

B2B Procurement Summit promotes 'Buy Navajo'

Written by Staff Reports

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TWIN ARROWS, Ariz. - The B2B Procurement Summit aimed to connect small business owners with Navajo Nation and enterprise procurement staff to further the understanding of procurement processes while giving entrepreneurs a guided perspective on growing a successful business.

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The Office of the President and Vice President in collaboration with the Navajo Division of Economic Development organized the 2016 Navajo Nation B2B Procurement Summit at Twin Arrows Casino and Resort on Oct. 12 - 13. The theme of the summit was 'Buy Navajo.'

Aaron Rosetta, CEO and manager of Nations Gas Technology, conducted a breakout session on 'How to Present Your Business for Contracts' in which he touched upon developing effective capabilities statements, making presentations and maximizing business card real estate.

Rosetta emphasized that financial opportunity is out there if entrepreneurs are strategic, concise and thorough in their approach to the marketing and presentation of their businesses.

"One benefit is that the federal government is given directives to do business with minority companies. They look for them," he said. "Therefore it's beneficial for minority businesses to have all their qualifications in order. Are you a SAM company? List it on your capabilities statement. Are you a HUB zone company? List that as well. Always maintain professionalism."

The event was designed specifically to provide insight into tribal processes for small businesses and entrepreneurs. The goal of the summit was to develop a strong foundation for Navajo tourism, small businesses, and commercial, manufacturing and industrial development.

Reuben Mike helped facilitate a session called 'Entrepreneur Basics' that addressed capitalism and economic development in Indian Country. Mike is a partner in the Cameron Travel Plaza, which opened two months ago. The plaza includes the Cameron Trading Post, a Burger King, and a McAllister's Deli.

During the session, Mike acknowledged that financial capital is a consistent struggle in the business world for everyone.

"It doesn't matter what business you're in, financial capital is a struggle and people get exasperated by this," he said. "But there are ways to get money and not just through the Navajo

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Nation. There is the SBA, the loan guarantee up to \$5M through the BIA. There are a lot of different avenues.”

Mike was fortunate to have been indoctrinated into the work ethic of his family who own several businesses across the Navajo Nation.

“I sometimes will go to work at 10 a.m. and not come home until 4:30 am. This is very common,” he said. “I’ve been able to watch my family do this and I’ve been able to take from them the teachings that work and are successful.”

Although Mike has an MBA from the University of Arizona, he said there is no MBA course on how to open a business on an Indian reservation on trust land where you can’t get financing. These situations, and sometimes obstacles, are unique to Indian country.

Professor at Arizona State University, Robert J. Miller was a part of the same session and supported that the potential for business opportunity on the Navajo Nation is enormous.

Miller is a citizen of the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma and more recently a member of the Navajo Nation Council of Economic Advisors.

Although there is potential, there are also obstacles that entrepreneurs will need to overcome before seeing immediate success.

“There are obstacles of infrastructure, lack of water and electricity and having sufficient seed money. We are in a rural area with small customer bases within rural communities,” he said.

Miller said that the human capital aspect must also be taken into account.

"Human capital is more than the sheer number of people. First of all, are the people trained? Are they able to work Monday to Friday from 9 am to 6 pm? Does the workforce have skills to work in a certain industry?" he asked.

These are considerations that all entrepreneurs and small businesses must assess to maximize potential growth and revenue.

The lack of competition on reservations for small businesses is a positive aspect if the businesses can get up and running, he said.

"The potential for every kind of business is here, especially for a reservation of this size," Miller said. "We want to buy like everyone else and jobs contribute to developing entrepreneurial spirit."

During his welcome address, President Russell Begaye

acknowledged that tribal bureaucracy and administrative processes could be stifling to small business owners. Often business owners have to chase their packets through the land department to get their land situated. These lengthy processes can sometimes cause business owners to back out.

"Business owners run at 100 mph while the Nation runs 10 mph. I know the red tape and I see contracts. People don't realize the amount of time it takes. But we're working to foster better process for the benefit of small business. Sometimes just changing one word or sentence in a policy can really help the business owner to get their business going," Begaye said.

The president reinforced that he always opts to search for Navajo business owners to fill contracts that he signs off on.

"When I read through these contracts I think of our Navajo business owners," he said. "If I know

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of a Navajo business that could do the job, I send the contracts back to seek Navajo businesses.”

The B2B Summit was a forthright effort on behalf of the OPVP and DED to facilitate better opportunities for small businesses to be successful in gaining tribal contracts, RFPs and business opportunities.

Feedback noted the summit to be a first for the Navajo Nation, unprecedented in terms of content. Participants felt the educational component in training to be beneficial in providing information on certification they can utilize to optimize their successes.

Before closing, President Begaye commended the business owners in attendance.

“You know what it’s like to work,” he said. “You’re the first to be on the site and last to leave. You are passionate about your work and you believe in it,” he said. “Even in light of stifling policies, you are still working to be successful. Thank you and god bless you.”