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Business

Group of minority-owned suppliers launches consortium

By Richard Lee
Staff Writer

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Like many small-business owners across the state, members of the Connecticut Minority Supplier Development Council Inc. were frustrated at being ignored when bidding for large information technology-related contracts.

Minority owners of information technology businesses believe they have found way to attract the attention of large corporations by creating the IT Consortium, a group of 21 companies offering a variety of information technology-related products and services.

The organization launched its consortium during Mayor Dannel Malloy's symposium, "Tools of the IT Trade for Entrepreneurs," Tuesday at the University of Connecticut's Stamford branch.

"This helps us get the word out to the corporate community. We have a lot of corporate members who are located in Stamford," said Fred McKinney, president of the Hamden-based council and a member of UConn-Stamford business school faculty.

Among the companies attending the symposium were GE Capital, Pitney Bowes, Purdue Pharma, Savin Corp., Turner Construction and Guinness UDV, as well as the City of Stamford.

"Reaching out to minorities is extremely important to us," Malloy said. "We look at ourselves as a center for your type of businesses. We look at this as an emerging industry."

Because of their large-scale information technology projects, corporations are prime candidates for the consortium members. Some already have expressed interest in hearing from the new organization, McKinney said.

"Now large corporations know we've formed the consortium, and they're beginning to ask questions," McKinney said, stressing that the organization is still in its early stage.

Development of business and marketing plans are at the top of the consortium's agenda.

"These are still separate companies, but this gives them a scale that they didn't have," McKinney said. "We look at this as a strong and fruitful relationship."

The consortium is ideal for David A. Beam, managing partner of Beam & Associates in New Canaan, which advises companies in diversity development, team building, business process improvement and technology innovation.

"Companies have an interest or a mandate to deal with diverse suppliers," Beam said, noting that businesses with a diverse staff typically rank as good places to work and are successful.

Many large companies want to demonstrate their willingness to work with minority-owned vendors, McKinney said, adding that Pitney Bowes is an example of a major local corporation that attempts to hire minority-owned vendors.

Pitney Bowes sponsored the symposium, along with the Connecticut Information Technology Institute, IBM, Northeast Utilities, UST and UConn.

Using qualified minority vendors makes business sense, said Henry Hernandez, executive director of global diversity leadership at Pitney Bowes. The company has had a policy of encouraging bidding from minority vendors for several years.

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"Large corporate customers are challenging us and asking what we're doing in terms of diversity suppliers. It's no longer just corporate responsibility or a nice thing to do," he said. "They still have to compete on their own merits. They have to be the best and make economic sense. The challenge is being able to provide enough scale to be a provider."

That's the premise of the consortium, said member Sush Tripathi, principal in IT Source in Southbury, provider of information technology expertise based in India for area companies.

"We're leveraging our capabilities. It's a way to immediately respond to a company's needs. As a minority business, we're coming in much stronger and providing more value. It's a great concept," she said.

The UConn School of Business, available to consortium members as a resource, participated in workshops on Tuesday. The day also included a luncheon presentation by David Cearly, vice president and co-research director at Meta Group in Stamford, and an evening executive forum featuring Ray Laracuenta, a senior consultant with Gartner in Stamford.

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