

SBA and Commerce will expand outreach to small and minority-owned firms

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August 19, 2009

President Obama has directed leaders of the Small Business Administration and Commerce Department to renew the push to meet contracting goals for minority-owned and small businesses.

In a statement released through SBA, Obama said it is essential to provide those companies with the greatest possible opportunity to participate in federal contracting.

"Small and minority-owned businesses must play a significant role in our efforts to restore economic growth," Obama said. "Small businesses employ half of the nation's private sector workforce, create a large share of the nation's new jobs and introduce many groundbreaking ideas into the marketplace."

Obama tapped SBA Administrator Karen Mills and Commerce Secretary Gary Locke to lead an initiative to increase outreach to companies and ensure agencies meet or exceed the goal of awarding 23 percent of prime contracts to small businesses.

Mills and Locke announced that procurement officials across government will host and participate in more than 200 events focused on minority-owned and small businesses during the next 90 days. These forums are designed to share information on federal contracting opportunities, including Recovery Act projects.

Commerce and SBA also will expand outreach to federal contracting officials to share best practices and ensure they have the tools to meet annual procurement goals.

SBA press secretary Hayley Matz told Government Executive on Wednesday that as of Aug. 14, 23.7 percent of the \$8.37 billion in Recovery Act contract dollars have gone to small businesses. Agencies have been hitting disadvantaged business category goals with stimulus spending as well, awarding 10.6 percent to small disadvantaged businesses, 8.7 percent to 8(a) firms, 6.4 percent to HUBZone firms, 4.3 percent to women-owned firms and 3.1 percent to service-disabled veteran-owned firms.

"It has been a priority from day one of this administration to ensure that small and minority-owned businesses are aware of and have access to federal contracts and funding opportunities," Locke said. "Over the past 40 years, minority-owned businesses have grown from 300,000 to nearly 4 million today. Their success and the success of small American businesses are vital to our economic recovery."

Access to federal contracts can help a small business quickly turn the corner toward expansion and job creation, Mills said.

"But make no mistake, the benefits the government receives are equally as impressive. Working with small businesses allows the federal government to work with some of the most innovative companies in America, with a direct line to the CEO," she said.

Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., chairwoman of the Senate Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee, called the announcement a step in the right direction. She pledged to continue strong oversight of agencies to make certain that all small businesses, including minority-, women- and veteran-owned firms, are receiving their fair share.