It will be increasingly promoted among women business owners and women business organizations.
- A study on “best practices” of OSDBUs to reach out to and recruit more women business owners has been initiated and is underway.
- NWBC staff has been directed to increase involvement with OSDBUs and OSDBUs’ women business owner advocates:
 - Staff will sponsor meetings with women business advocates of OSDBUs to raise their awareness of the special challenges of women business owners and collect from them recommendations on how women business owners can better access Government markets.
 - Staff will attend OSDBU vendor outreach activities and provide information on the NWBC.
 - Staff will continue to participate in monthly OSDBU Council meetings and events.

The National Women’s Business Council continues to monitor rising concerns regarding government procurement from both women business owners’ and OSDBUs’ perspectives.

APPENDICES

- A. List of Participants
- B. Complete Transcript

Appendix A: List of Participants

Alma Alfaro-Laska

Economist
International Business
Washington, DC

Ann Marie Almeida

Association of Women's Business Centers
Camden, ME

Jeraline Artis

Procurement Analyst
Defense Facilities Directorate
Contracting Office
Washington, DC

Jill Baker

Director of Research
National Women's Business Council
Washington, DC

Karen Baker

Procurement Analyst
HQ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Small Business Office, USACE
Washington, DC

Kevin Boshears

Director, OSDDBU
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC

Mildred Boyd, Ph.D.

President
Edu Tech Ltd., Inc.
Silver Spring, MD

Janice Buffler

SADBU Director
Pentagon Renovation
and Construction Program
Arlington, VA

Marilyn Carlson Nelson

Chairman/CEO
Carlson Companies
Minneapolis, MN

Sherry Cohen

Program Analyst
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Silver Spring, MD

Marc Comer

Democratic Professional Staff Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business
& Entrepreneurship
Washington, DC

Karen Conti

Vice President
Epsilon Systems Solutions, Inc.
Arlington, VA

Warren Corbett

Editor
Business Research Services, Inc.
Bethesda, MD

Trish Culbreth

Small Business Representative
U.S. Department of State
Washington, DC

Deborah Cundy

Office of the Chair
Carlson Companies
Minneapolis, MN

Mary Ellen Dorsey

Small Business Advocate
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC

Marsha Firestone, Ph.D.

President/Founder
Women Presidents' Organization
New York, NY

Claire Guthrie Gastañaga

Principal
CG2 Consulting
Richmond, VA

Wilma Goldstein

Associate Administrator
Office of Women Business Ownership
National Women's Business Council
Washington, DC

Donna Mullen Good
President and CEO
Center for Women & Enterprise
Boston, MA

Angel Graves
Procurement Analyst
Department of Health and Human Services
OSDBU
Washington, DC

Jesse Greene
Director of Business Development
Maricom Systems, Inc.
Baltimore, MD

Susan Hager
CEO/Chair
Hager Sharp, Inc.
Washington, DC

Willette Hamilton
Business and Industry Specialist
U.S. Department of Commerce
Washington, DC

Eppie Hankins
Vice President
Operations and Business Development
BETAH Associates, Inc.
Bethesda, MD

Winsome Humphrey
Senior Account Executive
Maricom Systems, Inc.
Baltimore, MD

E. Jean Johnson
President/CEO
Legal Watch
Houston, TX

Sharon Jones
SADBU
Defense Information Systems Agency
Arlington, VA

Karen Kerrigan
President
Women Entrepreneurs, Inc.
Washington, DC

Aileen Kishaba
Director, Policy Programs
National Women's Business Council
Washington, DC

Claudia Laird
Vice President
Ability Center
San Diego, CA

Dan Lee
E2 Program Manager
CW Government Travel
Alexandria, VA

Virginia Littlejohn
Co-Chair and CEO
Project TSUNAMI
Washington, DC

Ella Luke
Director CRD
Office of Surety Guarantees/SBA
Washington, DC

Mary MacRae
Owner/Senior Consultant
MJM Enterprises
Ashland, TN

Deirdre Magee
Vice President of Operations
Career Management International, Inc.
Reston, VA

Ferguise Mayronne
Program Analyst
U.S. Department of Transportation
Washington, DC

Laurie McDonald Jonsson
President/CEO
Stellar International
Seattle, WA

Sara Mitcho
Program Manager
Air Force Office SADBU
Arlington, VA

Emily Murphy

Senior Advisor/Acting Associate Administrator
Small Business Administration, Government
Contracting and Business Development
Washington, DC

Terry Neese**Barbara Kasoff**

Co-Founders
Women Impacting Public Policy
Oklahoma City, OK

Sheri Orlowitz

Chairman/CEO
Shan Industries, LLC
Washington, DC

Shirley Perez

Small Business Advisor
NASA Headquarters
Washington, DC

Amanda Perl

Director, Program Development
National Association of Women
Business Owners (NAWBO)
McLean, VA

Susan Phillips Bari

President
Women's Business Enterprise
National Council (WBENC)
Washington, DC

Annie Presley

Principal/Owner
The McKellar Group, Inc.
Kansas City, MO

Judy Shifflett

WOSB Program Manager
Department of the Army
Washington, DC

Linda Sitney

Small Business Specialist
Veterans Affairs
Washington, DC

Susan Solovic

CEO
SBTV
St. Louis, MO

Erma Spell

President
CW Government Travel
Alexandria, VA

Katherine Stanley

Administrative Officer
National Women's Business Council
Washington, DC

Karen Swanson

Business Development Manager
1st Choice Staffing and Consulting
Calverton, MD

Ann Sullivan

Federal Legislative Consultant
Washington, DC

Terry Toomey

President
Paladin International
Alexandria, VA

Linda Waters

Acting Assistant Administrator
Office of Contract Assistance for Women
Business Owners
Washington, DC

Julie Weeks

Executive Director
National Women's Business Council
Washington, DC

Angela Williams

Small Business Advocate
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC

Cindi Williams

Special Assistant to the Office of Public Liaison
SBA/The White House
Washington, DC

Elisse Wright JD, Ph.D.

Career Development Project Manager
Edu Tech, Ltd.
Silver Spring, MD

Linda Wright

Director
Small Business Program
Naval Facilities Engineering Command
Washington, DC

Barbara Wrigley

Executive Director
Women's Business Center of Northern Virginia
Springfield, VA

Appendix B: Complete Transcript

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KEYNOTE: “---” denotes inaudible in the transcript.
“*” denotes word was phonetically spelled.

WELCOME
Julie Weeks, Executive Director

(1:07 p.m.)

MS. WEEKS: Good afternoon, everybody.

(Chorus of “Good afternoon”)

MS. WEEKS: My name is Julie Weeks. I am the Executive Director of the National Women’s Business Council. I would like to welcome all of you, today, to our roundtable discussion on Access to Government Markets.

Roundtables, such as this one, is one of the ways that the National Women’s Business Council gathers feedback information input from the women’s business community, to help us fulfill our mission, which is to tell the President, the Congress and the Small Business Administration, what is going on with small business owners, women-owned businesses, especially, and what policies and programs can be changed, implemented, improved to make things better for women-owned businesses.

My goal here, this morning is, we are going to greet you, to let you know—I think you have already figured out, we have refreshments in the back of the room. So please, any of you, if you get thirsty or feel the need, step up and go back anytime during this afternoon, grab a little munchie or something to drink.

For those of you who have not visited them yet, back on the other side of the elevators, on this side of the building, is where the ladies room is. On the other side is where the men’s room is. So also, anytime you feel the need to do that, please avail yourselves to the restrooms.

Also, I would like to ask those of you who have cell phones or pagers, to please either turn them off or mute them so that we do not get interrupted with ringing during this afternoon.

Let me briefly introduce you to the members of the National Women’s Business Council. Annie Presley is from Kansas City, Missouri. Anne Marie Almeida is the CEO of the Association of Women’s Business Centers, based in Maine. Claudia Laird is from San Diego, California. Karen Kerrigan is an entrepreneur from the Washington, DC area. Susan Solovic is from St. Louis, Missouri. Our Chair, Marilyn Carlson Nelson is from Minneapolis, St. Paul, Minnesota. Mary MacRae is the Past President of the National Association of Women Business Owners and is from the Nashville, Tennessee area. Laurie McDonald Johnson is from the Seattle area and Jean Johnson is from Houston, Texas.

With that, I would like to turn things over to our Chair, Marilyn Carlson Nelson.

ROUNDTABLE INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Marilyn Carlson Nelson, Council Chair

MS. NELSON: Thank you Julie, and thank you all for being here. We are most appreciative of your joining us today. I hope you would give us a little—some female enthusiasm as we regroup. We have not seen each other for a while and I think many of us have been working on various aspects of our agenda. And it is just exciting to be back together and to be continuing this kind of discussion.

Let me take you back a moment and remind you, if you have not, sort of, focused on it recently, which you may not have, not being part of the National Women’s Business Council. But, this organization is bipartisan. It is federally funded, advisory body. And the mission is to bring fact-based information and the voices of women business owners to Federal policymakers on issues that are important to the women’s business community.

We do this by conducting research, having discussions like this, which is actually the continuation of a discussion that was begun, actually, years ago, and by speaking to women business owners individually, and at conferences and other meetings.

Every year we forward policy recommendations to the President, to the Congress and to the SBA. Just this past February, together with the Department of Commerce and Project Tsunami, the Council co-hosted an expert's roundtable on Access to Markets. And my guess is that some of you, actually, were participants in that event.

It had to do with access to markets, to corporate markets, to international markets, and of course, to government markets.

From these discussions, several challenges and best practices were identified. A challenge that was often mentioned was the role of the Offices of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization, or the OSDBUs, as somehow, you all seem to be lovingly called.

The questions that were raised were, why are some government OSDBUs actually easier to work with? Were the staff as eager and more supportive and more receptive? Why do some OSDBUs lack experience working with women-owned businesses? Why do some OSDBUs lack top-level support, or executive level support, so to speak? Or, the authority to actually effectively work with women-owned businesses?

The role and the function of OSDBUs have expanded and have changed over the past several years. We realize that many of you in these roles are now being tasked with overseeing Federal rules and regulations pertaining to small business contracting as well as targets and goals established by congressional and administrative decrees—such as the goal for Federal agencies to award at least 5 percent of all prime and subcontract dollars to women-owned business.

Before I go back to that goal, just as an aside, I would like to comment that I am actually the CEO of a large women-owned business. Certainly, relatively large, when you think of the businesses that we tend, most often, to represent here. And I have a passion for the mission and the objectives of this particular Council. Why is that? It is not because I see women-owned businesses as pushing and needing to have equal opportunity, et cetera. I do see that. But I actually believe that, increasingly, there is going to be an important quote that, as the demographics of the country change, as this trend, this extraordinary trend that women are starting business at twice the rate of men, that there is so much innovation. There is so much creativity in these small businesses, both male and female, and certainly, minority-owned and majority-owned operations.

There is so much creativity and so much cutting edge capability, that if we can actually open our minds and our agencies, and our thinking and our corporations to working with these companies and to help them, whether they pair with other large companies or pair with other small companies, or operate individually where their individual capability fits, we are going to bring more vitality to this economy.

We are going to bring better quality services and more creativity and more innovation. And this whole tension that we have around outsourcing in our country has to do with creativity, job creation, next levels of ingenuity and innovation. And if we somehow go from only those enormous corporations that are, kind of, inside of the beltway that have, historically, been serving us all the way to outsourcing, we have missed a huge resource that this economy has to offer.

So, we are collectively working on making sure that we open up this process in a way that the new voices can be heard. And that people with new technology that maybe are not known and do not have traditional relationships, can get enough access that they can work with all of you, and with the others in your agencies and your purchasing operations, to bring the next level thinking, the next level creativity, the next level of cost savings and effectiveness to the market.

So this is a big goal for us, and a big passion. And I hope you will sense, as we work through the day, that we want to hear from you and what your issues are. We want you to hear from some of the small businesses that have had experienced what best practices are, what some of the barriers are. And then, we

need, collectively, to bring our best thinking to what the next steps are and how we can make more progress.

As you know, the goal for the 5 percent was established ten years ago and it has not, yet, been achieved government-wide. But there has been, and we have to acknowledge that what gets measured does get managed. And there has been progress.

There has been a significant increase in Federal contract dollars spent with women-owned businesses over the past years—from 2.4 percent in fiscal year '99 to 3 percent in '03.

The overall share of contract actions, all these things become important. You probably know it a lot better than I do. The overall share of contract actions awarded to women-owned, small businesses was 5.3 percent in '03 and that was up, from 3.8 in '99. So you really are moving the dial. And we thank you for that.

There are several OSDBUs who have met and exceeded the goal, and there are others who are increasing the percentage of awards to women-owned businesses. By the way, the Council is going to be releasing an updated report. Perhaps the same as our last one, we are going to update that August 2003 issue, what we called an issue with grief*, about Federal contracting with women-owned businesses. You could watch for an update next month.

If you are on our database, you are going to be notified by email and it is going to be also available on our website. And if you are not on the database, I suggest that you speak to either Julie or Aileen Kishaba, who is in the back of the room, and make sure that you put yourself on that database.

We, the National Women's Business Council, monitor the issue of access to government markets, as part of our mission to report on trends and issues of importance to the women's business community, that also, we think have grown to the larger, larger competitiveness of our country. And we have made numerous policy recommendations to the congress and the administration on the issue of contract bundling and access to Federal markets, in general.

And we have helped to make the procurement process more understandable and navigable to the average woman business owner by creating and hosting a website, WomenBiz.gov, which maybe you have looked at, and if you have not, please avail yourself.

That website, we feel, has useful information. But it also for women business owners interested in gaining access to Federal markets, has important links. So that they can link with all of you, and in some cases, link with the organizations that are represented at this table.

I want to welcome Susan Bari from WBENC, who has just joined us—is at our Council, and Marsha Firestone from Women Presidents' Organization.

So the Roundtable Discussion today, as I mentioned earlier, follows up discussions that were held earlier this year.

It was clear at that expert's roundtable event, that was co-hosted by Project Tsunami, whose founder is right here, sitting in our front row, and the Department of Commerce and the NWBC, that the roles of Federal offices of small and disadvantaged business utilization, are critically important points of entry for women and men, small business owners.

We also learned more about the OSDBUs and the challenges and the successes of these offices, and that that warranted further investigation and discussion, which prompted today's discussion.

On the other hand, we also recognize the hard work of the OSDBUs and the experiences and challenges that some of the small businesses face, in dealing with them.

Today, we are going to focus on the role of OSDBUs. We are going to hear both, from the OSDBUs leaders and women business owners. And their experiences are going to help us to illustrate the following things.

First, creative ways that OSDBU offices are, right now, reaching out to the women's business community, and how the best practices could be shared and improved. And secondly, what preparations women business owners can take to build relationships with OSDBUs.

In other words, what kind of accountability do we, as women business owners, have for our part of the process, so that we actually can help you help us?

Your event packets contain information on the council, on the council members, the panelists and today's agenda with a time for each discussion session. We have got quite a lot to cover, so we ask you to help us keep track, and on time.

Now, the first group of panelists is from four different OSDBU offices. Thank you, each of you ladies, for being here. They are going to highlight best practices employed to support women business owners' successful entry into the government market place.

And also in our audience today, I see several other representatives from other agencies, and I hope that you will, as the afternoon goes on, offer observations and best practices so that we can increase the richness of the dialogue.

It is meant to be a dialogue. So I hope, whatever the press of your other activities that, if possible, you actually can stay for the afternoon so that you, also, hear the women's business owners panel, which may create the other side of the dialogue that will make it much more creative in the long-term. And productive.

The second panel, as I say, is composed of women entrepreneurs and they are going to share their experiences with the government procurement process in the OSDBU offices, in particular.

Their stories are going to open the discussion on how challenges can be addressed. Both, Federal officials and women business owners.

Earlier research has indicated that there are several areas that both can improve on. Such as, focused outreach, including marketing promotions efforts by the OSDBUs. Targeted solicitations, where the women business owners actually do more of their own research to actually identify which Federal agency or agencies are their best market opportunities.

There are Mentor Protégé Programs, which almost all Federal agencies now offer. There are relationship-building opportunities between government officials and women entrepreneurs, among others.

So many of these are relationship, relationship, relationship. That is probably what keeps people out and probably what helps them to gain entry. But in the end, we turn to people we know, we turn to organizations we know, and we need to facilitate a better understanding of each other. We have the confidence that we can help each other to succeed.

Now today, I have asked two of our council members to assist me and moderate these panel discussions.

The first is Susan Wilson Solovic. Susan is the CEO of SBTV, Small Business Television. She does a fabulous job and her organization is growing. And I think if one of the issues, which inevitably, in these discussions it is, is communication.

Susan's whole life was dedicated to improving that communication and facilitating it. She is going to moderate the first panel.

And Mary MacRae, the National Association of Women Business Owners representative for the council, is actually going to moderate the second.

So with that, I am going to turn it over to the first panel and turn it over to Susan Wilson Solovic, who is going to introduce the panel members. Thank you so much Susan, for doing this on our behalf.

PANEL #1: OSDBU REPRESENTATIVES

Susan Wilson Solovic, Moderator

MS. SOLOVIC: Thank you, Marilyn. I would just like to say before we get started. Marilyn humbly described her business as, somewhat small. But actually Marilyn is quite an outstanding business leader and she has also been a fabulous leader of our council. And we thank you so much for giving us this opportunity.

And I would also like to thank our panelist of our first group. As Marilyn said, we are going to be talking about contracting with the OSDBUs. I think that my first suggestion is that we change the name. So okay, we are done. We can all go home now.

(Laughter)

Anyway, I would like to introduce these ladies who are here today and who have generously given their time to be with us this afternoon.

First, right here on the end in the black, with the fuchsia pink blouse is Karen Conti. And Karen is actually a contractor with the Navy Department. She is working with their OSDBU and she is helping to recruit women for their NAVSEA Program. Did I say that correctly?

(No audible response.)

Sitting next to Karen, is Mary Ellen Dorsey and Mary is -- Mary Ellen actually is the WBO with our Federal government's newest agency, which is the Department of Homeland Security. Welcome, Mary Ellen.

Next to Mary Ellen, is Shirley Perez, yes. And Shirley is, actually, with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration on NASA. And finally, last, but certainly not least, is Sherry Cohen, who is the WBO Representative from the USDA. Welcome.

We are going to start and hear from each of these ladies and then of course, you will have the opportunity to add comments and ask questions once they have finished with their presentations.

I would like to start with Karen Conti. If she can please, just talk a little bit about the Navy's NAVSEA Program and what you are doing there, Karen, to certainly, contract with more women business owners.

Presentation by Karen Conti, NAVSEA

MS. CONTI: Great. Can you hear me okay?

MS. : No.

MS. WEEKS: I do not think it is on.

MS. CONTI: Okay. Thank you for having me here today. I am standing in for Nancy Tarrant, who could not be here. First of all, for those who do not know, you are probably wondering, what is NAVSEA. NAVSEA is --

MS. WEEKS: Can you excuse me. One second. Can you hear her in the back row?

MS. : Speak a little bit louder.

MS. CONTI: Okay. NAVSEA is one of the Navy's five-systems commands. They have a work force of approximately 50,000 people. Many of which are located right here in Southeast. Are we Southeast or Southwest?

MS. : Southwest.

MS. CONTI: Southwest, at the Washington Navy Yard. And also, at shipyards, at warfare centers around the country. They are responsible for one-fifth of the Navy's budget, which is approximately twenty billion dollars.

So, we are talking big money here. And they manage approximately 130 acquisition programs. So if it floats or dives in the water, probably, it is coming out of NAVSEA. And there are six program executive officers.

I have been supporting as the Program Executive Officer, PEO Submarines for most of my career. And they have some terrific activities going on for the women. But I wanted to talk to you today in the, kind of in the focus of best practice, since we could not talk about everything.

PEO Submarines are responsible for designing, developing and constructing submarines. And they have approximately 509 military/civilian people located here at NAVSEA Headquarters, and another 205 people up in New Hampshire, at SUBMEP, which is the maintenance activity.

Below that, are just a numerous amount of programs, shipyards, and the warfare centers that support their program. So, it is very, very extensive.

One of the things that Team Submarine has found is that they have had—their contractors are prime contractors who are responsible for building the submarines, have the, women-owned business goals, in their contracts. And they come back to the program office in the contract shop, and they say, we just cannot find the women to do the work, to help us build the submarines.

So, during the first four ships that were being built for the new Virginia Class Submarine, this was the case. So Richard McNamara, who is the PEO Submarine Deputy, took this on and set up a women-owned business conference down at Sweet Briar College, in Lynchburg.

This is strictly for women-owned businesses to come in and learn about PEO submarines, the programs, and have one-on-one phase time with the program office people, the contracts people, the shipyards, and the integrators and even some of the service providers. Like an EG&G or an Anteon. So it really encompasses all of their programs.

The conference has been held at Sweet Briar College in October and it is a two-day conference. It is a very nice venue. It is a woman business -- a woman college. So we get the students involved. And, nowhere else, do I know of an opportunity that you have for one-on-one time with a program office, to find contractors like this.

There are only about 100 women that have attended and you probably have 20 staff from the different organizations. So that is the number one thing that I think the Team Submarine has done.

In addition to that, with the following contract for this next batch of submarines that we are buying, they have increased the incentives for women-owned business. And they are offering award-fee to the ship builders, for meeting those incentives.

So, over and above, just having the goal in there, they are incentivizing the contractor to increase those numbers. And I think, nobody else is doing that sort of thing that I am aware of.

And the goal is to provide, I think, much like Marilyn mentioned in her opening remark, we are trying to create a place for the women to come forward to learn about the Navy, to have their voice heard and to also, have the Navy find non-traditional suppliers.

A second thing that Team Sub does very well is, they are very active in the small business innovative research program. And if you are not familiar with that program, you need to be.

It is a great foot in the door. There are three phases. I will not go into all the details, but there are three phases. The first phase is 100K and it is basically, to write a proposal.

So you work with your program offices and you find out what their needs are, and you respond to their advertisements of topics. And if you win, you get 100K. And then, you can parlay that on up to phase two and phase three. And I have seen phase three's go in the millions of dollars.

So, one of the things that we do at the conference is, we provide training on the SBIR Program for the women. In addition to that, I would say Team Submarine has one of the highest capture rates for

winning SBIRs in the Department of the Navy. Because they feel that, bringing small business in, is a way to solve their problems at low cost.

I have a handout that is on the table that has some contact information on it, I will leave out there. The next conference is going to be October 2005 at Sweet Briar College. I have the name of the woman in the package, to get on the mailing list.

I have the website for the SBIR Program. And I have also put out there, bookmarks, which I would encourage you all to take. And, on this one piece of paper, are all the names, phone numbers, email addresses of all of the key people that manage contracts from Team Submarine, and all the prime contractors. So you will have General Dynamics, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon. They are all on here.

So, Team Submarine, in particular out of NAVSEA, has been really stellar in trying to recruit and bring new business into the opposition game.

MS. SOLOVIC: Thank you very much, Karen. That is very interesting and I know that you are probably going to be hearing from a lot of women business owners, not just here today, but certainly, from around the country.

Next, I would like to ask, let's see, Mary Ellen from the Department of Homeland Security.

Presentation by Mary Ellen Dorsey, DHS

MS. DORSEY: Thank you for inviting us. As many of you may have seen me before, from the Treasury Department. Sorry. Is that better?

MS. : You have to stick it in your face.

(Laughter)

MS. DORSEY: Okay. I, previously, was with the Department of Treasury, along with my colleague, Kevin Boshears, our Director, and Dan Sturdivant. So, if you ever worked with us, there, you are going to see the same program, essentially, at DHS.

The difference is that, we have a challenge at DHS, in that we have 22 organizations that came from different agencies and combined them into, what is now, DHS. And there are only eight buying activities. So I would ask this question. How many of you who are interested in DHS and have been to our website.

(Show of hands.)

MS. DORSEY: I see two hands. Okay. We recognized early on, that we needed to step out there and pull as much information together, as we could, to make information about DHS available to women-owned business and all other small businesses.

So we took the effort of creating a new page that said, DHS.gov/openforbusiness. And there, we laid out information on acquisitions, on small business procurement assistance, on grants, because that is another huge pool of money that is available that we do not have control over. But you have to follow that money out to the state and local governments. And again, our SBIR Program.

So, I would encourage all businesses to go there first, to capture as much information as you can to learn about the department and how we are structured, and who is buying what you are selling. Our forecast is out there. We also have a listing of our small business specialist for each of the organizational elements.

Those are the individuals that we ask you to first make contact with, because they are in the buying activity. They understand what the requirements of that organization are, and they can best refer you to, you know, the next level. Be it, the program manager or someone else in the contracting office. But do, first and foremost, read the information on the website.

I cannot tell you how often I hear from business owners, saying, oh, but it is so much information. I agree, it is so much information, but it is so much information in one place. That way when you, then, make the calls, then you have done your homework. You know what you are talking about and your conversations are better suited to that individual.

Among the best practices, we continue at DHS, which we brought on from treasury, is our vendor outreach session. We recognize their monthly meetings, prescheduled 15-minute appointments, again, with the small business specialist. Twice a year, we also offer those meetings with our IT Program Managers. And again, twice a year, we bring in our prime contractors.

The demand for those meetings far exceeds what we have available to offer. So we ask that you do pursue it. Be persistent, you know. Call us if you are having problems and we will see if we can walk you through it, to make it work for you.

We do offer our March event. It is set-aside only for women-owned businesses. So if you are anything but a woman-owned business, then do not even try to schedule the appointment because we do not let you in.

I would say, based on my experience, I guess, one of the concerns I have is that we attend a lot of conferences all throughout the country. And too many times, I find that vendors will walk by and not even approach the table to even ask very basic questions about, well, what do you do? You know, find out what the vendor does, and have a conversation.

I think that there is a lot of business that does not take place because you just do not, or they just do not walk up to the table. It is discouraging to me to be shipping that material. I should walk away from there with nothing.

I would also encourage you to use our listing of our prime contractors as a source, again, for subcontracting opportunities.

We do provide a listing on our website and we are getting ready to expand that again, to include more primes. But those primes have worked with us over the years and have given us very specific information that they are looking for businesses to provide to them.

Please do the homework that they have asked you to do. Follow up, you know. If they have asked you to enter information into a database, do it. Because that is the first question they are going to ask you. So, I guess, that is the best advice I can give at this point.

MS. SOLOVIC: Mary Ellen, I have just one quick question. You mentioned the month of March being designated for women business owners. How many women do you have participating in taking advantage of that?

MS. DORSEY: We can average about—we have about 40 companies who can participate in the event, based on the number. We limit the number of appointments you can have, to 4. And generally, we have about 12 individuals who are taking the appointments.

A lot of our problem is that we do not have the resources yet. We are still establishing our relationships, you know, with the program offices to get the right people in there to talk to women-owned businesses and others.

MS. SOLOVIC: And are those—the meetings, are they scheduled on certain designated days in March?

MS. DORSEY: Yes. There is a listing on our website. I have provided this one page handout that gives you the address of the website and it will give you all of the information about our vendor outreach sessions.

We are going to update that site in the next week or so, to put out updated FY 05 information, which I am hoping to include all the other conferences that we attend throughout the country. You know, these vendor outreach sessions are here in the DC area, but we are all over the country.

MS. SOLOVIC: Thank you very much. Next on our agenda, I would like to introduce Shirley Perez. And Shirley is going to be talking about -- I am sorry I lost her. I lost you, Shirley.

Shirley is actually going to be talking about NASA's Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization. And NASA has published some profiles of women-owned businesses who have contracted with NASA. And Shirley, if you could please share with us a little bit about that.

Presentation by Shirley Perez, NASA

MS. PEREZ: I will. Thank you. Good afternoon and thank you for inviting me. I hope everyone can hear me. I am fighting the cold. Okay.

The way I set up my presentation, I was asked to address three questions. The efforts to meet the 5 percent target. What is needed to address issues and meet the target? And specific programs or initiatives that are new or under consideration. So that is what I want to talk to, today. I will start by saying that --.

MS. SOLOVIC: Shirley, you might want to just move it just a little bit closer.

MS. PEREZ: Is that better?

MS. SOLOVIC: Yes.

MS. PEREZ: Okay. I will start by saying that NASA has achieved its women-owned business goal of 5.5 percent. That is a combination of 2.5 percent in direct contracts and 3 percent in subcontract.

(Applause)

MS. PEREZ: Thank you. Eighty 5 percent of our dollars are awarded to large businesses. That only leaves us 15 percent to do direct awards to small businesses. Considering that, we focus on subcontracting.

We have established very aggressive goals. We do this by using the uniform methodology process. That is where— that is for procurement. Any procurement, \$50,000,000 and over. That has to come through the small business office and we will negotiate with the procurement office on the goals.

We make sure that they are achievable goals, but we make sure that they are aggressive goals. We also have, in acquisition, management strategy process that we follow.

Again, whenever there is a large procurement and it is all high-tech, they have to come into DC. There is a meeting that is held. Small business is always invited to that meeting and we will, again, negotiate those goals. So if we feel that those goals are not where they should be, we have an opportunity to address that issue.

We have recently de-bundled two large contracts. The space station contract and the SEESAW contract. The space station contract was a 20,000,000-dollar contract. It was a large contract. It is now 5 smaller contracts, of which, two are small businesses.

The same has occurred for the women-owned contract—I am sorry, the SEESAW contract. That has gone from one large contract to five smaller contracts. Now those two small businesses are not women-owned businesses, but there are goals on there for women-owned businesses.

What are the issues that need to be addressed so that we can meet the target? It would be helpful if there were a small business set-aside for women-owned businesses. We also, are doing what we can to try to bring more businesses into the high-tech area. And we do that through our existing programs.

Establishing a website --. I am sorry. Specific programs are initiatives that are new or under consideration.

One of the things that I am doing as the women-owned small business advocate at NASA, is trying to establish a website where I will list the names of women-owned businesses. I will provide information about their product, their service, contact information and information on the President and CEO.

The purpose for that website is three-fold. One, I am going to use it for primes that are looking for women-owned businesses to achieve their goals. I am going to use it for businesses who are looking for teaming partners. I have had one business approach me already, about helping them to identify women-owned businesses that they can team with.

And last, I am going to use it as a tool -- a communication tool to relate information out to women-owned businesses about things going on at NASA.

We currently have many existing programs in place that have proven to be very successful, and we try to integrate women-owned businesses into those programs.

We have the quarterly aerospace technology forum. We have three aerospace technology centers. Dryden Flight Research Center, Glenn Research Center and Langley Research Center.

Every year, each of those centers put on a forum at their center. This is where they will invite four to five small businesses to come in and present to NASA technical end users and prime contractors.

I just attended Glenn's, back in the summer. It was very successful. We have two contractors actually write a task for one another. And so, we have had great success with that.

Dryden is going to -- Dryden is located in California. They are going to be holding their forum on November 9th. They are now accepting capability statements. Again, they will invite -- from those capability statements, they will invite four to five small businesses to come in and present.

We do a semiannual forum. Our science centers, Goddard Space Flight Center in JPL. Every year, they do a semiannual forum. The purpose of this is to bring small businesses in to meet one-on-one with our NASA technical end users, as well as, our prime contractors.

We do the JPL High Tech Conference. That is held every March. This past March we held it and we had over 1,300 businesses, large and small, in attendance. Again, it is another opportunity for small businesses to come in and meet one-on-one, with our prime contractors and our technical end users.

We do the Small Business Solution Conference. That Conference is held around August, September time frame and that is held on the east coast. Same purpose. We do the Small Business and Advanced Technology Support. This is a training program that we put on. Otherwise known as TASBAT*. This training program is held four times a year. There are two basic courses, two advanced courses.

It teaches small businesses how to do business with NASA. It teaches you how to write a winning proposal. It tells you what NASA is looking for in those proposals. So it is an excellent course. It is free. The only cost, is for lunch. So, it is something I would highly recommend if you have not had it.

We do a supplier diversity training. This is where we teach our procurement people the importance of considering small businesses when they are writing these contracts. Again, that course is taught four times a year at various places around the country.

We have a Mentor Protégé Program. Again, the benefit of that is, points are provided to -- in doing the SEB, points are provided to the mentor when they have a protégé. So that is something that one would want to consider.

We put on awards ceremony. We just had an award ceremony last Thursday, where we had a woman-of-the-year, contractor selected -- woman contractor selected woman-of-the-year, Cimarron, Inc. from Houston, Texas.

At the same time, Dryden Flight Research Center put on their awards ceremony and they had a woman-owned contractor-of-the-year at their center. And that was Analytical Systems and Materials. So we recognize women-owned businesses.

We have a Minority Business Resource Advisory Committee. This is an arm of the NASA Advisory Council. This council, we call it the MBRAC. The MBRAC has direct access to the NASA administrator. They are there to advise the administrator on how we can improve in bringing small businesses into NASA.

They are very active. They meet four times a year. They just met last week. We do procurement management surveys where we go out to our various centers and we review their small business programs.

We use the automated 294 system, where we pull reports. We look at the low goals and we sit with the contract officers, and we try to determine how can we get those goals up. What are the problems that are causing those goals to be low? We do that again, at every center, every two to three years.

We have received our full budget. We requested a budget during our budget process and we have received all the funding that we have requested. I am very excited about that because we can carry out all the programs that, you know, we have planned for the upcoming year.

We did the publication. The women contractors at NASA publication and I am currently working on another publication, The Role of Small Businesses and The Return to Flight Initiative.

I have brought a lot of materials with me, I believe they are out on the table. One of the things I have brought is a list of all the programs I just talked about. It gives a brief description of those programs. I would encourage you to read that. Get more information about that.

I have also brought with me, a list of the small business specialists around the country. You can feel free to talk to them.

We at NASA, encourage you to market directly to our end users. Those small business specialists can put you in touch with those end users. They can tell you about requirements that are coming, that have not yet made it to the acquisition forecast. They are a great resource, and so, I would encourage you to talk to them. Feel free to talk with them.

If you at anytime, feel that you are not getting the type of support from them that you believe you should, by all means, give me a call and let me know.

I have brought loads of information that is available on the table. Again, I think, I will share with you, that I am very new in this office. I have only been here a little under a year.

I have come from the program house in NASA and I have been extremely impressed by the commitment and dedication of the small business office at NASA, in bringing small businesses to NASA and, you know, focusing on women-owned businesses, as well.

I have truly been pleased with what I have seen and the success of the office. So, with that, I thank you for this opportunity.

MS. SOLOVIC: Thank you very much, Shirley. And if you have only been there a year, you have certainly jumped in with both feet. You are doing an excellent job.

MS. PEREZ: Thank you.

MS. SOLOVIC: So, thank you for sharing that. And I want to also, like to mention, Shirley mentioned the table with the materials. It is just right outside the door here, on the left. So please, there is lots of good information out there and we appreciate you all bringing that with you.

MS. PEREZ: Thank you.

MS. SOLOVIC: And our next speaker is going to be Sherry Cohen from USDA and one of the activities that Sherry is going to talk to us about is a town-hall meeting that they hold on a monthly basis.

Presentation by Sherry Cohen, USDA

MS. COHEN: Good afternoon. Can everybody hear me in the back?

(No audible response)

MS. COHEN: Thank you for allowing me to address you this afternoon. It is a pleasure to be here. I am representing the Department of Agriculture and I feel a little bit like Mary Ellen sometimes because, I too will sit at a table sometimes and people will look at the Department of Agriculture and say, farming? I do not have anything to do with farming. I am not a farmer, and will walk right by and they have missed a lot of opportunities because we are a bureaucracy just like everybody else in the bureaucracy. And we buy new computers and office equipment and everything that everybody else buys.

So, I wonder sometimes, you know, why people are passing up some of those opportunities that we have along with everybody else.

MS. SOLOVIC: Sherry, I actually have to interject just briefly. My other company is, Susan-Says, and I have actually been a vendor of yours.

(Laughter)

MS. COHEN: And I do -- with that aside. I do have to tell you, the Department of Agriculture does so many varied things you would just not even, maybe, think about.

We do the school lunch program. So, we provide a lot of the food items for the school lunch program and the kids in the schools. So there is a lot of food commodities. About 50 percent or more than 50 percent of our procurement budget is spent on food items. But, still, we have that other 50 percent and all those items that go along to support those food items.

So, we are a fascinating department. I have been with the department since the mid-70's. I have been -- I was in with Shirley. I have been in the small business arena since the late 70's. So, I have done this for quite a while and seen a lot of changes in the small business programs.

And I have seen a lot of changes in the small business office too. A lot of different pools in the small business office. We, in the Department of Agriculture, had just for the first time last year, made our 5 percent goal.

(Applause)

We established a goal. We finally made it. We made incremental little pushes, that each year, you know, half a tenths -- a few points. We are making progress. People are aware that the goal is out there and that is part of our job in the OSDBU office, is to make sure that we have these programs.

But, as we know, there are other pools and other programs, and other preferences that are being pulled on the procurement community. We just had a new veteran's goal that just came up. Not goal, but an opportunity to do set-asides for veteran-owned businesses.

We do not have that implementation, yet, of that restrictive competition for the women-owned businesses and I think some of us in the procurement community would like to see us have that opportunity to see that come to fruition so that we would have that tool available to us, you know.

We have got the goal and we are having these special emphasis areas, you know. We are going out and doing outreach and we can bring in as many women-owned businesses as possible, but it is sometimes difficult to bring them on without some of these extra tools that the other programs have.

So that is something that I certainly, would like to see come to -- you know, for an implementation -- restricted competition for the women-owned businesses.

In the Department of Agriculture, as Marilyn said, too, it --- everywhere, relationship building is such a key and to get to know people and to be persistent and to keep marketing and knowing how you use the tools that are available out there.

We too, have various outreach activities, such as the vendor outreach session. We like the idea when the Department of Treasury was doing the vendor outreach session and we borrowed on some of their ideas.

So we, too, have a vendor outreach session. The second Wednesday of every month, where we invite vendors to come in and have opportunities to have one-on-one face-time meetings with representatives from our buying activities. And we, too, have a focus of two of those a year for women-owned businesses, where we invite just women-owned businesses.

Businesses can sign up for our vendor outreach session. I am pretty sure yours too, Mary Ellen, online. So it is a very painless sign-up method. But they are very popular and sometimes they are very hard to get into and sometimes there are more vendors that want to come, than there are slots available.

So folks do have to be very persistent if you want to attend those vendor outreach sessions. And one of the other things that you mentioned, Susan, that we wanted to talk about today, was our first Tuesday meetings.

The first Tuesday of the month, we invite associations and representatives from small businesses to come in for a roundtable discussion.

We usually have a speaker on a key topic for the month, but there is plenty of time and more time for those first Tuesday sessions -- are focusing on communications between networking. Communications between the department folks and the representatives are there and it is a good time for the associations to also, have networking time with the business people.

Cannot say it enough, that there is strength in numbers. And, as much as it is wonderful working and we -- emphasis on working with small business people, sometimes when there are issues that have to be raised, things that have to be tended to, sometimes when groups of businesses get together and come in and address whether it is a department or a congressional committee or other groups, the associations are often heard of, very well and very loud. So, we like to listen to the associations.

We want to have an opportunity for the businesses to hear the associations and for the internal folks within the Department of Agriculture to hear both sides of that, too.

So, these first Tuesdays have been very, very popular. An excellent forum for the Department of Agriculture to have a very good networking session that we can hear on a regular basis from representatives of the business community.

One other thing that we are doing, in the Department of Agriculture's OSDBU office, and if you do not like OSDBU, you may not like the term SADBUE either.

(Laughter)

MS. COHEN: You think OSDBU is bad. In the OSDBU at USDA, we have a review process where we are reviewing contracts that have not been set-aside for small businesses. We are reviewing those, along with our SBA Procurement Center Representative.

So contract actions are not going forward unless we had a review and a communication with our program community to have a determination of why a particular set-aside has not been set-aside, at least, for the small business community.

And then, we have an opportunity to jump in and to provide them with some other ideas of other sources that we think that should be considered for those procurements.

Our procurement forecast -- you know, every Federal department has a procurement forecast and I like to tell people, who come to visit, that these procurement forecasts are very interesting documents and they are very helpful. And they should be used, but everything does not make it on the procurement forecast.

But the procurement forecast should be used and, as Mary Ellen mentioned, also, they should be used as an information tool so that when you come in and talk to our buyers and people in the buying community, you kind of, have a feel for the types of things that we are buying. And you are educating yourself. You cannot stress enough how you have to come in and be an educated supplier to us.

We have people who come in to us and say, ask us, what do you buy? Because then, they will offer us whatever it is that we say, that we buy. A much better approach, is to come in and say, I understand that your mission and your function in your office is to do this type of work. I see in the past, you have done -- you have purchased these type of requirements. I have capabilities. I have a niche in this area. I can help you feel your needs.

So the better you come in, the better educated and more informed that you come in to talk to us, I think our buyers -- I know our buyers would be more willing to listen to you, than when you come in for the one-on-one approach.

Because you are going to have to come back again, and again, and again, anyway. You are going to waste a lot of leg time or business. Because you are going to have to waste a lot of leg time when they come in, just to get that basic general information.

The information is out there and that is what the OSDBU offices are for. We are there to point folks in the right direction of where to get that basic information.

If you have got any questions, that is why we are there -- we are there to point businesses in the right direction. And we hope that they will follow up on what we tell them, and not just keep returning to the OSDBU office for the same information. But you need businesses to take those next steps with the information that we give them.

We too, at the Department of Agriculture have an awards program. We recognize small businesses and women-owned businesses who have provided exemplary products and services. We select an overall USDA winner and we select representatives of winners from our different buying activities.

All the Federal departments, and agriculture is no different, we are very, very decentralized. We probably touch people throughout the country, more so, than a lot of other departments. We are in every state of the country and we use to be in almost every county, and still are in most counties across the country.

So we have a winner -- winners that represent each one of our buying agencies, also. So it has been a very successful program. And it is nice to take the time to recognize and point to the good service that has been provided to the department, as apposed to hearing the one case that always gets blown up and put in the newspaper, when you hear about a company that has not been successful.

We are always looking to improve ourselves for the Department of Agriculture. So, small business programs, if we are not satisfied with the attaining that 5 percent goal. But we have continued to make incremental steps in going up. When you are talking about billions of dollars, it does take a while, but we are working in those areas.

And we will look forward to working with all of you and doing whatever we can to continue that improvement. Thank you.

Questions and Comments from Council

MS. SOLOVIC: Thank you very much, Sherry. And thank you, to all of you, for sharing your best practices. And, at this point and time in the program, what we are going to do is open this up for comments and questions from other council members, and also, from the audience here today. As moderator, it is my --- to get you started.

So I would, first of all, just like to say to all of you, you are doing an excellent job and we truly believe that it is because of you and your efforts that we are seeing some increases in the numbers of contracts for women business owners.

I would also like to say to you, as representing SBTV's Small Business Television, 52 percent of our audience consists of women business owners. So, any information that we can help you disseminate, we would certainly be happy to do that. So please, make sure it is just Susan@SBTV.com. It is that simple.

But also, I want to switch gears, and as the owner of the other company, Susan-Says, which is a 100 percent female-owned company, one of the things that I have been perplexed about, and I hear this also from the general populous of small businesses, is getting on a GSA Schedule.

The first thing that I hear is, oh, that is going to cost thousands of dollars and I am going to have to hire a consultant. What do you say to business owners and what is being done to simplify and remedy this issue?

MS. COHEN: GSA offers a class every month. They have classes in the Washington area and I think they have them in different regional areas too.

MS. DORSEY: Online, too.

MS. COHEN: And online, also. So, I certainly would recommend anybody to try to attend those classes and see what is involved before running out and hiring a consultant. I do not really think it is necessary to go out and hire a consultant.

It is a lengthy process, a little bit of a lengthy process. It takes a little time but it is certainly well worth the effort. These tools that we use, the GSA Schedule, we are finding more and more in our contracting people who are getting pulled in different directions, their staff is diminishing.

They are going to use the tools that are easier for them to get to and the GSA Schedule and the Department of Agriculture has been very much, increased in usage. Anybody else?

MS. SOLOVIC: This is not really a question or a comment, though I was aware of the classes and all of that. But, being a very, very, very small company, I do not really have the time or resources, or time to be away from the business that long. So it is just -- I mean, I do not really expect that to be solved right here, but it is just sort of a comment and observation.

MS. DORSEY: I will offer a comment that was made to me, on this very subject, by Al Gaither from GSA. He tells me that he refers vendors to the local procurement technical assistance centers, PTACs. And because they are so -- most of those are associated with colleges and universities, it is very likely that they may have some business student who was working with them, as well, who might be able to do all of that. You know, putting all that information into your application.

But, to pay somebody to do it, I hear from too many vendors, oh, they tell me they will do it for \$10,000, \$20,000. That is ridiculous! But, I would also offer that, maybe you could promote where that information is. It is GSA.gov is where they can find the information about getting on schedule.

MS. SOLOVIC: We will actually -- because I am trying to get Susan-Says on the GSA Schedule, I am thinking about doing a new story on how to get done on SBTV.

(Laughter)

MS. SOLOVIC: So, we may be doing -- Susan Bari has a question.

MS. BARI: Hi. I have a question concerning your small business numbers and a separate --- to your broad numbers. Are you including your 5 percent goal for women? Is that also, part of your performance on your small business, set-aside goal? And if that is the case, I truly do not understand why it is such a struggle to met 5 percent.

If you have a set-aside for small business and women are a third of all the small businesses in the country, why is the Federal government not contracting a third of its procurement with women-owned businesses?

I cannot believe we are less capable. I cannot believe we are less competitive. I cannot believe we do not want to make the money. So, I have got to believe that there is something wrong with the process that merely layering another set-aside on top of what you already have, it is not going to solve. So, any comment on --

MS. DORSEY: I will comment. I think a lot of it -- we just got through talking about GSA Schedule. You are on GSA Schedule and they are going to go out and buy what they are buying off GSA Schedule. They go two, three vendors, often times, and nobody else knows about it.

So, we are trying, at DHS this year. In our forecast, we have asked them to identify if they are going to go on GSA Schedule. They have identified that, in some cases, but it does not stop there. I mean, we just know they are going to go GSA Schedule. Okay, then, how do we get through to the procurement office? And a lot of that is going to be in our review of their procurement actions.

So maybe we will see some changes this year. We are hopeful.

MS. COHEN: Let me talk. Let me comment. Can I comment, at all? That blows our mind too. We even have something called, a rule of one, I think a lot of other departments have that too, where we require that one company be solicited from a woman -- you know -- in these, in all three small businesses, one of them has to be a woman-owned business. And I think other departments have that too. And we are still struggling to meet that 5 percent goal.

MS. SOLOVIC: Marsha Firestone.

MS. FIRESTONE: I would like to -- can you hear me? I am sorry.

MS. : Mics with SBA are all broken.

MS. : I know a good vendor.

MS. : Woman-owned?

(Laughter)

MS. FIRESTONE: I have to say that I am knee-deep in women's business ownership in every aspect. And today, is the first time that I have heard about many of these programs. So, if I, who am knee-deep in women's business ownership topics, do not know what is going on in these programs, I do not think that most of our women business owners, out there, are getting the word.

So, when Susan says something being wrong with the process, I would have to say that I would support that and I would like to make an offer. I know that every woman sitting around here, has contact with many, many women business owners.

We, the Women Presidents Organization, for example, reach out on our emails to a thousand women business owners who exceed a million dollars in revenue, on an annual basis. So, could you not put us on your email distribution and we would make sure that the word goes out about these programs.

MS. : We will provide you, their names and contact information.

MS. SOLOVIC: Karen? Okay. Jean?

MS. JOHNSON: One of the things --.

MS. SOLOVIC: Hold the microphone to your --.

MS. JOHNSON: Oh. You talked about the GSA Schedule. Isn't there a disproportionate number of women-owned businesses are not part of the GSA Schedule?

MS. DORSEY: I do not know.

MS. JOHNSON: You do not know? Because I have talked to some of the organizations in the past and a lot of them say they go to the GSA Schedule because it is easier. Everything is there, you pre-qualified, so to speak. So it is easier to pick them. And maybe, that is one of the gaps there, where a lot of women owners do not know that. And they are contracting not being on the schedule and it is more difficult to get those contractors because they do not know about it.

But I am just trying to see if you have any statistics out there at all. The kind that give any indication of how many women-owned businesses are actually part of GSA Schedule.

MS. SOLOVIC: Karen and then, Sherry?

MS. KERRIGAN: How do business hear about, or business owners hear about the vendor outreach sessions?

MS. DORSEY: Ours is on our website.

MS. KERRIGAN: So they have to go to --- associations, --- marketing --

MS. DORSEY: Yes. It is also on, if I understand, it use to be on, vendorbids.gov, where they will have a listing of women-owned business advocates. Another place is the OSDBU.gov website, which is the website for the OSDBU community. Which has got links to all of the agency websites.

And it has got a listing of outreach activities that we participate in. So that might be the link that you want to know about and then, go from there. Off of that site.

MS. PEREZ: One other thing we do, we do one-on-one counseling. So if you pick up the phone and give us a call, we could set an appointment for you to come in and sit down with us, and we can do the one-on-one counseling with you. But we also use the website, as well.

MS. SOLOVIC: Sherry?

MS. CONTI: You know, I think there is so much opportunity and there are so many agencies. And so, I think you have to do some pre-screening to figure out where your best niche is. In the women-owned business conference, we really encourage women that own tool shops. And metals dealers and a lot of those people that the shipyard would, very easily, be able to make a match with.

So not every agency is an exact match for your company. So you have to do some pre-screening. Then, get on the websites and find out what is going on. Understand what is going on and then start making some calls. I think each one of us here are leaving you with some information that have points of contacts, and some information about our organization.

You really need to figure out who might have a need that you can best fill. It is not, you have a product and they need to buy it. It is who might have a need that you can best fill. And you really need to, kind of, sort through that, otherwise, you can really spin your wheels trying to reach a place to go.

MS. SOLOVIC: Sheri?

MS. OLOWITZ: Hi there. First, I want to thank you all for a really informative presentation and a very exciting presentation, because you have opened up my eyes to so much opportunity I never knew existed.

And I want to underscore what Marsha said. Which is, if you are having trouble meeting your goals, use this Council as a resource because we will get the word out.

And each of us is pretty knee-deep and there is so much opportunity, you said Karen. And I think that we can help you to achieve your goals even if there is not the implementation.

And that brings me to my next question. Shirley, I heard both, you and Sherry, comment on the fact that while the legislation passed, it has not been implemented and is a consequence you do not have the tools that you do with the small business set-aside.

I wonder if either of you might address what the difference is and what tools do you have that you cannot, currently, use with women-owned businesses?

MS. PEREZ: Well, at NASA, we do not have -- for example. I wanted to have a forum, where I would only invite women-owned businesses in, to be considered for procurement. I was told I could not do that. I have to invite them in with all the other small businesses.

So, my belief is, if we were able to -- if there were a set-aside, I would be able to do something like that. So, it is a little more difficult for me to try to set up a program where I am targeting women-owned businesses, specifically. Again, as I said earlier, what I am trying to do is integrate them into our programs, along with all the other businesses.

MS. COHEN: The implementation of these restricted set-asides is not going to all of a sudden, make all of us reach our goals. That is not going to be it, at all. That is not going to be the only answer, because it is going to be a combination of everything. That is just a small part of it.

Again, we do have a small business set-aside. We --- small business set-aside and we try to make sure that, at least, one woman-owned business is -- at least one, is included, as part of our work force. And that is why we go out.

We are constantly out at conferences and talking to women-owned groups. And we have women-owned business advocates. Not only at the headquarter level, but in our buying activities, going out and talking about opportunities within our organizations, so that, we can bring the women-owned businesses and let them know about the opportunities. That is the first step.

But we are constantly out at conferences. We are constantly talking about our vendor outreach sessions. We do not have the luxury, but a lot of the Federal partners have newsletters that go out. And the Department of Transportation has a big widespread newsletter that goes out, that talks about a lot of the programs.

So, we are not just saying, come to us and what you find on our websites are what you are going to find. That is part of the effort. The program is the outreach that we are all trying to do.

MS. ORLOWITZ: Could you just address -- 'cause you have been around for 30 years. Could you address --

MS. : That is good. You are a wealth of knowledge.

MS. COHEN: I started very young, yes.

MS. ORLOWITZ: Could you address the specifics of the tools that you do not have? What does small business get that women-owned businesses do not get? Can you address that, specifically.

MS. COHEN: Well, right now, we can restrict the competition to bidding or just for small businesses. Only the small business can bid on that requirement.

MS. ORLOWITZ: And how much set-aside do you have for just small businesses?

MS. COHEN: If there are two or more small businesses that are -- that we feel, that can respond to a requirement, it is suppose to be set-aside for a small business. So, it does not matter, even the dollar value. If there are two small businesses who, we feel, are responsible and can be responsive to the requirement, it is suppose to be a small business set-aside.

And that is one of the things that the small business offices are doing. We are oversight on our buying activities to make sure that they are compliant with that requirement of the laws, it is part of the Federal acquisition regulations.

And we have many, many other Federal departments, too. We, at the Department of Agriculture, have an SBA procurement center representative, or known as, PCRs. So you have got the OSDBU advocates and you have got the PCRs overseeing these buying activities to make sure that the small business set-aside program -- one of the first things we do.

We are also looking for 8a set-aside programs -- there are other set-aside programs to the 8a set-aside program.

MS. ALMEIDA: Thank you. I want to reiterate Sheri's thank you's, for giving us all this information. But I also heard in Marilyn comments -- I knew that relationship is one of the important elements of this and what I think we are suggesting here, is that you really are our best kept secret.

This group here, represents an enormous amount of women that are interested in your programs. And, why not leverage the relationships that we already have, with this marketplace of women business ownerships.

The National and Business Council is a portal to many of us. But I really think that the way in, is access to who, and what is going on. Because we know. And we are happy to help you reach your goals. And, as Susan says, increase them.

And really, if we can sort through how to access the information in, sort of a seamless way through this relationship that we have, I think we have accomplished something here today.

MS. SOLOVIC: Marilyn, our Chair, has a question.

MS. BARI: I would say, I want to thank Mary Ellen for being a consistent participant. Both, which was at Treasury and Homeland Security. At WBENC's annual conference, where we have two thousand people that attend every year. And it is a great opportunity because there are all certified WBEs. So, it definitely, is your market.

We send out invitations to all the OSDBUs every year and Mary Ellen, consistently, is the first one to sign up. But my question was more concerned with the failure of women-owned businesses to be 7 percent of that -- is the small business set-aside, 21 or 23 percent?

MS. COHEN: 23.

MS. BARI: Okay, so, we should be at about seven and a half percent without any trouble. WBENC has found, in the private sector, and I am wondering if it is true for the government sector, as well, is that, frequently, the reason that our access to corporate markets is stymied even in those corporations that have strong goals and strong commitments, is that word might not get down to the procurement official, in a positive way.

For example, people have performance measures in their performance agreements that, generally, do not involve risks. And risk means, using a new supplier.

So that, even if you are putting three people on your bid list, if one of them is a woman-owned firm or a minority-owned firm, that you have not necessarily done business with in the past, is there a reward for the procurement official to take the chance to change the numbers? To do more business with women or to do more business with minorities. I do not think so. My guess is, that does not happen.

And I think that, until you build in that carrot, that allows people to take risks in change. I know that everybody is doing more work now than we were doing, per person, five years ago. Technology, aside. All departments have been downsized.

Your procurement offices are under a lot more pressure than they were in the past. You are under a lot more pressure. That generally means, and translates to, you are going to do business, as usual. rather than changing and taking a chance on a new supplier.

So, I would just present that to you as an opportunity for the OSDBU Council. To take a look at ways that you can incentivize. Thank you. That you can incentivize your procurement officials to make changes that will provide greater access.

The other problem that we saw, was the average length of contract, was three years before it was really competed. And is there any analysis that goes on at that three-year point. Yes, you can have three people on the bid list, but if the procurement official just, out of hand, picks the same supplier that he picked, or she picked, three years ago, or six years ago, or nine years ago, you are not going to see change or improvement.

MS. CONTI: Just one -- going back to what I said earlier, as an example of what the Navy is doing. On the recent multi-year procurement submarine program, they have upped the goal to 45 percent for small business on all subcontracted amount. This is to try to incentivize the ship-builders to sub out more work to small business. And as I mentioned earlier, we also increased the goals for women-owned and small Disadvantaged business.

But in addition to that, they put a very large incentive fee for them to meet it. So they are really putting their money where their mouth is. And I can tell you that the ship-builder's behavior has changed accordingly. You see much more activity in getting those businesses in.

So that is just an example of where, I think the Navy is taking these --.

MS. NELSON: Susan. Oh, excuse me. One more? Are there more comments?

MS. COHEN: At the Department of Agriculture, our

OSD Director does have some input into the evaluation of the agency administrators. And part of his input is in their participation, their outreach and the achievement of their goals.

So, it is raised at a higher level, as far as some oversight and what would bring you to the top of the line for each buying activity.

MS. NELSON: I have two questions. One, in directly, is prompted by Susan's comment. And I think it has to do with the primes, which may have to do with the role. And that is, I was -- when I first came into this role, and learned about some of the issues around access, I could actually predict, I think, some of the issues that we are addressing here. The communication issues and so on.

What surprised me and kind of shocked me, was that there wasn't more accountability between the primes and the subs. In the fact that we do not, as a nation, hold people accountable who bid and, actually, in some ways, who differentiate between the primes who actually do use the subs and do pay the subs, and actually deliver on their bid. As opposed to those who probably are just -- have the right window dressing, that worked with these departments so long that with a wink and a promise, they can talk all that. And then we have people who in some cases, can just face ruin because they gear up thinking that something is going to happen, but never happens.

So I wonder if you do spend any time, not only on this renewal process, but looking at primes to give them some sort of scoring that is the first piece. And I do understand that in many of the large contracts there is different weight. And I am asking, quite seriously, is that weighted heavily enough?

Not only, whether there are, you know, we are minorities, small businesses as subs. But, are they utilized? And what is the record? So, that is one question and how can we help, in that regard.

And then, the second is, would you speak a little bit, to the -- in business we have, sort of, RFPs that we put out, et cetera. Is -- and I am confused as to these meetings that you schedule and information that is disseminated and the website. And then, are these RFPs -- and have the decision been made before the RFP?

If our people waited until the RFP -- are they late? Because I think, somehow when you are new at these things, you are very earnest. You see that this is how it happens, and then, you get feeling that you are coming late to a party that is, you know, already well underway, if not, almost over.

(Laughter)

MS. NELSON: So, give us a little help in that regard.

MS. CONTI: Let me address the last point of the last question, first, about the RFP. Are you late when the RFP is released?

MS. : Yes.

MS. CONTI: The decisions are certainly not made. It is fair and open competition. But generally, most of the contractors have insight on what is coming down the pike. And many times, that will come through sales, the forecast, the procurement forecast. Many organizations have annual conferences, where you can go in and find out what their forecasts are.

And again, you have to pick some and go through their website and register so you these are coming. But in most cases, teams are formed long before the RFPs are released. So, if you are reading something for the first time, when it hits FedBizOpps and their solicitation is released, you are really behind the power curve.

What you need to do, is get into the OSDBU -- what is it?

MS. : OSDBU.

MS. CONTI: Well. Understand the organization and target a few, well in advance. Find out -- you can -- before any other contracts, and find out all about who is doing the current work, and try to position yourself with the incumbent's team.

I can tell you. This works. They are more aware, today, and this goes to your first question, of the requirements for small business and the solicitations. And so they are very often looking for a woman-owned business, a hubs-owned business, a small disadvantaged business, veteran's-owned business that can add value.

Not just because you are woman-owned, there are a lot of woman-owned businesses, but if you can add value to their team, they are looking for you.

So you really have to, a year in advance, start targeting these kinds of work.

MS. SOLOVIC: We are going to take two more questions from the council members. We will take Mary and Marsha. And then, we are going to open it up to the audience.

MS. DORSEY: I would just like to add one more thing. The other piece that you need to be looking at, and often times, it is on the website, is the agency's strategic plan and their budget. It is there.

MS. NELSON: It is on the website?

MS. DORSEY: Yes.

MS. NELSON: --- first question about ---?

MS. DORSEY: Oh, the comply --- the primes?

MS. NELSON: I heard that so much and I think for us, for this part of this proceeding, we need to have some conversation.

MS. DORSEY: I am going to put my boss on the line. He is here. Mr. Boshears. He is the Vice Chair of the OSDBU Director's Council. So I think he can best answer that question.

MR. BOSHEARS: Good afternoon, everyone. I am Kevin Boshears. I am with the Department of Homeland Security now. And I have been Mary Ellen's colleague now, for close to ten years.

The question was, if I may be sure I have it straight. Is, what efforts are underway to be sure that we have an effective subcontracting plan program within Federal government, where that large business prime offerors actually use the team that they submit?

Are we looking at the performance of those plans during contract performance and are we holding these companies accountable for their work? Is that pretty much it?

(Course of yes)

MR. BOSHEARS: Okay. Okay, well. There are a number of efforts underway that address that. I am afraid it is going to be like a number of the others things you have talked about today, in that, there is not a single magic solution. Not just one single stroke of a pen or something like that, that, it is a combination of efforts.

But let me share with you, if I may, some of the efforts that are underway. One is, there is a FAR case to strengthen the subcontracting --

MS. : Can you speak up?

MR. BOSHEARS: Oh yes. Sorry guys. No wonder you have been struggling all day. There is a FAR that changes the regulation to strengthen the subcontracting pool.

MS. : Not everybody knows what FAR is.

MR. BOSHEARS: Oh, FAR. The Federal Acquisition Regulation. The Federal Guidance to -- sorry. The Federal guidance on how we put together our Federal contracts. And for those that are in the marketplace, it is always, FAR, for short. So if you said, The FAR.

(Laughter)

MR. BOSHEARS: No, that is what it is called. So there is one effort there. Now that actually changes the regulation. Most observers believe that will be quite helpful to us. The details are pretty numerous. But I am sure that we can get the current draft language to all of our audience.

Another area that is important is to look at programs that strengthen the traditional subcontracting program. One of those is Mentor Protégé. I think that can be part of the solution to the subcontracting --- program. It is not for everyone. Mentors are experienced, large business prime contractors. Protégés are small businesses in the Federal marketplace.

They enter into, some sort of a joint agreement. It is a business developmental assistance program for small businesses. I think that can be effective, too.

Another area that can be effective is one that we started at Homeland Security last fall. We convened a meeting of our largest 20, 25 large business prime contractors. And I laid out -- we have only been there a few months, so it is kind of bold, you know, to hold a meeting.

So, we laid out the things that we expected of our large business prime contractors. And we made it very, very clear of what we were looking for. It was a very productive meeting. It was scheduled to last like an hour, and it lasted for three.

But we talked about a whole number of things. And ultimately, what we found in all of our discussions, is that, there is a world in which small businesses, women-owned small businesses included, market directly to the Federal government for prime contracts. And that is the set of opportunities for which a firm has to be strategically positioned.

But also, there is a world in which small businesses can market directly to prime contractors for subcontracting opportunities. It is two different sets of procedures, but what they have in common, based on the small businesses that we have spoken to, is that they are both critical forms of revenue in the Federal marketplace.

Now, we have also learned from small businesses, that what we base our record on -- we worked in the treasury for so long in this same field, we asked small businesses, how did -- those that have been successful, how did you do it?

And that is one of the things that keeps coming back. You have heard from the panel here today. It is a really good panel, by the way.

MS. : Very good.

(Applause)

MR. BOSHEARS: I go to a lot of panels. This is a good panel.

(Laughter)

MR. BOSHEARS: Even though I was not expecting to talk today. But the lessons are important. If I may, and I will close on this. Again, this goes back to, what can we do to strengthen the subcontracting --- program? It is a joint effort. Clearly getting the message out on the opportunities, is critical. What a marvelous network we have available here. Also, it is important that it be known as a two-way-street.

We have terrific websites, chock-full of information. But folks have to know where they are and how to visit them, and how to use the information that is available to them.

But that is a two-way-street and that is something we can all do. Okay but now, here are the four things that small businesses that have been successful in the Federal marketplace, have told me over the past, how many years. When you ask this question, there are four answers that come up over, and over, and over again.

And subcontracting is one of them, but it is part of one of the four. Number one, the successful small businesses have told us that they do their homework—that they review all the applicable background information. Is it a lot of material to digest? Yes. But it is essential. And there is no shortcut. It is like taking a test in school and you do not really read the book. What happens? Okay.

Number two, they have told us that they understand the difference between open market buying, FedBizOpps, and the use of preexisting contract vehicles. GSA Schedule is an illustration. It is critical because this strategic positioning depends on it.

The third thing that they tell us, is that they participate in small business outreach activities. Now at the same time, they told us they pick their spots. Because a small business owner representative cannot go to all of them. They have a business to run.

And the fourth thing that they tell us, is they look at the whole gamut of positions. Where, on some projects there are prime contractors, sometimes it is subcontractors, sometimes part of a teaming arrangement, sometimes part of a mentor protégé relationship.

So I think when you kind of stack it all together and you look at those four things that we hear over, and over again, I think that those are important things we can learn from successful small businesses, and translate that into future success for those small businesses that have an interest in the Federal marketplace.

MS. LAIRD: Is there an audit process to determine the small business ---?

MR. BOSHEARS: Is there an audit -- say it again, ma'am?

MS. LAIRD: An audit process?

MR. BOSHEARS: Is there an audit process to determine --?

MS. MACRAE: If a small business is truly used in that process?

MR. BOSHEARS: There is a -- well, that deserves an honest answer. There is a mixed bag of follow-up. At Homeland Security, we hired a young man and that is his full-time job. We are going to

monitor our subcontracting plans, we are going to participate with our SBA colleagues, our commercial market representatives, and the various audit agencies.

It is a mixed bag and it goes, based on discussion of resources, which we have previously discussed.

MS. SOLOVIC: I just want to comment, and then we are going to go to Mary and Marsha, and then to the audience.

MS. : Can I please ---.

MS : Hi, I am Trish --- with the State -- Department, OSDDBU. I just spoke with Bob Taylor who is the head of the subcontracting for the SBA. And when he heard that I was coming here, he said, well if subcontracting happens to come up, please make sure that you mention this. And that is, that defense contract management agency, they do compliance reviews every year. They do try and review every single DoD contractor, large contractor who has a contract with them, and that SBA does about 50 percent of compliance reviews every year.

He said they were going to do more, but SBA has very -- enough resources, but they would like to do more but he did say they do at least 50 percent.

MS. DORSEY: Is that for civilians?

MS. : Civilians? Yes. DCA does DoD contractors, SBA handles civilian contractors. And the other thing too, is that the new electronics subcontracting reporting system will be coming out and that will certainly help with reporting.

MS. SOLOVIC: Okay. Great. Thank you. We are going to come back up here to the Council. Mary, and then Marsha, and then we will open it up to the floor.

MS. MACRAE: Thanks, Susan. I, too, want to say thank you ladies for coming this afternoon. I have been knee-deep in business ownership issues since the mid-80s and I have learned quite a bit of information this afternoon.

As a result, what I am going to ask you is, each of us up here representing women business owners, and especially women business owner organization. We have newsletters where we can reach thousands, and thousands of women business owners.

And research shows the women business owners do quite a bit of their research information via Internet. With that said, with all the information available to us about procurement opportunities through the Federal government, what one website would you recommend that we use in our newsletters to be consistent in getting the message out to our members, who are women business owners, as to how they can get the information they need to do their research, do their homework, what one website, so that we do not confuse them with a thousand websites?

MS. DORSEY: I would say, and I have not been on it recently, but WomenBiz.gov was always one that I have referred businesses to. But I need to be sure that if the information is current and also, I would ask that, rather than just put the names of an OSDDBU office or a women-owned small business advocate, put our websites on there. And tell them to go there first, before they ever pick up the telephone.

MS. MACRAE: So, WomenBiz.gov?

MS. DORSEY: That would be my choice.

MS. : We have all that contact information

back by the refreshment table for those of you who want to write it down.

MS. SOLOVIC: Marsha?

MS. FIRESTONE: Well, I learned a great deal and I thank you for that. I do, however, have to say that one of the things I learned is that, if RFPs, when they come out are already late, then that means that the old boys network is really in action.

MS. : I do not know.

MS. FIRESTONE: No? You do not think so? Well, after I finish, I would hope that you would respond to that. Because I -- the reason I believe that is true, is because the percentage of contracts going to women-owned businesses are still very small.

Now I think we need to change that. So, I am going to take a big risk here and throw out an idea. I do not know if it is possible. I do not even know if it is in our mission, Marilyn, could put the National Women's Business Council put together a program for women-owned businesses that was specifically targeted to contract opportunities for us, and invite the various agencies to participate and hold an event where they could come and begin to start building the relationships. And, perhaps, building contract opportunities.

MS. : Can I just add to that for a second? Because I was thinking something similar to that. We have so many women entrepreneurs in the United States. But there might be opportunities for a business they have not been in before. Then if women could actually hear the opportunities they could go to them together, and come up with some solutions, and go for some of those bids.

MS. NELSON: I think it is absolutely within our mission to facilitate this process in any way that we can, without creating any redundancy, because we cannot afford, within the private sector or the public sector, we have got to find ways to access what is there and to utilize it.

I think it will be interesting to open this to the audience and then to hear the second half. Because, we have heard a lot of ideas with the sense of accountability. I think, Susan said, as a small business, how much time do I have.

There is tension in this system, to the extent that we can facilitate it. But, whether you are a very small business or a large business like mine, when you are bidding for a big contract, and that is all relative to your own size, it does take time, it does take homework. And the accountability that you are asking for us to have, in terms of the fact is, yes, there is a lot of money at stake. But nobody seems to be able to win without a lot of work.

And if we have ways to, sort of, find these sources or finds ways to facilitate so that, people who are sole proprietors, who have small businesses, can get, somehow, --- that they can get to the point of correctly being selective. Because that is the other thing you have all pointed out.

Be selective so that you are not dispersing your own energy across opportunities that are not realistic. So, how we can help them to get to that point, so that they can utilize the time and energy that they do have, to sort of focus and target efforts and be more successful.

I know at one point, I remember, when Susan, she is not here right now, so. I do not know which is safer to quote her, when she is in or out of the room

(Laughter)

MS. NELSON: But, Susan, from time to time, that WBENC has told women not to spend a lot of time and effort. That it was not going to pay dividends, that it cost too much to get to a point of being able to bid. Both, the information gather, whether it is getting on the GSA Schedule, and that the risk was so much higher than the gain. I see some nodding over here, we will hear more about it.

But, again, I think it is something that, perhaps, each of you who had these associations if we can help be more precise, so that we can cut that down and make the process more efficient, more realistic. And then, to correct accountabilities on both sides that we are going to make progress.

But that is really what today is about. And I think we are all learning a lot and I am really grateful. I will turn it back to ---.

MS. CONTI: Can I respond to that last comment though?

As far as the good old boy's network? The RFP is going to identify the evaluation criteria. And it is going to, clearly articulate what that will be. So no matter who bids, we will have to be measured against the same criteria.

And generally, there is technical, there is management, there is past performance. Those are the three common ones you will see. You are up against teams that know the business, that have the insight, have past performance in that area.

When these RFPs actually are released, and sometimes on some of the contracts we are working now, they will have a four-day, seven-day turn around times. Some of the very big ones might have thirty or sixty days.

My point was, you cannot wait until that is, to start figuring out who your team is, how you qualify, what you have to bring to that effort. You have to figure out, in advance, where the major opportunities are coming up, and work to try and figure out who the best team is to be on. So, I hope that clarified it.

MS. FIRESTONE: But my point was, that you have to have some sense that that is happening before you --.

MS. CONTI: Absolutely. And that is why you have to go to these procurement opportunity days and be reading the websites. They often will announce things once, in advance if they are being released. They will have a sources slot, where you can even put in a response that says, I am qualified, and try and take it to a small business. Limited competition.

So there is quite a bit of advance notification that goes on. And then, there is the networking of trying to get in, like, on our -- we have our prime's list here. You could go see the small business women-owned business reps in the prime contractors.

And start making relationships with them, to try and find out from them. Because they know what contracts are coming out a year from now. Believe me, they have already got a team assigned to them.

MS. NELSON: Would you just take us through, without the detail, because as you can see, --- there are a lot of things we are learning? Once the RFP goes out, all of this relationship building and education goes on ahead of time, and capabilities matching, so to speak. And then the RFP goes out.

And then, there are various places where women seem to feel they need consultants. One is, getting on this GSA. But then, there is this next task order piece and how do they get from -- if they do look like they are winning a contract to this task order piece, then do they need a consultant there?

MS. CONTI: No. Although, if you are really serious about being a defense contractor, you may want to do some strategic hiring to try and -- rather than go through this very long learning process, which is taking all of us along at the time, try and acquire that through a targeted hire. That is one, possibility.

But one of the things I wanted to mention was, there is something called teaming agreements. And, if you are able to get through the first wicked, wicked prime contractor who will hire you, or include you on their team, then you will be offered a teaming agreement. And that teaming agreement should define what role you will take in the work.

And, you can get guarantees. So, that is an area -- teaming agreement is very, very important. A lot of people do not -- a lot of times you are so happy to be on the team, that you do not get the teaming agreement captured properly, to guarantee your work.

So, the Office of Naval Research has a yearly conference and they have a four-hour session called, Doing Business with the Navy, where they take you through all their different programs. Those are

the sorts of things that, I think, if you are really serious in going after government work -- probably all the agencies have those kinds of workshops. You would want to go.

Questions and Comments: Audience Discussion

MS. SOLOVIC: Okay I know we can -- this has been wonderful information, but I want to open it up to the audience and give everyone --. If you would just raise your hand and I think there is a hand-held microphone that --. And, Virginia, we will start with you.

VIRGINIA: I would like to, not only, compliment the magnificent panel, but also, wonderful questions from the council members because you have really elucidated some critically important issues.

I have been working in the area, off and on, since the late 1970's, trying to get women involved with Federal procurement. And I think it is an enormously complicated area. There are so many different agencies. Things are more organized and standardized now, than they use to be.

But I think the multifaceted aspect of it, makes it quite difficult. I chaired the Access to Markets event that Marilyn talked about, that we did in February with the Council and Department of Commerce.

And one of the things that we heard there, repeatedly, was the --- and understanding. And I think that really came out again, very much, today. One of the ideas that came out in that Access to Markets meeting in February, and I specifically wanted to ask Shirley about this, in terms of NASA.

You have mentioned the MBRAC Program. I did not quite get it but, Minority Business Research Advisory Committee, you --

MS. PEREZ: MBRAC. It is a council.

VIRGINIA: Council. So my question is, do you consider that an extremely effective vehicle? Would there be relevance in potentially having something like that in "w"* brack kind of thing? Because it was so clear that the OSDBU reps that we had at the February meeting, they thought they were doing a fabulous job with outreach.

And they were very, frankly, stunned, many of them, to find out that these experts in the room knew nothing about it, as validated by the number of the gurus on women's entrepreneurship here. But that was one thing that we were interested in as a possible vehicle up for communicating in an ongoing kind of way to the OSDBU people. I believe you said also, that they could comment straight up to the administrator and whether you saw this as an effective vehicle, both within NASA and more broadly, essentially, in other agencies.

MS. PEREZ: Absolutely. The MBRAC is a group of small business owners that are appointed by the head of the OSDBU. And again, they are an arm of the NASA Advisory Council. And they are there to advise the small business office on ways to help bring more small businesses into NASA.

And, yes, they do have access directly to the NASA administrator. Their recommendations are taken into consideration by the NASA administrator.

VIRGINIA: And how many women-owned businesses are represented in MBRAC?

MS. PEREZ: We have one, two, three --.

VIRGINIA: Percentage-wise?

MS. PEREZ: I cannot give you percentage-wise because I cannot think of how many. I think we have about five women-owned businesses, currently sitting on the MBRAC. I think, and I have not seen the full council, but I would guess to say that we have about thirty members. So, they are well represented.

VIRGINIA: And are they all minority women entrepreneurs?

MS. PEREZ: No, they are not all minorities. But, well, yes they are. They are all minorities. Minority representation. So, yes they are.

VIRGINIA: So do you think there would be any value in having a “w”* brack?

MS. PEREZ: Well, let me -- I stand corrected. Minority, in that they are small business. But, no, they are not all minority-owned businesses.

MS. SOLOVIC: Someone else in the audience? Right over here? Stand right up.

MS. SULLIVAN: I am Ann Sullivan with Women

Impacting Public Policy. I just feel compelled to echo support for the advocates that are sitting here. Sherry Cohen, with USDA, is a tremendous advocate for us. Kevin Boshears --, I mean, Mary Ellen, I know of your work. I just have not had a chance to see you at the department.

But there are just so many advocates at every agency that are willing to help you if you are truly interested in doing Federal work, and you are committed to it. I would say that their advice is something that we always hear, but it is very valuable to women-owned businesses and certainly, my members.

So, I think I am saying, thank you and I want to encourage you to continue to be the advocates that you are, for certainly, our members here in the Federal contracting arena.

MS. SOLOVIC: Right over here. And we are going to take a break at about three o'clock. So, I am going to keep moving right along.

MS. TOOMEY: Hi. Excuse my voice. I am Terry Toomey and I produce a radio show called, Business and Technology Insider Radio. And it is an Internet broadcast. And a lot of the issues that you have been talking about, we talk about everyday on our show.

It is www.btiradio.com, it is totally free and Kevin has been on our show a couple of times. We have interviewed many of the OSDBUs at the different agencies and we are always looking for great stories.

So we wanted to let you know, first of all, that the radio show because I think it would be beneficial to most of your members, that we do produce a show everyday. It is on 1:00 to 2:00, and if you cannot listen during the day, you can listen in archives. It is available for three months.

We also have a conference coming up, November 2nd to the 4th, called Marketing to the Federal Government. And we are profiling the Department of Homeland Security, Commerce, Army, I cannot even remember everybody who is going to be there. But there is a flyer outside.

So again, it is www.btiradio.com.

MS. SOLOVIC: Terry, it is nice to meet you. I get your emails all the time. I get to put a face with the email address.

MS. HANKINS: Hi. My name is Eppie Hankins. I am with BETAH Associates, Incorporated. We are a woman-owned business and we have been providing services to the Federal government since 1988. I wanted to echo a couple of the comments and also, from our side, just make a couple of comments to the Government individuals.

First of all, I agree. SADBUs and OSDBUs representatives are an invaluable resource. On the GSA Schedule, there has been a comment that you can go to GSA directly and bypass getting a consultant.

We have three schedules. The amount of resources and time that it took us to get one of our schedules by trying to do it ourselves. Twenty or thirty thousand dollars is a small investment for a consultant, compared to the time of effort, labor, loss opportunities that you have to expend to try to do it in-house.

It takes a tremendous amount of internal resources to try to put together a GSA Schedule. So it would be wonderful if that process could be simplified. Also, as far as the subcontracts. It is very easy to get on a team, but it is very difficult to get work.

Large prime contractors, you could spend a lot of time marketing them and trying to get on their team. But, getting work afterwards, is another story. And I wonder, in terms of the monitor of subcontract plans, what are the penalties? If those prime contractors do not use a small business subcontractor, unless they are threatened with losing the contract, it really does not have any teeth in it. So it have to be some penalties associated with that.

MS. KISHABA: Can I answer that with an example? As Kevin pointed out, it is something that --

MS. SOLOVIC: Can you come up here? Why do not you use this microphone, you are so close.

MS. KISHABA: As Kevin pointed out, it is something that is developing. For example, one of the best practices that the US Agency for International Development, you say, the procurement chief, himself, Tim Beans, is working with the OSDDBU Director, Marilyn Martin. And primes, who do not use their subs as they say in their bids, will not be allowed to compete for additional work.

And so, this is something that is just happening and it is sensitizing, I guess, all of us to hold people's feet to the fire.

(Applause)

MS. SOLOVIC: Karen and Sherry, do you want to comment? Wait a minute, will this microphone reach over there to you?

MS. CONTI: Another way you can prepare yourself -- oh, this is better. Another way you can, kind of, help yourself is when you are looking at opportunities, read the solicitation carefully. Sometimes there are award-fee provisions. If it is an award-fee type contract for execution, where the prime will be given award-fee based upon meeting their goals for small business involvement.

So, if you see an opportunity and you are put on a team where there is an award-fee associated with it, they will lose money if they do not hit their goals. Now that does not usually mean it is, you, particularly, it means they have to hit the woman-owned business goal. Or the small disadvantaged business goal.

But certainly, there is a higher likelihood of them using you. So these are the sorts of decisions that have to go on when you are trying to weed through all the opportunities that are out there. When you see something that is set up this way, I would move that up a little higher on the list.

MS. SOLOVIC: Sherry? Do you have a comment?

MS. PEREZ: I was going to say, at NASA, we currently, are using an automated system, where we can pull up the system and we can track the activity of the contractors -- the subcontractors.

So I have access to it, every contracting officer at NASA around the country, has access to that system. I will go through, once a week, and pull it up and see just what the activity is, on contracts at the centers I am responsible for. If I see low goals are occurring, I can contact the small business specialist at that center and find out what is going on.

I mentioned, when I was doing the briefing, we do the procurement management surveys. At that time, we go through them, we do an audit of the small business office, looking at everything.

One of the things that we hone in on, are the small business goals. We pull up low-goal report. I sat down, when I did the audit of one of our senators recently. I sat down with contract officers, where there were some low-goals. And we had a very intense discussion about that.

One of the things we decided to do, very simple. We have a form at NASA, that is a performance evaluation. At the end of a contract, a performance evaluation form is done on the contractor. On the prime.

That form goes into a database that is agency-wide. We are going to revise that form and we are going to add another box, specifically, for small businesses. Where they have to address how they have achieved their small business goal. That is something that they will not want in the record, to see that they have not performed well in that area.

MS. DORSEY: I just have a question. I know we were talking about monitoring and looking at their goal accomplishments, but is there any method that you can use to actually determine which of the subcontractors that they have proposed on their team, they are actually awarding those contract to, or are you just getting a number?

MS. PEREZ: I am sorry. I did not know you were talking to me.

(Laughter)

MS. DORSEY: NASA or anybody else. Are you just looking at the goal accomplishment on the subcontracting, or are you actually looking at, who the subcontractors are to that prime, and whether or not that prime is using those subcontractors, or maybe they are meeting their goals, but they are using somebody else, who was not originally identified.

MS. PEREZ: No. I have all the information. I know who the prime is and who the subcontractor is, as well. So all of that information is available too.

MS. DORSEY: And they report back to you, who they used?

MS. PEREZ: Yes. They report that on the automated system. I can pull it up and I can sit with the small business specialist, or even the contract officer, and discuss issues concerning that.

MS. SOLOVIC: Sherry?

MS. DORSEY: Trish, I am going to ask this question of you. Is the SBA, 294, 295, going to have that information in it?

(No audible response.)

MS. DORSEY: It does. Okay.

MS. SOLOVIC: Does someone else have a question in the audience?

MS. : Or a comment or, want to share best practice?

MS. SOLOVIC: All right. Well, I thank you all for your participation. Once again, thank you to the outstanding panel. I have certainly learned a lot and I am sure everyone has. So thank you for your time.

(Applause)

MS. SOLOVIC: And we are going to take a 10-minute break, and then, we will be back to start the second panel. Thank you.

(Whereupon, a break was taken at 3:04 p.m. and resumed at 3:15 p.m.)

MS. FIRESTONE: Let me see the hands of everyone because we are on something new, this afternoon.

(Show of hands)

MS. FIRESTONE: Lots of good information shared. And again, thank you ladies, so much. And gentlemen, where did he go?

PANEL #2: WBOS **Mary J. MacRae, Moderator**

MS. MACRAE: Good afternoon, I am Mary MacRae. I am a member of the Council and it is my pleasure to serve and represent NAWBO, the National Association of Women Business Owners. I am also delighted that I have the opportunity to introduce the panelists for this afternoon. A panel of

procurement experts. And I say, a panel of procurement experts because they have done it from the other side.

Before I introduce them, however, in your packet there is a wonderful brochure about NWBC. I want you to be sure and read it, so that you will know more about the council. But one of the things that Aileen told me, as the moderator this afternoon, I have liberty to go off the script.

And so I want to take about three seconds. Well, maybe about a minute and do it.

MS. NELSON: Who gave you that much liberty?

(Laughter)

MS. MACRAE: Aileen. One of the things that makes me very proud of having been a volunteer leader within NAWBO, is the amount of energy and effort that NAWBO women, NAWBO members, NAWBO leaders did, in order to help their fellow sister-entrepreneurs.

We may not be sitting here today, had it not been for NAWBO. And our two people that I want to recognize from the four that have an instrumental -- who were instrumental in that, and also, somebody else who was instrumental in helping NAWBO progress today.

First, there is Susan Hager, who was the first president of NAWBO. Susan, say hello people.

(Applause)

MS. MACRAE: Virginia Littlejohn, who is also a national president of NAWBO.

(Applause)

MS. MACRAE: And Amanda Perl, who is the Program Director at staff headquarters.

(Applause)

MS. MACRAE: And that is one of the reasons why I asked about, which link to put -- what website to put into the newsletter, because she does our newsletter. I introduced them because, back in the 70's, these ladies started working on issues important to women entrepreneurs. One issue, procurement.

And in 1988, HR.5050 was signed into law that did a lot of things. It had access to capital requirements, the women's business centers. It had the establishment of the National Women's Business Council and it also had Federal requirements for procurement.

And it was wonderful to hear what is going on today, but at the same time, it saddens me that 16 years ago, Federal legislation was passed for women to have access to Federal opportunities. And 16 years later, we are still trying to make just that 5 percent of the pie.

So, I think what is important to us this afternoon, is to listen to the panel of experts who are going to tell us how they were able to break through the web. And also to say, thank you to Susan and to Virginia for being trailblazers and seeing, back in the 70's and 80's, what we are still struggling with today, and to let you know the struggle is going to continue probably, for a few more years. But we will win this battle.

(Applause)

MS. MACRAE: So, for the panel of experts. First, today, we have Dr. Mildred Boyd, who is President/CEO of EduTech, a firm that has successfully competed in the private and public marketplace for 10 years. EduTech is a 2001 branch with the SBA's 8a Program.

Our second panelist is Deirdre Magee, Vice President of Operations for Career Management International, Incorporated, located in Reston, Virginia. Dee's company was awarded its GSA Advantage contract in January 2004. Maybe she can tell us about that GSA stuff.

And our third panelist is Claire Gastañaga. Did I say that right, Claire?

(No audible response)

MS. MACRAE: Principal of CG2 Consulting. Claire currently serves a member of the National Procurement Taskforce for NAWBO and she is the Atlantic Region's Representative to NAWBO's public policy council.

Dr. Boyd will begin the discussion this afternoon, by sharing with us, her experiences in the government marketplace and she is definitely well qualified to speak to us on this topic, since her company has successfully won contracts from NASA, Health and Human Services, FEMA and the Department of Education. Dr. Boyd?

Presentation by Dr. Mildred Boyd, EduTech

DR. BOYD: Good afternoon. I am very pleased and proud to be here to represent small women-owned businesses. I have an interesting story to tell. One of the things that people mentioned earlier was, what it takes to be business. And I have four things that I think are important.

One of them is, to be prepared. Two, is to develop relationships. Three, is to be well educated. And, four, is to have a niche. Find yourself a niche. And the thing that I think that helped our company make its turning point, was the relationship.

Prior to being incorporated, we were a company that worked with higher education. We helped universities with their career programs for minorities, to help minorities get into the science and technology areas.

And through this relationship, we happened to do some consulting for a government agency, which was NASA. And NASA was very interested in the services that we had. And at that time, that was some 15 years ago. They helped

-- you have us put this together, you should contract with us to help provide this service.

And the service was outreach to minority institutions. We have helped them put together their university programs office. And they held our contract for a year while we got certified in one of the SBA programs.

It was from that relationship, and we are still doing some of that business today, that we established our company. So NASA took us under their wings and they helped us to grow. We are featured in a magazine that is outside. It is entitled Minority Women and Business Owners that contracts with NASA.

So, being prepared, having a relationship. And relationships do not stop. You have to keep them growing. You have to keep working and growing with them. We were educated in the fact that, we had a niche. We, not only had relations with the client that they were interested in working with, but we had methods of doing that, that were different from everyone else.

So our niche is knowledge and sharing. We help people to infuse knowledge either from inside the organization or outside the organization. That has helped our company to develop so we do training as well, to help support that.

We do support for small business, but we do -- in addition to our outreach to universities and higher education, we work with other small businesses, as I said. But we help train project managers. This is a way we help organizations to keep knowledge within themselves, and to recognize that.

We do all the project management training for NASA, which is not the original program that they had for us. But we do the first four courses to help certify their program managers. So we have not only been able to identify our original niche, but to identify an additional niche, and to work through that.

We are located in Columbia, Maryland, in Silver Spring, and of course we are located onsite, at NASA facilities. But for us, it is continual marketing and continually developing relationships. And if you have one relationship and you get that niche, you can piggyback to other agencies from there.

That is the method that we use and there is where we went. We started off with NASA, we were successful with them, and after we niched, we said, do not you have an OSDBU or something of that kind, over at another agency that might want to use our services?

And so, we went from there, to the next person. So we gained credibility because we took it from the first place to the next agency. So that was the method and the pathway that we used, that we thought was a little bit different from some of the things that they say. But you must be educated and know, as people talked about earlier, what your agency does and how you can fit into that.

It might not develop exactly into a contract from there, but they may have something that they can help you align with it, in terms of that. But when they see a service that you can provide and can successfully provide it, even if it is something that you have done in the private sector side, that you want to take over to the government side.

You do not want to, just tell them, I could do everything and anything. Do what you can do and stick to it. Then you can probably be successful.

MS. MACRAE: Okay. Can you hear me back there?

(No audible response)

MS. MACRAE: Good. Thank you Dr. Boyd. It sounds as though you serve as a prime contractor, correct? Do you also serve as a subcontract?

DR. BOYD: Yes. Yes. I do both.

MS. MACRAE: So you do both ways then. You do the sub and prime. Thank you.

DR. BOYD: Oh. It is okay. It is just loose. We do prime contracting work and subcontracting work. We also have our GSA Schedule. One of the things that, in terms of being prepared is, you have to have vehicles that people can get to you with.

If you go marketing the agency and you could, say if they like you, and they are looking at something -- well, this is how you can get to me. You can use my GSA Schedule or I am a certified 8a, or I have a small woman-owned business certification and you can come directly to me by a small procurement, or purchasing. Whatever it is. Whatever you can get, start off with that, then go to the next level.

MS. MACRAE: Good, thank you so much, Dr. Boyd. In your event packet, you will find more information about Dr. Boyd, as well as all of the panelists, that you can look to as experts from the vendor side, the supplier side, and again, thank you very much.

Our next speaker is, Deirdre Magee, who will share with us, her views on marketing and sales in the government marketplace, and the value of OSDBU opportunities. Dee?

Presentation by Deirdre Magee, Career Management International, Inc.

MS. MAGEE: Thank you. This has been a very good learning opportunity for me, as well. I came here expecting to show, but I probably learned more than I can probably show you. But let's see where we go with this.

We did get our own GSA Schedule. It took us about a year to fill out the application. It was a huge Excedrin headache and it cost us about nine thousand dollars. But, we figured we were smart women. We could do it. I know you all could do it too. And if anybody wants information on how you get started or, which direction you went in, my name is in the bio package. Just give us a call I would be happy to share with you.

One thing that the GSA Schedule has not done for us, is our phone is not ringing off the hook, just because we were are on the GSA Schedule. It really is, as everybody here said, it is relationship and it is no different to do sales to government, I do not believe, than it is to do sales to industry.

Because you really do have to have people know what it is you have to offer. They have to have a need and want your services. And you really want to invest in the people that you are meeting and go to the shows. I never heard of an OSDBU. Actually, I do not even know how to pronounce it. Until today, I was saying O-S-D-B-U.

(Laughter)

MS. MAGEE: So I am glad to know. And it rolls a little faster off your tongue now. But we actually -- you know, you start off with the schedule and then you get all this marketing material from GSA, and that is where we learned about the local PTACs and some of the -- we started getting some literature.

So, we started to go out and we actually did some of the OSDBU shows. We did one at the pentagon recently, at the army, we did one in Philadelphia with the army, we did the State Department and the Department of Energy show, and sent our sales team out there and made some very good partnerships and representations.

Actually, when we were in Albany with NASA, we were introduced or -- I forget who it was from NASA, took us over to a very large northern American corporation. That is one of your subcontractors. So we just started a dialogue. And actually, we have a teaming agreement. We are a subcontractor to that organization. So we hope we will get some work that way.

Of course, as a woman-owned business, you always want, and I think are better off having your own contracts, if you can get them. So that is our goal.

We did, through DoD and being registered on PRO-Net, have three previous government contracts before we got on the GSA Schedule and, how did we get those? We knew somebody who invited us to competitively bid and we did get one contract that way. The other two contracts, they were sole source to us because of some clearances that our people have that other companies did not have.

But the PTACs were very useful to us, too, because when the relationship we made in NASA, by going to a show in Albany, lead us to our local PTACs. Because we did not know what a PTACs was. But we thought, well, this is good. And actually, we got some very good graduate student who did some marketing for us, free for all the demographics in the local area, companies that bought our services and what they spent on it in the previous years. So that was very useful information for us through PTACs.

RFPs. We have not been very successful with RFPs, I am afraid, and I think we were a little late getting in there. And it is people -- either you have to have a relationship and you have to just constantly be on the telephone.

Even the contacts that we made at the OSDBU shows -- you cannot call people just once, because they may not have a need at that time. You got to really just continue to dial up, you meet them right at their shows and just kind of, have a continuing relationship with them.

That does not mean we call and bug these people every other week. But we do, we take notes at the time we talk to them about what it is that we talked about. And really, what it is, is, we ask them -- obviously, as Sheri had said, you need to really go to the website and do your homework.

But, I am trying to approach it like we are not trying to sell you anything. We just want to know what it is your challenges are.

We also asked some of the representatives from OSDBU to help us get to know some of the HR folks. Because our buyers are really the HR folks, and the procurement folks are a wonderful vehicle to introduce us to other people that we need to get to know.

So, I will just say we are keeping at it, and I know you all can do it to. Just keep at it. Keep making the contacts and relationships, and hopefully, it will payoff for all of us. We will all be successful. Thank you.

MS. MACRAE: Thank you so much, Dee. And see, even someone who is successful at getting contracts from Federal government, she said she still learned something today. OSDBU.

(Laughter)

MS. MACRAE: Our last, but certainly, not least, speaker for today is Claire Gastañaga. I am going to get it right, yet, Claire.

MS. GASTAÑAGA: That is all right.

MS. MACRAE: The principal of CG2, a consulting firm that specializes in business and public policy advocacy services just for women and minority-owned businesses. As a member of NAWBO'S National Procurement Taskforce, Claire brings to her presentation, this afternoon, a strategic perspective on government procurement.

So, Claire, what advice do you have for the audience?

Presentation by Claire Gastañaga, GC2

MS. GASTAÑAGA: Thank you ---. Is it a possible to turn the volume down, so the feedback will stop? A little bit, because -- is anybody else disturbed by the feedback?

MS. : We all hear you.

MS. GASTAÑAGA: All right. Well, let me make sure that people understand, I am speaking for myself, personally. My opinions are informed by my experience with lots of different organizations. But I am not --- to speak on the NAWBO, or any other organizations with which I am associated.

And I say that, in part, because I would like to be more flattering and I am afraid that I am -- well, I am very respectful of the commitment of everybody in this room and what people are doing individually. I do not think that the outcome or the, overall, result is one that I can be very positive about, frankly. Based on what I see out there.

I mean, you start from the prospective that NAWBO did a national survey of our members that said that 50 percent of them do not choose to get certified because they do not see a return on investment. Whether it is from the private sector or the public sector. And so, that sort of, gives you a feel for how women business owners perceive this whole process.

Which is that, seeking to participate in, and even by becoming formally certified, is not something that they think is worth their time and energy in a broad range of things.

The second thing I will say is that there is also a perception of government that there is an overage and lack of commitment, really, to make things happen for women business owners.

And I think it is complicated by the reality that there is, whether we like it or not, some folks may be unhappy with my saying this, there continues to be a perception that, particularly majority women business owners, do not need any help. And that many of us are fronting for our husbands anyway.

And I think, you know, we make certifications on other things, that bring credibility and integrity to our statements about who we are, and our businesses as an important part of our addressing that perception from our own side.

But I also think we have lots of work to do with folks who seek to pick women business owners against minority business owners. And frankly, I think minority women business owners end up in the worse possible posture of all.

But we just did the disparity study in Virginia and if we ever had a Federal disparity study, I will be shocked if it does not show similar data. But the largest disparity between utilization and availability documented in our statewide study, which surveyed five years of contracting, was a 69 percent disparity between the utilization and availability of majority women businesses in the professional services area.

And so, you know, one of the things that we see over a period of time is, whether it started in '88 or its

the 1994 thing that said, okay, lets make it a 5 percent objective or it is two thousand when we said, okay, lets make it an actual set-aside.

But we cannot get a set-aside until we get a study. And now, we are in a situation where we have been waiting three and a half years for a study. And the reality is that all we are going to get in December is a statement of methodology from the National Science Foundation.

I mean, the SBA has procured the methodology. We are not going to get the study in December, we are just going to get something that tells us how to do it. And there was a six-month extension on that contract that was given for reasons which I feel unfathomable.

Because you know, this methodology for doing these studies, it is not a mystery. I mean, there are people out there doing it everyday for other organizations. I mean, it is just not that hard to come up with a methodology.

So all that says to me is that folks are not really committed because it took six months to get the veterans program up and running with a set-aside. Not sixteen years. Six months from when the legislation passed to when it was being implemented with goals and objectives.

So, you know, the perception out there is, there is a true, despite the real commitment of people down the ranks, that the big picture of commitment is just not present.

To add to that, this whole -- one of the things that we did not really address or talk about is, the difference between what happens with big-dollar initiatives and small-dollar initiatives.

So, there was a reference to the fact that everything under \$100,000 is an automatic set-aside for small business. But small business is defined in such a way that, in Virginia, 97.7 percent of all businesses are small businesses.

And the SBA had an interesting program in 1998, for the very small business, which is under 15 employees and under \$1,000,000 in annual revenues, where they were authorized to do a pilot to find out if the set-aside would help with those businesses.

And, you know, a lot of our women business owners are in that category of smaller businesses. That pilot program was supposed to result in some kind of evaluation of whether that would help all of us to do something in that -- that evaluation is still out in the ozone.

The authorization, as far as I can tell, expired in 2000. But the SBA help desk tells you the program is still going on. And the report that was supposed to be made to congress has not been made yet. And so again, you know, something that might be more helpful is out there, but we do not know anything about it because we do not have any data.

On the small purchases, there are lots of procurement offices in the Federal government and in state governments, and in private industry, who have, what we would consider, large-dollar authority, whether it is \$50,000 or \$100,000. Where they can buy something without going through all these elaborate procedures.

They can either buy it off GSA, they can buy it with a request for quote, they can do it through something that is very informal. Well lots of women business owners consider a 50,000.00-dollar contract, a big deal. And yet, those are the ones that really have the least amount of oversight performance and accountability, at least in my experience.

So, I think we missed something that would serve a lot of the people that we represent because we do not focus on how informal and how underevaluated that part of the program.

In Virginia, our state procurement, 80 percent of money goes out with 20 percent of the actions. Eighty percent of the actions, in other words, 80 percent of the contracts deal with only 20 percent of the

money. But 20 percent of billions of dollars is not small dollars. And I think the same is true across the Federal government.

That if you look at, and I was looking at the fact that we do track actions as well as dollars, in terms of percentages. But the agency that is doing the best -- was doing the best, as of 2002, which is HUD, had the highest percentage of both, actions and dollars.

And so, if you do not focus on numbers of contracts, which is what reflects those small-dollar decision-makings, or numbers of purchases, and you only look at dollars, we are missing a huge part of it.

So, those are the kinds of things that I think are important. And then, just one other thing. I mean, I want to echo what everybody else said about accountability. Incentives are great, but there needs to be a hammer. And the hammer has to apply the people who make decisions, people who design the systems that could be better utilized to do technology to track, and the primes.

And, you have to incentivize but you also have to turn around and say, you know, if you do not get where you are suppose to get, you do not get to play anymore. And you get sanctioned. So. That is all I would like to say.

MS. MACRAE: I told you she would give us a strategic perspective. Thank you Claire, and you represent yourself well, women business owners and yes, even NAWBO, even though it was your own thoughts and words.

Let's see if the council members have any questions. And lets start with our chair. And what I will do is, I will go around to the Council, giving each one of us an opportunity to speak once. And once we have all had an opportunity to speak, then we will go around a second time, if necessary.

Questions and Comments from Council

MS. NELSON: Once again, I really appreciate your insight and I think we have learned a lot from listening to as well. Do you think it would -- I guess I have two comments.

One, from the council's viewpoint or the organizations represented, would it make sense for us to actually look for these organizations, either collectively or individually, to do some of that strategic hiring on behalf of their membership, and have, whomever that individual or couple of individuals spend time familiarizing themselves with the capabilities of the membership?

And then doing this, sort of, surfing of these opportunities and start to do the first cut, because what we have got to do is, get this match-making process more efficient and see how we might be able to participate in doing that. That would be one question.

And then another is, I am sure, from both points of view that, there are probably, at least I would like to know -- is it possible that some of the tension in the system goes back to -- as fast as we are growing small businesses and starting small businesses, there is a cycle between the start up of a business and a certain viability level.

And there is sort of, the chicken and the egg. People want to be contracted in order to become more viable. And I hear us saying that, past performance becomes a, sort of, hurdle or part of the ---. So we need to have a certain performance that we can demonstrate before we are seen as viable enough to bet on in this very rigid system.

So, we need to spend time and we are spending time, I should assure you. Looking, not just at how many

--- are starting businesses, but how to help them to get to second and third stage businesses.

And so, I think that we should assure you that we do recognize that the viability issue is important to us, as it is important to you because there is a progression. That said, we cannot use that to diminish, in

any way, the fact that those who do have capability, do have certain niche capability and need to get access, need a fair playing ground. And that is, I think, what this is all about.

But I do not know if any of -- what I am saying is that if any of you want to comment or reflect on --

MS. MAGEE: I think that would be a terrific idea, to be able to take the capabilities and try, somehow, to at least, have a point where you start. Because the Federal Government is so huge. I mean, I know it just took us forever to just even break it down into who might use our services. I think that is a terrific idea.

The other suggestion I was going to make, and I do not know how you do this link, but I think there is something in this, is that, when we went to the show at NASA and we went around and we met some of these larger contractors that we could subcontractor a team with, one of the very first questions I asked was, are you on the diversity supplier list? Oh, well, do not know.

So we went back and then we realized, we have to get registered with all of these companies. I think if you could put that kind of information, and then try to, as you mentioned, develop a capability statement and/or list of services that different organizations use, that would be very helpful too. Because, you know, again, that is like the chicken or the egg. Do you start as a diversity supplier and then go out to the Federal OSDBUs, or do you get them all married up in sync.

It would be so much easier if somebody had one-stop shopping to be able to learn how to do that, as opposed to, all of us trying to reinvent the wheel on our own.

MS. MACRAE: Claire?

DR. BOYD: I think that the organization has the ability to assist women in marketing. But I think it is just like Deirdre said, you have to help us to know which areas are the best areas to go in.

I think that developing the relationships is something that we have to do on our own. But if we have leads or you knew which organizations, or which agencies actually procured which things, in an easy way to get to, then you would know which agencies to target and which people to deal with. That was in response to your question number one.

Question number two. I think that, in terms of the tension in the system, we have to look at small purchases. That is probably the best way to get your past performance, if you do not have any.

Originally, they are not saying, do you have a million dollar contract or do you have million dollars worth of past history with this agency. What did you do for them? As long as it is in your core area of expertise, then it is considered past performance, and you can use that to market.

Whether it was \$25,000 or \$10,000 in the beginning, it is not important. The importance is getting that past performance and then you are allowed to be able to build on that.

MS. GASTAÑAGA: Two things. One, I am a firm believer in the private sector. So, however we do it, one would like to think -- I sat there thinking, there is a business here somewhere.

(Laughter)

MS. GASTAÑAGA: During the entire first presentation, I am sitting here like an entrepreneur thinking, okay, there is a business here somewhere. But I do think that the NAWBO and WBENC and others, and the Council could help streamline access to the knowledge piece.

In other words, two-way. Because the other thing I noticed about and listening to the different Federal agency presentations, and we experienced this with our own SBA office. We have the SBA district office involved in planning for our trade show and then, despite their involvement in planning, they scheduled something on the same day, where the regional director was coming down and doing something with women business owners.

So I am like, excuse me. But I think there is a two-way thing here. There is a helping the Federal agencies piggyback on existing opportunities that exist to communicate with our members so that they are not reinventing the wheel. Whether it is by making sure there is a national calendar of trade shows on things that women business owners are already engaged in, I do not know what it is.

But then the other piece is helping to get us the information that we need at our own best opportunities. And second, on the startup to viability. I do think -- and the GSA Schedule is a pre-qualification mechanism. And I think if we can find a way to better help businesses get those small procurements, then we are put in the position to be able to meet those requirements that the GSA Schedule has for surveying your customers and getting information about performance that can help women businesses grow.

What we see, I think is that there are a lot of startups. And then, there are not as many long-term successes and somehow there is a way this all can work better in understanding.

MS. MACRAE: Good. Okay, which council member wants to go next?

MS. : I would just like to follow up on that. Can you hear me okay?

MS. : They are saying yes.

MS. : Okay. Good. In terms of the business opportunity, just one idea and I have a question for you and what you think of this idea. Is I think, first of all to get the information out there to women-owned businesses so that they know how to go on contract. But, to take it a step further and get the information out to women that could invest in these women-owned businesses.

So, we could -- women could come along and invest. Help the women-owned business and actually support them with money. Do you think that women-owned businesses would be perceptive to that idea?

DR. BOYD: I think that women-owned businesses would be. Primarily, because there is a special set of circumstances that a women-owned business has to deal with that other businesses do not. And that is a reality. So that, if they were able to give capital from other women, it would be very easy. Very, very beneficial.

MS. MAGEE: I agree.

(Laughter)

MS. MACRAE: Simple and to the point. Okay anymore questions from the council members?

MS. LAIRD: I will hold it to my mouth. Is that working?

(No audible response)

MS. LAIRD: I have two simple questions, I think. What are the best practices converting the relationship currency into projects with the OSDDBU? I keep on hearing this word again.

And the second one is, I love the idea of tracking the small contracts because I think that that is where the wealth of information -- what recommendations would you make to OSDDBU? And I guess maybe clear -- I have a passion for this question, about what recommendations about tracking both, the size of the contracts, in addition to the total budget for the different agencies?

MS. GASTAÑAGA: I think the first thing is to examine whether technology has been used as efficiently as it could be, in terms of these processes. For example, where somebody goes out to use even the GSA Schedule. I mean, does the technology bump up and ask the question, have you complied with the requirement that you worked for a woman, or minority-owned business.

What we found, there are similar kinds of technologies in our state procurement system, is that the technology is utilized to help with the compliance piece. So, while the information is there to track after the fact, there is nothing in there, proactively, to guide people in the right direction, in terms of

decision-making or to prevent them from getting to a certain point in the system, until they have shown, or at least said they did something.

If they said they did it, you would go back and find out if they did. And if they did not, then punish them for saying that they went and did it. But, I think there is a technology piece here. I think that is the thing that is so exciting about where we are right now.

Fifteen years ago, we could not be having this conversation about making a meeting for ---, in terms of the accountability and tracking, because we did not have the systems to do it. And we do now, but were not using them on the front-end as well as we could. And I think that is something I would like to see us do better.

There is an assumption built into the system, I think, that I always hear about under the really big contracts. And making sure the subcontracting system works, which it -- that is a very important piece of our success. But for a lot of people, in terms economic growth and in terms of moving from start-up to sustainability, getting into that lower level, I think it is incredibly important.

MS. MAGEE: I have a question. I just thought about something. It has been on my mind and now I have an opportunity to ask this question, so I am going to ask it. If you are a small woman-owned business and you have done business with large contractors, who were some of your subcontractors, why can't that count for past performance in some way? I mean, do you ever consider that? I am just curious about that, for people who do not have traffic.

MS. MACRAE: Jean is next.

DR. BOYD: Can I respond to this? A part of what we have to do as small businesses, is to document. Make sure that whenever we do business with someone that we have, in writing, that we have done this, et cetera. So that you can use it as a past performance. Maybe that the company is so big that people have moved on. They are not in the same place.

But if you have something in writing to show that you have done that business, you can always use it as your past performance. You know, what did you do?

MS. DORSEY: I would also like to add. I have looked to many times at PRO-Net and looked for past performance and found nothing. So if you are in PRO-Net, you need to update your information in PRO-Net.

MS. KERRIGAN: When you say documentation, are you saying ---.

MS. MACRAE: She is asking for a testimonial or letter of some type. What type of documentation are you talking about?

DR. BOYD: You can develop a form that you send to every client. You know. And say, we would like to find out what we did, was it satisfactory, et cetera.

MS. : Like a survey?

DR. BOYD: Right. A survey or whatever you can use that you would like to have as a part of your marketing materials. Develop that and use it.

MS. MACRAE: Jean?

MS. JOHNSON: Okay, yes. I have a --. First,

Dr. Boyd, where are you located?

DR. BOYD: Our primary office is in Silver Spring, Maryland.

MS. JOHNSON: Okay. I kind of figured that. The reason I say that, is, I kind of went through all of this stuff. I knew most of the stuff you talked about and ---. I do not know why. I just was one of the ones sitting here that actually knew some of this stuff. And I will give you another applause. Those websites are awesome. They have everything in there.

DR. BOYD: Thank you.

MS. JOHNSON: Those are the good things, so now I can go to the other side.

(Laughter)

MS. JOHNSON: But I was one of the ones that went to the GSA program. They told me which schedule to get on. I followed everything they said to the letter of the law, spent a lot of money in the process, only to find out that they said I was on the wrong schedule and they are the ones who told me to go on that schedule. So I had to start it all over again.

But, it is almost finished. It is almost finished. But that was not -- the issues was, after doing that, I spent a lot of time coming down, back and forth. And then, the bitter reality itself told me that, unless you are really here in this area, it is really hard to make those relationships.

And that was the thing that kind of, started to make me think, I am going to have to invest in a person or I will never get any business from the government. I did come and I went to meet with a lot of OSDBUs. I talked to them and some of the services that were needed, they would give me people to contact, and I know that it was like 12 people in one organization.

I called every last one of them. Not one of them knew anything about the person that told me to call them. What I was doing, they said, no, we do not do that here. Out of 12, this is insane.

But, you know, bottom line. The reality to me, is that you really have to be visible here and it is going to be hard work. Now I expect the hard work but it is nothing short of that. So we are, as women think, we get on the GSA Schedule, we get 8a certified. That is great. That is good, but it is not going to get anything unless you have somebody here that is knocking there -- making those relationships.

So, before you go through all of that work, you want to make sure you got the time and resources to invest, or it is not going to happen. And I am not just saying that as a negative for the government. That is any company you want to go to. You got to have the time to invest. But for the government, to me, you got to have a whole, whole, whole lot of time.

MS. : Okay, Marsha -- Sheri?

MS. DORSEY: On behalf of the Government.

MS. : On behalf of the Government, your answer is?

(Laughter)

MS. DORSEY: This is Mary Ellen's opinion. But, yes. You are right. The majority of the buying is right here in Washington, DC. But that does not mean that you have to physically be here. Have you looked in the blue pages of your local telephone directory to find out what government agencies are right in your backyard? That is a place to start.

Work with your PTACs to find out who your points of contacts are. They are right there in your neighborhood. And then, you know, if you want to come to Washington -- I think there are several government agencies now that have these vendors outreach sessions. So find out when they are.

We are trying to make them so that they are within a week's time of one another, so that if you come, maybe you would hit two or three at a time. But that is my two cents.

MS. JOHNSON: I will just add one thing for people that do not know. They do have this. I know they just had it in July and they are going to have it again in October, where you can meet with these agencies. You sign up ahead of time, and you could -- it is one day and you could block out times. You have to go online and register really quickly and they will meet with you, each of those departments.

Now I know it is coming up again in October. They had one in July. It is twice a year. So that is something that every woman business -- should be trying to get there and meet, but make sure you have the time.

MS. COHEN: Back to the, having to be in Washington. It certainly helps but it depends on which department you are marketing to. So you want to know your departments. And NASA has these regional set-ups.

So if you are in an area where there is a regional set-up and you are interested in marketing NASA, make sure you do one of the regional, you know. USDA is a very rural agency and we have got places all over the country. So it depends on what -- some organizations within USDA only contract within the Washington area within USDA. But some of them will be contracting in a regional set-up or a state set-up.

So again, it is part of knowing the organization and targeting your market, and doing your homework.

MS. CONTI: As a follow-on, the Navy in 2004, set up something called the Seaport Enhance Contract. Seaport was a contract that basically came out of the headquarters that did a lot of procurement.

And then, they decentralized their field activities, and they have seven geographic regions. It is, in many ways, similar to an SBA kind of thing. However, it did not take all of the qualifications. You could submit as a prime and just about everybody that submitted, got on.

And what they do now, is, they issue solicitations by region. So, one, being New England, and I think, six, being San Diego. So these RFPs come out daily. I mean, sometimes on a Sunday they might dump 10 of them into my -- my inbox is constantly full of these things.

So again, if you are new to this business, figure out what your niche is. Figure out who primes are and pay some visits on those primes and see if you could be added to their teams. Very low-cost approach to getting the -- it is all about vehicles. Even if you get on a team and you do not get work, to have the vehicle, gives you, what we call in the business, the license to hunt. Having a vehicle is everything.

So just getting on a team, even though you may not be getting work, you have the ability, most times, to go out and market work and not expect the prime to hand it to you. If you have that vehicle and you have a good skill or a good product or something like that, you value add. To have that vehicle is everything.

MS. MACRAE: Sheri. Then, I saw Annie, and then, Marsha.

MS. ORLOWITZ: Ladies. Hi does anybody hear me good?

(Chorus of yes)

MS. ORLOWITZ: I will stick in right in my mouth. Okay. I just want to pin one thing down, which is, this organization is really a resource. When Marsha -- I am part of the Women's President Organization and every week, Marsha comes out, and there is also NAWBO and the Women's Business Enterprise. But every week, Marsha Firestone, on behalf of the Women's President Organization, puts out the opportunities.

When you have the vendor days, when you have the schedule of seminars. If that information can be networked to this organization, I do not want to speak on behalf of anybody, but I know Marsha offered herself up, that information is going to get disseminated. It is not a waste of your keystrokes and we could really use a tighter network of dissemination. I think these women would agree.

So I really want to put it down and I am going to follow up, because I get stuff from Marsha, too. So if you are not contacting me, at least contact the WBE or NAWBO, or -- and Marsha Firestone at WPO. Now that I have made my pitch to pinning you ladies down on this.

I think what I have heard you say is, we need to read the procurement budget of each of the agencies in order to understand the business out there. And Clair, to your remark, there is business. Okay? And I mean, I am with you.

And, I guess my question, with regard to the procurement business, I mean, the procurement budget -- is it that defined? I never sat down and read and agency procurement budget. I can do that. I can read regulations. So could every woman in this room, but are we going to really find something out if we sit down and read the procurement, or do we have to make --- requests in order to get some specific information?

MS. DORSEY: I would say it is not that refined to tell you what contract is going to come out of that pot of money. That is where you have to get -- that is where you need to have an understanding of the organization as a whole. To determine, okay, within DHS, if we are going to be increasing security on the borders, where is that going to come out of?

Likely, the Customs and Border Protection. But if we are going to look at, you know, looking at immigration forms, well that is another department within DHS. So I am telling you that the information is there but I cannot tell you, well okay, we are going to take it from here and put it here, here, here and here. It is difficult for me to come up with that. I do not know. Does anybody have any options?

MS. ORLOWITZ: Can I just do one follow-up? I am kind of confused because you spoke, just now, about all the RFPs that get dumped on your desk. And I also think I heard you said that, by the time you are in the RFP process, it is not worth it. And I know that we, someone either at the SBA and council has been trying to circulate these RFPs.

So, what is the next step? I mean, how can we --we are smart women, how can we figure out where the money is being allocated and what that money is being allocated for? Okay, if you have to go to the department and you have to figure out, within the department, which department. Is there someone where, the information of what is going to be procured by the agency, is there somewhere where that information flies?

MS. CONTI: For example, at NAVSEA. I think that the Seaport website is in a public domain and I will double check on that and send you the email address on that. You can go in and see who the primes are, for example. Then there is a Forecast that is sent out, on a quarterly Forecast, that says, here is what we think is coming up.

Now, in general -- so that is helpful. If you did not know anything, you would at least know quarter of ---. But in general, when you are sort of in the business, you kind of know when things are coming up for bid. Because they have a ---. It is a contract, you know, base, plus four years.

So, people are tracking them five years out, and up. So it is not just a simple, straightforward thing. But what I think you want to do is, whether it is through proximity, you know, I am next to ---, San Diego. So that would be good for me. Or I am next to shipyard, Norfolk Ship Yard or something like that, through skill match, through a number of things.

You need to, sort of, reduce the number of opportunities to the things that you think you have the most likelihood of, in a match, a hit. And then, really dig in on those.

So do not spread yourself thin on going after all four of these. We have four very different areas here. So, depending upon your business, your skill set, your past performance, even your vocation, try to figure out which is best for you and then start working in through that organization. Through their website, through the -- I always want to say, SADBO -- SADBUs and all of their opportunities.

There are generally business industry days, planning forecast, matchmaking events. Almost every one of the major activities has these sorts of things. And when you go in and you start registering on their websites, they will automatically notify you.

So you need to focus your target and then, try to get in on a number of different ways. Coming in and just talking to the small business office, is not going to do it. You got to come in through every door.

MS. MACRAE: Claire, did you want to respond to that?

MS. GASTAÑAGA: I do the kind of business that is not in the Forecast. I do sexual harassment training and investigations. I do mediation work and most of the time, my discovery is that, the kinds of contracts that I am interested in are often something nobody had any idea they were going to need, and yet, it will come out on FPO and it would be out there and you respond.

And the only way that you can find out what happened, because nobody is ever going to send you a note that says, oh by the way, so-and-so got selected for that contract, is true for all the contracts. To deal a whole investigation of what they did and to try to come up with some learning in that process. I mean, in terms of the historical information.

And I guess, you know, guess there are lots of things that agencies forecast. But a lot of professional services stuff is not in the forecast. So it is some very amorphous thing. And if you talk about, only being able to be positioned, if you wait for the FBO and the request for quote, and the solicitation to come out, you are too late.

I have not heard anything today that would be helpful to me to better position to do that. I mean, I have put together a nationwide team to bid on a Department of Justice mediation solicitation. And I have yet, to be able to figure out what happened to that contract and what the outcome was.

MS. CONTI: Did you ask for a debriefing?

MS. GASTAÑAGA: Yes. But, there is a limit to how long you pursue something before it becomes dysfunctional, in terms of, your other business development and your clients. So, there is not an easy way to get that historical information, at least in my experience.

MS. WEEKS: As somebody who has worked in the Office of Advocacy in the past and procured research services, and as somebody here in the National Women's Business Council, we procure, also, projects.

Everybody who bids on a Federal contract opportunity and does not get it, has the right to come back to that office and say, I would like a debriefing. I would like to find out why I did not win. And, believe me, it is kind of a pain, sometimes to meet with lots of folks who did not win, but it is a very useful opportunity for me, as the person who were at the statement of work, to see did they get understood very well. But also, for the small business owner. Everybody has that right to get a briefing.

MS. GASTAÑAGA: But you have to come and do it in person.

MS. WEEKS: You do have to come and do it in person.

MS. GASTAÑAGA: It is a very difficult process.

MS. WEEKS: Although I have done a couple of them over the telephone. So it did not all have to be -- but that is something that maybe a lot of business owners do not know. You do have that right to get a briefing, afterwards, to find out, you know, what were you ranked, lower end. And certainly, we have always, then, told that person, here is who won. Here is the business that did win that opportunity.

MS. GASTAÑAGA: But what you might also want to know, is, what was their prior relationship with the agency. How many other contracts have they got from the agency before. All those things that really give you the information to maybe say, was I really fairly considered or not. And I found that the agency gets very defensive when you start asking those kinds of questions because they assume you are going to file some kind of protest.

MS. MACRAE: Okay. So lets wrap up the questions with the council because I see some hands being raised out in the audience. Annie, did you have a question?

MS. PRESLEY: This may not be the testimony. I was just wondering if there is a single source document that you guys are familiar with, from and to the departments, which kind of, step-by-step, working through potential pieces of business? And if so, if you could identify where those are located.

And maybe the Council could consider -- kind of, put them in flow-charts or something that others could use to just get them started, step-by-step?

MS. DORSEY: As I mentioned before, all of our information is on our website, www.dhs.gov/openforbusiness.

Particularly with our group, we not only have prime contract opportunities and subcontract opportunities, but there is all that grant money that is going out the door to state and local government.

From that point, you need to figure out who is getting those grants and target yourself to them. The other program we have at DHS is our SBIR Program and our, it is called Broad Agency Announcements, and our Science and Technology.

But we need to remember that the government does not buy everything. There are certain things that each organization does buy or going to buy what NAVSEA is buying. So you really, kind of, need to focus on those websites to get a sense. Look at the Forecast. Figure out what that agency is buying and when they are buying it.

Ideally, we are trying to capture the information on our existing contracts so that we can have a companion document to our new opportunities that will list existing contracts, and who the contractor is and when that contract is up for renewal, so that you can start building that relationship, you know, two to three years out. And, you know, work with the primes, let them know who you are, let them know what you do and how you fit into their needs.

MS. MACRAE: Marsha?

MS. COHEN: Can I just respond?

MS. MACRAE: Yes.

MS. COHEN: There is no one place of step-by-step because we are all different sizes and different shapes. And, even within the Department of Agriculture, we have different organizations. We call them our sub-units agencies. Sometimes they are called bureaus, sometimes it is divisions in different organizations.

And my food and nutrition service is buying out of the headquarters office and my forest service is buying at every forest. Some of them are buying mostly small purchase procedures. Anything that is under \$2,500 is a different procedure. And if it is \$2,500 to \$100,000. If it is over \$100,000, it is another procedure.

So between our different sizes and shapes and the different regulations, and the different vehicles that we use, whether they are going to go on for a GSA Schedule, whether they are going for an open competition or set-asides. So that is why it is not easy. It is not an easy process. Almost every Federal department puts together a, doing business with our how-to, contract, with.

I brought some. They were out on the table. They are all online too. And here is the one for USDA. Almost every Federal department puts something like this together to help you get a start. But that is what the OSDBU offices and SADBUs are for, too. It says, first steps to get you -- how to understand each organization.

There is also something out there called a Federal Procurement Data Setup, FPDS.gov. Which is a compilation of what every Federal department across the whole board, what they buy. And there is always the GSA website.

MS. DORSEY: Yes. I think it is FPDC.gov.

MS. COHEN: FPDC.gov. So, you can get in to see where, across the board, which Federal departments are buying which products and services to help you get started in holding things down. But there is no one, how-to, for everybody.

MS. MACRAE: Marsha?

MS. FIRESTONE: I think I learned today, is that there are many opportunities out there in the Federal agencies, but that it is a very complicated process to weed through. To find our way through, let me put it that way. So I was going to ask the women business owners if they could tell us what would have been -- if they could have had help, what would have been the biggest help to them, in getting to this process?

MS. MAGEE: Having a flow chart, as you mentioned, would have been helpful. We just would have just said, okay, GSA that is where we have to be on a schedule. That is what we keep hearing. I think, just to have some type of a pamphlet or, here is how you would approach doing business with the Federal government.

You can say that everything is different in each agency, but it is like unraveling spaghetti. In has no beginning and it has no end. It would just be nice to know, you know, here is the bowl and here is how you might start tackling all of this. So, I think that would have been very helpful.

Because I was, you know, Susan Sagano* and I, we were just, sort of, shooting in the dark. I was a former Federal employee and I knew the contracting on the other side. I knew nothing about contracting for my own business.

DR. BOYD: For me, the difference I think, would have been to find a mentor early on. If you can find a mentor, someone who has been where you want to go, that is willing to help you, then that would be a big plus.

A lot of the agencies talked about their mentor protégé relationships for the programs that they have. That would helpful. But a mentor for me was the biggest thing. If I had had one earlier on down the pike, I would have saved a lot of time, effort, energy and headaches.

MS. MACRAE: So, Susan, Karen and Claudia. Then we will turn it over to the audience if you have questions, okay? Susan?

MS. BARI: I think mine is almost more of a statement than a question. I have been involved in this for many, many, many, many, many, many, many years, from many different sides of the table. More than two sides.

(Simultaneous conversation)

MS. BARI: I have been involved for many years in many different ways. I was chair of the Interagency Committee on Women's Business Enterprise back in the 80's. When we were doing baseline studies of what Federal agencies were doing with women business owners. I ran one of the first four women's business centers that, at that time were called demonstration sites. I have been a contractor to the Federal government and I am the founder of WBENC, Women's Business Enterprise National Council.

I think that everybody has a piece of the blame. Women business owners, as well as small business owners, minority business owners. Everybody looks at the Federal government as the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, as sort of an amorphous opportunity. Rather than trying to take a look at it the same way you do with a corporate contract and opportunity, as you have got to differentiate your market.

You have to understand what you have to sell and who is going to buy it, why they would buy yours rather than somebody else's. Product, price, delivery. All those same things you do in the private sector, you have got to do in the government sector.

One of the things that -- Virginia has got a session that we did on access to markets, one of the later studies that we did was to find access to information and education. And we found that there is too much information out there. Just as much information as anybody could possibly use.

The problem is there are not any good filters that help you develop, just-in-time, learning practices. Like say, there is an RFP out there, or there is an opportunity or there is a strategic plan. How do I address it? What is the best way to approach it?

And then, having been a Federal contractor myself, the dirty little piece of information at the other end, is that your return on investment is very limited by what the Federal government will allow you to make as a profit. As opposed to what you can make, in the private sector as a profit.

So, I think that, part of -- whoever it was that suggested getting a mentor, somebody that has been there and done that, I think that that is absolutely the right way to go to develop a teaming arrangement, to go in as a sub, to go in as a partner. To go in as part of a team and test the waters and see is the Federal marketplace really where my business belongs?

Because the Federal government tries to really be fair and open to everybody that knocks on the door or rings the bell. But not everybody is appropriate to be a Federal contractor. And I think that we have to be very honest with people so they do not waste their time.

What I said to Susan Solovic, if I had gotten picked up at the back of the room because the mike was open. The fact of the matter is, if you do not have a staff person, or you cannot afford a consultant to help you get on the GSA Schedule, you probably are not big enough to be on the GSA Schedule. And it just boils down to what your targets are as a company and you have to treat the Federal government the way you treat any other business opportunity.

MS. MACRAE: Karen, or anyone who have feedback to that?

MS. GASTAÑAGA: I just have one comment. The best piece of data that I could have had to be able to advantage me in making the kind of decisions that Susan is talking about is, simply, every time I applied for a contract, an email back that said, here is who got it and here is a copy of their contract.

Because I can look at it and see what I did not do right or these are the fundamental things. I can forward that information. So keeping it from me does not make sense. Or making it hard for me to get, does not make sense. But if I had that information, I could make my own decisions about whether -- and how.

MS. MACRAE: I see some heads shaking. Where you asking for a copy of the contract of the person that won?

(Simultaneous conversation)

MS. CONTI: The proposal is proprietary and it will not be released in the ---. Yes. The contract will but basically it is the source selection. What I think was mentioned earlier is, that the best thing to do is really to go for the debriefing because that is where they are responsible for telling you what the differentiating factors were. You will never get the other proposals.

MS. MACRAE: Karen, do you have a question? Claudia?

MS. LAIRD: What was the return on your investment, in terms of how many years it would take for you to initial investment?

MS. MACRAE: Did you hear the question in the back? She wanted to know about the return on the investment. Okay.

MS. MAGEE: It cost us \$9,000 and a staff person to do it part-time for us over a year's period of time. We got bids from 15 to 35 -- \$35,000 from a consultant, to do it.

Part of the process is electronic, so you can cut and paste all of your material and your background information from your own electronic files. Part of it is a hard copy application. The open ratings, you have to go out and survey and pay for the survey.

It was very frustrating though, because you do not hear anything back for the longest time. So we just had to keep calling and calling and calling, and saying, where is it? They lost stuff, you know, of course. And you are like, yes you have it, and no we do not, yes you do, look harder.

(Laughter)

MS. MAGEE: So, in terms of aggravation, the cost was substantial. In terms of dollars spent, it is a person's time, but we took our time with it. I mean, we did not have a -- there is \$9,000. We had a part-timer do it.

MS. : Is the work as profitable though?

MS. MAGEE: The only work we have gotten off the GSA Schedule since we have been on the GSA Schedule, is through -- we went to a State Department of OSDBU and we got some small training. We have not had a large contract. The large contracts that we have had has been through PRO-Net or we had already had them through DoD.

We are still waiting for the return on our investment in the GSA. We got on it in January and we have not gotten a bid through them. But we are working it.

MS. MACRAE: Okay. Let's see if anyone in the audience -- and if you have a question that may bring another perspective or question that has not been asked so far, let me hear from you.

Questions and Comments: Audience Discussion

MS ARTIS: Good afternoon. My name is Geraldine Artist. I would like to thank Janice Buffler for inviting me today. It has been very informative and I would like to just leave this on a positive note, with the defense facilities directory of contracting office at the Pentagon. And I just want everybody to know that there is one agency out there that is doing extremely well in the women-owned category. And number two, my agency ended at 13 percent.

(Applause)

MS. : --- 23 percent. And so far this year, we have ended at 24 percent of awards to woman-owned small businesses. We have surpassed every category, except one, service disabled, and we are still working on that.

MS. : What is the ---?

MS. : Department of Defense. There is hope. It is still a lot of hard work but there is light at the end of the tunnel. It takes a lot of dedication and we are all still learning and so am I, as I go along. So keep up the good work.

MS HAGER: My name is Susan Hager and I have been in business for 31 years. And I have stories that match Claire's that you would believe. Because there has really been an awful lot of change in the procurement side from 30 years ago. Back then, you could not even get a credit card in your own name.

Today, part of it is because --- jobs. But I do not think that we are ever going to get to 5 percent without some teeth in it. The programs are wonderful. The information is really there. We do government contracting, as well as work toward our foundations and organizations. But I do not think until, for example, that all of these years -- I do not think any prime contractor has ever lost a contract or not gotten a new one because he did not do -- he, did not --- subcontractors.

And I do not think any SADBUD or OSDBU has ever gotten anything slapped or a certain buyer forgot meeting their goals or for not taking that into account. So I think that the accountability that, supposedly is coming, and the issue that Karen brought up is really very important if we ever are going to get to 5 percent.

Going back to, what would you do with advice or what made a difference. For us, I think it was starting with one agency and really focusing on one agency, and learning everything about that particular agency. Because you already have your expertise there.

MS. : Hi. I am Barbara Wrigley from the Women's Business Center in Northern Virginia. Sincerely, a question. I have been surprised today to not hear more about PRO-Net, which is now CCR, in terms of a central place for people to go and get registered --- Central Contracting Registry. And I wonder if both the OSDDBU reps, as well as, businesswomen who are here, if you have used PRO-Net or CCR and why haven't we heard more about that today?

Because there has been so much talk about, you need to go to this agency and you need to go here, and you need to go there. Is CCR just not working well? Or how do you see it functioning to be of assistance to you?

MS. MAGEE: Our existing contracts, before we ever got on GSA, where as a result of being in PRO-Net and CCR. But again, that was just a contracting vehicle. And we had to be out talking and meeting people at trade shows. I think our first contract through meeting somebody at the Shoreham show who was with DoD. The other ones were through their intelligence community contracts that also used that contracting vehicle.

So for us, that was just a vehicle. It is the relationships and the investments before you ever did the RFPs, which we have to bid the RFPs. But, yes, it is useful but it is not the only mechanism.

DR. BOYD: We use CCR more for marketing information. It tells you who your competition is. It tells you what other people have done in the area. And you can find -- you can search it very easily. It is also a requirement for any government contract that you register there. So, I think a lot of us took it for granted that everybody understood what it was and why you needed it.

VIRGINIA: A couple of different things relating to Marilyn's point about start-up to sustainability. If you look at the impact that WBENC has had in the corporate market. It has been absolutely enormous over the seven years, or so, that WBENC has been going.

And it has been a sustained effort of communications between the corporate purchasing people for supplier diversity --- and the certified government ---. So there has been a constant process of refining the learning. The training, constantly getting better as the corporations communicate what they need from WBEs, as WBEs are able to deliver it. So there is the continuous learning process.

I think one of the areas, and I do by the way, agree with Susan Hager's point about the set-aside. I mean, we have been working years and years, and years. So the point that was made about the veteran's set-aside in such a short period of time, compared with our literally working on this since the 70's, 74 was when we really started it.

But, I think that one of the things that makes it difficult, in addition to, there are so many different agencies. It is a very long-term and a very strategic process. I also, very much agree with Susan's point about going after one agency or one niche, that you know, really, really well, which is a again, something that you see with the WBENC members. Where they are really zeroing in on where their capabilities are.

But it seems to me, that we are really at the stage where we need to be more strategic about how we proceed on this. And I think, either the National Women's Business Council could provide some coordination and leadership, ala, this particular event. We cannot do this only once a year and expect all of the dots to be connected.

I think, either, sort of, a coordinating committee spearheaded by the Council, maybe WIPP, which does a huge amount and the whole area of access to procurement. But I think somebody needs to help connect the dots and provide some leadership, whoever you all think is best on it.

I also think a procurement handbook to provide basic information. This could be an online handbook or it could be something that could be printed. But I think that would make a lot of difference. Even though it is not one-size-fits-all, I think there are some commonalities that a lot of people do not know.

I also think that we could look at linkages between the WBO groups and the OSDBUs, in some sort of ongoing way. Perhaps again, coordinated by the Council or

--- or somebody. And in states and cities where there are strong women business owner groups and strong government agencies, I think we could also create ongoing linkages at that level, again, with leadership.

I think that, to Susan Bari's point, that we need to be much more tiered about it. Because I think some of Susan's members or Marsha's members, for example, have the capability of moving into this market in a very significant way.

If they decide it is comparable enough for them to really put their time and energy into it. But let's say there are three, or five, or seven groups around the United States, and maybe it is tying into some of the organizations that do certification for WBENC, but, who certify WPOs.

Let's say Chicago decided that it was very interested in doing this, and other initiatives, through NAWBO or the WBENC certifying groups, or whatever, decided that they wanted to focus on it. Or WPO focusing on it in certain cities.

I think, building those linkages could be very important. I also think that the OSDBUs could create WBO advisor councils where either they were working through coordinating or through the National Women's Business Council or WIP, or something else that was put together to provide ongoing feedback.

Because if the February access to markets meeting, the absence of understanding, on the outside or the other, what was really known and communicated, was enormous. The continued process of sharing best practices across the OSDBUs, I think it is enormously important.

And I think also, that some of the mature, women entrepreneurial MGOs could work closely with some of the prime contractors, on the Mentor Protégé Program. And I think, some of that could also potentially have more ramifications, in terms of corporate supplier diversity, that it could spill over between the corporate side and the nonprofit, to governments. I do not mean nonprofit. The WBENC to government side.

But I think there is a real role for connecting the dots. I think it needs a lot more thinking. But I think this discussion, with all of the state focus in the room, has really been terrific. Thank you so much.

MS. MACRAE: Would anyone like to respond to Virginia, before we go to another question?

MS. DORSEY: I will.

MS. MACRAE: Go ahead.

MS. DORSEY: With regard to there being a procurement handbook, I believe there is one with -- is it the women's business council?

MS. : There is one.

MS. DORSEY: Because I worked on it a few years ago. And then, the other issue is, there are women-owned, small business advocates in every agency.

Now, we have not had a meeting in, I cannot tell you when. But we do exist and we are all -- I know our names are out on the website because I get calls all the time. And I am going to take the opportunity now, to introduce you to the new women-owned, small business advocate for DHS. Angela Williams.

(Applause)

MS. DORSEY: I have been trying to pass this on. So now you know Angela.

MS. MACRAE: Okay. Anymore questions?

MS. BARI: --- Association Representatives to come to attend the OSDDBU Council.

MS : I would like to say -- I would like to tell you all, I work for Marilyn and I have been doing this for a long time. I love the government. Once you understand how they operate and what the rules are, it is not hard to do business with them.

And also, I have to tell you, that we had about 23 percent of subcontracts who now bid to DoD. And would you believe that I have had to find numerous -- because they are now big business? And we train them and we bring them in, and it has been very successful.

So if you really want to get started, instead of banging your head against a brick wall. Get with a prime and make sure that they have an educational process that teaches you. Because riding a bid is not easy if you do not know what you are going. But you have to find the requirements.

You have to know how they are going to evaluate. You cannot just go in and put in a bid. You have to know exactly what you need. You got to know exactly how to respond to it and you have got to know what you got that makes you better. Okay? I would get with a prime, if I were you all. I would insist that they teach you.

MS. MACRAE: Okay if there are no further --. Okay, I see another hand back there. And you have the honor of being the last question from the audience today, so that we can wrap up.

MS. : I just have a quick comment. I have been in the government contracting business since 1988 and people are trying to -- there is so much information. So much you need to know. The -- mentor in the absence of that. One thing I think that the Council can do to help women-owned businesses who want to get in this arena, is to provide a resource of screens, consultants, organizations that would work with women-owned businesses who want to get into government contracting. Because there is no one resource you can really go to.

Women consultants who can help put together schedules if you need to, proposals and also, become involved in an organization like the National Contract Management Association --- nationwide. You will be meeting with both, government and contractors and you can learn a lot from those organizations.

MS. MACRAE: Thank you so much. And before I turn the mike over to the chair, Marilyn Carlson Nelson, lets give our panelist a round of applause.

(Applause)

MS. MACRAE: So Marilyn, I will hand it to you to tell us what is next.

CLOSING REMARKS

Marilyn Carlson Nelson

MS. NELSON: Well, I also wanted to say, thank you so much. Those of you from the OSDDBU community who stuck with us, really, all afternoon. But really, through the years. Some of you, through many years, and some of you, newly focusing on this issue.

I think we all have the same goal in mine. And that is obviously to keep this marvelous economy that we have got, producing innovation, allowing accessibility, inclusiveness, competitiveness. All of the things that have really made this country great and made us the people that the world's economy actually depends on. So, thank you all.

I have to laugh. I do not know how big the handbook that was once developed, is. Aileen, you probably worked harder than any of us. Lets give you a hand.

(Applause)

MS. NELSON: But it seems to me that this is a lot like learning a foreign language. If you use all the -- I mean, I just listened for about three paragraphs and started to put down all the, what do you call them? Acronyms. And there was hardly anything that, someone walking in from really outside, would either begin to find understandable.

So, one of the things that we need to do is act a bit, as translators and make absolutely sure that we can clarify this. And it seems that, also, that every few paragraphs, there was a reference to something new. A new website, a new -- there are a lot of attempts, obviously, to make this work. And the Women's Business Council, today, I think has really burned even more. And the next step is to actually do a couple of things. One, incorporate what we have heard today, with any written statements.

So if any of you are stimulated to go back to your agency or to your business, and forward some kind of a written statement that you would like to be a part of this record, or that you feel is a precise example that might give some clarity or be utilized, in our written report, to actually, make a point or exemplify or clarify something on understanding, we would really welcome that. And you can encourage others to send it in.

Our report will come out, probably not until next year -- at the end of this year. And this is again, absolutely in the spirit of continuous improvement. I actually believe that the momentum is going to increase because there is a certain causality. You can have this many women starting businesses without having more of them become more and more successful, and more and more innovative.

In a knowledge economy, some of the historic capital-intensive businesses are a piece but not all. Now, increasingly, we are drawing from the entire source or pool of intellectual capability. And we are just going to be adding more and more value and be more and more valuable as partners. And we need to partner better with each other.

We are going to work harder to understand that, and partner better with those who have been historic -- historically have been the primes and who need new information, need new ideas and sometimes, new energy as well, in order to maintain their contracts.

We have historically, as a Council, encouraged more accessible information that can give out again today, streamlining the application process and simplifying the paperwork. And that means --- seems to be on the agencies, but also on our women's business organization and those who are trying to empower more of this kind of contracting to take place.

We are going to continue to speak on anti-bundling, but also to help you by making clear, really what bundling is, so that you are not spending a lot of time defending things that, perhaps, are not definitely real bundling. And also, understanding where it is appropriate and where it is not appropriate to bundle and unbundle, in order to make sure that we have access where it is appropriate and that we are part of the solution where it actually is not.

To ensure that these efforts extend to government-wide acquisition contracts, in terms of this enforcement question. And I am excited, I think we are all excited. And understand that there are technologies that are just going to help keep everybody on this, and to ensure that we really do fulfill our roles, whatever they may be. As primes, and subs.

And then this mentoring question. The Council has done -- and I do not know if all of you in the audience are aware, but we did a clear major study on mentoring and how mentoring increases the odds of success in almost every endeavor. Whether it is mentoring a child or peer mentoring, or mentoring from a business that is slightly larger, or one that is the same size and the same phase of development.

So, I think what we have heard today, is that we need to facilitate this specific mentoring of our government contracts, which is a next level of refinement that we probably have not focused on ---. I just,

again, in 1999, the NWBC profiled model programs for public and private sectors. They have been successful, increasing contract awards to women-owned business.

We have been monitoring the process and we are going to continue to do that, but with new energy of our facilitation. Really new energy around it. And I think, Virginia, we have taken note of your marvelous, kind of, crazy or what happened here today, and wonderful ideas that came out of it. If you have a brainstorm on your way back to your office, or driving home, or flying home, email it back. This really has been, I think, provocative. I think we have all, sort of, looked at what we are doing and said, as hard as we have been working at it, are there ways we can do better. We have certainly learned and that produces growth and always produces results.

Again, thank you so much for being here and thank you for your personal commitment to making sure that this country stays competitive and creates jobs, because the best philanthropy in the world is job creation and career opportunity. And that is what we are about. So, thank you all. (Applause)

(Whereupon, the meeting was adjourned at 4:45p.m.)