

NORTHROP GRUMMAN

By Rebecca L. Robbins, PH.D. (Lakota)

Fall 2003 – We all know that nothing's really perfect in this world but, if a perfect business relationship is possible, this is how it might look.

"One perfect scenario for an American Indian-owned business to participate as a Northrop Grumman supplier today would be a situation where the small company had developed a unique product or service that would complement Northrop Grumman's product lines," say Gloria Pualani, corporate director of Northrop Grumman's Socio-Economic Business Programs,

She adds, "The company, because of its size, may lack the resources to fully develop the product Northrop Grumman would assist that company in fully developing the product and establish a subcontracting relationship with the smaller company, purchasing that product or service."

Northrop Grumman Corporation is a \$25 billion global defense enterprise, with worldwide headquarters in Los Angeles. Northrop Grumman provides technologically advanced, innovative products, services and solutions in defense electronics, systems integration, information technology, advanced aircraft, shipbuilding, and space technology.

"Another likely scenario would be the case of a small company that has a fully developed infrastructure and product line, but is interested in acquiring a technology that Northrop Grumman possesses but does not want to maintain. This scenario would be a great partnering opportunity that would have the potential to broaden and strengthen the small business's capabilities and make them better able to compete in the open market," Pualani continues. "In each case, Northrop Grumman would work with the smaller company to create a mutually beneficial solution," she adds.

As to major issues that affect American Indian business development, Pualani says access to capital is the most important. "Many of the large prime contractors are moving toward next-higher assembly manufacturing. And, in many instances, next-higher assembly manufacturing will require a major capital investment on the part of the small business.

Without the necessary funds to make this investment, subcontracting opportunities may be lost," says Pualani.

In response to this, Northrop Grumman has developed a corporate initiative that focuses specifically on providing opportunities for American Indian businesses. The initiative includes annual funding to the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development (NCAIED) in support of sponsored outreach activities, membership on the NCAIED Resource Council, and a leadership role as it relates to socio-economic business issues.

Northrop Grumman also served as the title sponsor for the annual Reservation Economic Summit 2003 (RES). This summit provided an opportunity for American Indian businesses to meet face to face with procurement professionals, buyers, engineers, and end users. It allowed the businesses to make the necessary first contact needed to develop relationships within the company. RES provided a forum for the businesses to share their capabilities, ask questions, set up briefings, and understand the requirements from a prime's perspective.

"It is an awesome opportunity to bring together procurement professionals, not only from Northrop Grumman, but from several of the largest Department of Defense (DOD) prime contractors to discuss subcontracting opportunities with American Indian-owned businesses," says Pualani.

In the coming months, Northrop Grumman intends to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the NCAIED that describes Northrop Grumman's commitment to subcontracting with American Indian-owned businesses. This MOU is part of Northrop Grumman's longtime commitment to the ideals of the NCAIED.

" I personally became associated with the National Center in 1989, when Northrop Grumman was in the process of working with a Tribally-owned business in North Dakota. NCAIED was instrumental in facilitating discussion between the Northrop Grumman management team and the Tribal leaders," says Pualani.

A mutually beneficial working relationship resulted in the first Northrop Grumman Department of Defense Mentor Protégé teaming agreement. That first Protégé was Mandaree Enterprise Corporation. Northrop Grumman first began an informal mentoring relationship with Mandaree in 1989, and became Mandaree's Mentor under the DOD program in 1992. In September of 2001 and after eight successful years, Mandaree Enterprise graduated from the formal Mentor Protégé program.

"The Northrop Grumman/Mandaree team was so successful, it received two Nunn Perry Awards from the Department of Defense. This is the highest recognition awarded to Mentor-Protégé Teams from the DOD," says Pualani.

Today, Mandaree remains an important team member to Northrop Grumman, pursuing partnership opportunities in information technology as well as manufacturing. Another Northrop Grumman Protégé is Upper Mohawk, Inc., and American Indian-owned small business that provides information technology services.

Finally, Northrop Grumman plans to fully implement elements of the MOU with the National Center, with the objective of providing an open and inclusive environment for all potential suppliers.

"Northrop Grumman has sustained a relationship with the National Center for more than 20 years. During that time, with support and encouragement from our friends at the National Center, Northrop Grumman has been able to seek high-tech, capable American Indian small businesses and include these firms in our supplier database. This, in turn, allows Northrop Grumman to continue to provide a product with the highest standards of quality and reliability," Pualani continues.

"Ken Robbins, CEO, and the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development are to be congratulated on its increasing efforts to develop and provide assistance to American Indian small businesses," Pualani adds.

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