

From the Desk of Nancy Porzio, DD in the SBA Alaska office.

Thank you for the opportunity to address your gathering today.

I came to the Alaska District Office of the US Small Business Administration 14 months ago armed with 16 years of experience running an SBA office and the desire to expand our presence in the Alaska small business community. Members of the BBNC leadership were among the first to meet with me and extend a warm welcome. I was also provided an amazing overview of the history of the ANCs and the impact of the 8(a) program to the vast communities, urban and rural in the state. I was, and still am impressed with the unique and massive contribution that the ANCs make to the economy in the state. And I know that is not without challenges.

I knew that in order to properly manage the Alaska 8(a) portfolio that I would need highly qualified and motivated staff. I also knew that we needed to establish a close rapport with the procuring agencies to encourage more solicitations made available to our 8(a) firms. Finally, I planned to introduce more training in the district office for staff, for our resource partners that work with the firms and to the firms themselves.

Regarding the staffing, I was immediately given the opportunity to hire three BOS staff and I hired former contracting officers with years of experience on the procuring side of the projects. It was just what we needed in the Alaska office and after about two weeks of training with our existing BOS they took

on portfolios and today each manage about 50 firms. Unfortunately we lost our Lead BOS in September but were able to refill that position with an existing BOS Christie Vandendries. Christie brought over 10 years of experience as a contracting officer with supervisory experience and has proven to be a stellar employee. We have the approval to backfill her position and are on the top of the list of offices to receive staff, once our HQ determines there is a slot. It is complicated and frustrating but it is our reality. I expect that hire to take place within the next two months. When I came to the office it was with the intention we would return any firms to Alaska that were being temporarily serviced in Seattle, Spokane, Portland and Boise offices. We brought back about 50 firms and will need to wait to bring back more; we also have approval to hire 2 more BOS but again need to wait for a slot. That typically means someone in the SBA field offices nationwide needs to resign or retire to open a slot but that happens often during this first quarter so I am not worried that it will take too long. That will bring our BOS staff to 6 which will accommodate the firms in the office, current and future.

Regarding building the rapport with the agencies we are halfway there by hiring former contracting officers. They have connections with the Corps of Engineers, the Air Force, Army, Department of Interior and VA and they are opening doors for better communications and more transparency. We have trained the Corps recently and plan to schedule 6 more training sessions over

the coming months with other agencies. In addition we plan to hold matchmaking events, panel discussions and networking opportunities for our firms that will result in more procurements and better relationships.

Finally, training is paramount to the success of the SBA office and our staff; therefore it is priority with me and our Administrator Linda McMahon. She is making national training available to the BOSs across the country for the purpose of transparency, standardization and making better connections. I am offering professional career development training to Alaska staff to improve their abilities to perform their duties. Those employees are also planning training events for our firms to be held over the next 10 months, in person, through webinars and from our resource partners. I am very excited that we are going to be increasing our presence. I requested and received an increase in our travel budget to accommodate more travel for training to remote areas in Alaska.

I know many of you know something about our Administrator Linda McMahon as she addressed your leadership when she visited Alaska in July. You know that she has experience in business, that she has a keen interest in improving the opportunities for success for our country's small business and she has the ability to get things done. She has three words that she uses to emphasize what she expects from her staff, the 2,000 plus employees across the country. She expects Efficiency, Effectiveness and Accountability and she

is helping us to achieve that through more funding for our outreach and training, better technology to help us perform our duties and transparency from the top down. We have her ear and she has our backs and that is a rare gift for employees in a federal agency.

I would like to be able to tell you about the upcoming initiatives and more changes to our agency but I cannot do that just yet. There are changes in process but many will not be ready to roll out until the second quarter. At that time you will start hearing about agency reform that will improve our communications, response time and accessibility. It will include state of the art reporting systems that will be easy to use for the employees and public. Our office will be working with our firms to provide training on the new programs and we look forward to the changes.

I will close on a very positive note and that relates back to Administrator McMahan. One of her initial priorities when she came to SBA was to expand contracting opportunities for small businesses and more specifically disadvantaged small businesses. To that end she is building a talented team of leadership in HQ offices to support that expansion and Administrator McMahan is personally getting involved at the higher levels of other agencies. A recurring meeting with agency leaders, small business specialists, contracting experts and other appropriate personnel is taking place in DC on a bi-weekly basis and SBA's senior leadership attends to

provide a voice for more procurement opportunities for our businesses. These meetings will be instrumental in making changes to existing processes related to requirements, to the percentages applied to national contracting goals and to the development of new initiatives and programs for contracting. And SBA is at the table. In fact they have recently invited some of the field leadership to attend these meetings telephonically and this will provide directors like me the opportunity to voice our concerns and suggest changes going forward. In my 31 years with SBA I have not experienced collaboration of this magnitude and I am so excited about the prospects for small businesses across the country as major agencies come together to make changes that will have a lasting impact.

These are exciting times at SBA and I look forward to working with BBNC in the coming months as we conduct training, outreach and communicate changes to our programs. I feel the best is yet to come.

Thank you again for this opportunity and best wishes on a productive meeting.