

Networking is Essential for Small Businesses

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By Linda Hillmer

With more than 1,750 corporate members, the National Defense Industrial Association is the United States' leading defense industry association that not only promotes national security but is also a catalyst for business development.

The nation's largest defense contractors, many of whom are world-renowned for major weapons systems, are members of NDIA, but so are some of the country's most innovative small businesses; in fact, more than half of NDIA's corporate members classify themselves as small businesses.

With the increasing national focus on job creation by the White House and technological innovation within the Defense Department, NDIA is in a prime position to help small businesses grow.

"NDIA values small businesses that are supporting our nation's defense," explains Lawrence Farrell, NDIA president and CEO. "Small businesses are vital to America's industrial base and play an important role in defense-related innovation."

NDIA is encouraging small businesses to join the association to help ensure they are clearly heard in national issues. Becoming a member of NDIA helps small businesses grow through a variety of benefits, including education, networking and industry influence.

NDIA produces more than 200 events a year ranging from large, several-day-long, regional conferences with several hundred participants to more intimate breakfast meetings with a dozen or so attendees and subject matter experts as speakers.

The NDIA website contains an up-to-date schedule of events, which includes background information on each event, an agenda, lodging and location information, and a point of contact to answer questions. Topics vary from highly-targeted small business interests such as small business size standards and set-aside policies to broad topics such as manufacturing pilot programs and supply chain management initiatives.

"I'm proud of the depth and breadth of the events NDIA offers to its members," notes Farrell. "Small businesses can learn a lot without having to take a lot of time and expense away from their business. The lessons learned from mid-sized businesses that have graduated from the small business program are absolutely invaluable."

Financial strategies learned from respected members of the investment community and foreknowledge of upcoming policy changes from senior government leaders are just some of the benefits derived from NDIA membership. Members get increased visibility with government

leaders, a powerful advocate in Washington to champion small business issues, and reduced rates at technical and policy symposia.

Small businesses can meet defense leaders directly by attending NDIA events and through NDIA members in the defense community. An example of these opportunities is the National Small Business Conference held each year. Members also have the opportunity to reach beyond attending functions and networking to joining NDIA divisions and assume leadership positions. The Small Business Division is actively engaged in monitoring and helping to influence legislation and policy by working with senior government leaders and other NDIA divisions.

Small businesses interested in joining NDIA may visit the NDIA website (www.ndia.org) for more information or may contact Britt Bommelje, director of operations supporting the Small Business Division, at 703-247-2587 or BBommelje@NDIA.org.

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