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A GATHERING STORM

The veteran business movement is gaining momentum in corporate America thanks to the efforts of companies like this year's "Best Corporations for Veteran-Owned Businesses."

by John Dowling

LIKE A ROLLING THUNDERHEAD GROWING on the horizon on a steamy summer evening, the veteran business movement is a gathering storm gaining energy as it poises to rain down on the corporate landscape across the nation. Thanks to companies like NaVOBA's 2008 "Best Corporations for Veteran-owned Businesses," the momentum of the cause is spreading to all four corners of the nation.

These companies, which span the breadth of industry from information technology and defense contracting to professional consulting and construction, share many of the same attributes for success. The attributes include extensive one-on-one "vet-working," dedicated full-time staff, and corporate buy-in at the highest levels of their respective organizations.

In just 10 short years since the federal government formally began recognizing veteran-owned businesses as a preferred small business contracting class, the effects have spilled over into corporate America, which has recognized in short order the value that military service prepares veterans to be great business owners.

This is the fourth year for these prestigious awards sought by supplier diversity professionals from among the entrants who want to demonstrate their company's dedication to veterans in business. Some such as Booz Allen Hamilton, SAIC and Xerox have proven worthy each year by placing a premium on contracting with VOBs. Others, such as CH2M Hill and Alcatel-Lucent are more recent entrants into the VOB contracting arena, but with no less resolve in helping veterans. Let it be said that all of this year's prestigious class have demonstrated their dedication and concern for veterans in business.

The "Best Corporations," comprised of eligible companies with more than \$1 billion in revenue, were judged on the total number of contracts, dollar amounts spent with veteran-owned businesses, total budget dedicated exclusively to veteran outreach and staffing allocated solely to assist VOBs.

Sit back and review the "Best Corporations for Veteran-Owned Businesses" to see if you may have what it takes to become one of their preferred suppliers, or grab advice to learn how you may improve your marketing outreach and ultimately your bottom line.



Novartis Makes First "Best Corps" Appearance

MAKING ITS INAUGURAL APPEARANCE on NaVOBA's list of "Best Corporations for Veteran-Owned Businesses" is East Hanover, N.J.-based Novartis Pharmaceuticals.

A U.S. affiliate of Basel, Switzerland-based Novartis AG – Novartis Pharmaceuticals researches, develops and markets leading innovative prescription drugs used to treat a broad range of diseases. In the U.S., its products are concentrated in three key areas: cardiovascular and metabolism; specialty medicines which include medicines for respiratory diseases, infectious diseases, neuroscience, bone and hormone therapy, ophthalmology, urology, transplantation & immunology; and oncology.

Novartis' commitment and mission to utilize diverse suppliers including VOBs is clearly and articulately published on the company's website in the "About" section under Supplier Diversity. It states "We are committed to fostering and maintaining relationships with small, minority and women-owned businesses in our quest to drive innovation, increase our understanding of our customers, and stimulate economic development in the communities where we do business."

For VOBs in the healthcare fields, Novartis has a broad array of buying needs, with requirements that can vary greatly depending on location, operation and/or business. A sampling of goods and services currently procured from diverse suppliers includes: clinical research services, engineering and construction, information technologies, market research, maintenance, printing, professional services, telecommunications, staffing, training, travel and more.

Sheri Shafir, supplier diversity manager in Novartis' Strategic Sourcing office has words of wisdom for VOBs who want to become preferred suppliers for this two-star NaVOBA corporate member.

"Focus on your value/ benefit when initially meeting with a corporation. Explain how you can save time, money, streamline a process, simplify. Know your own competition and highlight your company's strengths," Shafir said. "Ask yourself what makes your company better than your competition?"

Shafir also recommends that it is essential to understand the needs of the companies you are trying to do business with. She suggests you start by reviewing company websites to try and understand their sourcing requirements in that particular industry.

And finally, have your elevator speech perfected, she adds. "Start with the value/benefit, current experience and successes before noting the veteran and/or disabled veteran status. Meeting the company's business requirement is key to success!"



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