Chicago District showcases $70M in contracting opportunities at Industry Day

By Vanessa Villarreal, Public Affairs Office

The Chicago District hosted an Industry Day on Feb. 21, 2017, to share information about upcoming and ongoing projects and programs, and to showcase its $70 million in anticipated contracting opportunities for fiscal years 2017 and 2018. The event was attended by more than 250 representatives of industries ranging from consulting groups to engineering companies.

“This day is not just about business,” District Engineer Col. Christopher Drew said. “It allows us as an organization to accomplish our purpose which is to be able to protect American citizens and institutions. Protect them from flood risk hazards. Protect the environment so that people can live where they want to live in the environment they want to live in. Protect the economy of this nation by keeping major ports and harbors open. Allowing navigation to occur, allow the steel industries to be able to perform. We are the nation’s engineers. And it’s about us building a capacity for our nation. And we can’t do the work ourselves.”

The Chicago District is one of the seven districts under the Great Lakes and Ohio River Division. The other districts are Buffalo, Detroit, Huntington, Louisville, Nashville, and Pittsburgh. Forecasted contract opportunities for those districts were also highlighted.

The Chicago District is comprised of six counties in Northeast Illinois and 2.5 counties in Northwest Indiana, covering 5,000 square miles with a population of 9.3 million. Its major programs are flood risk management, navigation, ecosystem restoration, and aquatic invasive species.

The day began with briefings by key Chicago District leaders that covered a typical federal budget cycle, an overview of district operations, and major construction projects.

“The civil works project development process has four main phases,” Katarzyna Chelkowska-Risley, deputy for Project Management, said. “Feasibility; preconstruction engineering and design; construction; and operations and maintenance. Our major construction projects include Little Calumet River, McCook Reservoir, Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal dispersal barriers, and environmental infrastructure in Cook County and the Calumet region.”

Afternoon small-group discussions included such topics as contracts, small business opportunities, construction, operations, and safety.

Phil Stavrides, chief of Construction Branch, spoke about current feasibility studies that have the potential to lead to future design and construction of various projects – Upper Des Plaines River and tributaries, DuPage River, and Great Lakes and Mississippi River Interbasin Study. He also stressed the importance of safety.

“There are two cardinal rules,” Stavrides said. “Safety and quality.”

He gave tips to an effective safety program: understand the scope of work; follow the Accident Prevention Plan (APP) format presented in the Corps’ Safety and Health Manual, EM 385-1-1, Appendix A; engage with field workers; and make the APP site specific and use it as a reference guide.

“The APP is a document that the contractor develops for each project,” Stavrides said. “Therefore, it must be project specific so it covers the nuances of the job like, for example, the environment, facility under construction, and hazards. Plus, we have a specific format that should be followed. And that’s defined in EM385-1-1.”

“Doing business with the Corps is simple,” Bonita Carroll, deputy for Small Business, said. “Once a requirement is identified, we conduct extensive market research that may include ‘sources sought’ notices posted at the government’s federal business opportunities website, FedBizOpps.gov. We also use the Small Business Administration’s Dynamic Small Business Search, dsbs.sba.gov, to identify businesses that are not only interested, but competent and capable of performing the work.”

At FedBizOpps, government users may post, manage, and award opportunities; and vendors and citizens can search, monitor, and retrieve opportunities.

According to Carroll, the USACE-wide goal is that 41.5 percent of contracts awarded go to Small Business.

Ron Miller, SBA’s business opportunity specialist, covered SBA’s role in subcontracting, its Mentor-Protégé Program, plus resources and more.

“We urge interested small businesses to go to our local website, www.sba.gov/il, and search our events calendars for training in our office, webinars, and our speaking engagements all over the State of Illinois,” Miller said. “We also have HUBZone orientations every 2nd Wednesday of the month and 8(a) orientations every third Wednesday in our Illinois District Office. And small businesses can receive one-on-one counseling by appointment only.”

The SBA reports that the U.S. government is the largest single purchaser of goods and services in the world, awarding approximately $500 billion in contracts every year. The SBA’s Office of Government Contracting & Business Development works with federal agencies to award at least 23 percent of all prime government contract dollars to small businesses and help federal agencies meet specific statutory goals for [small disadvantaged businesses](http://www.sba.gov/content/disadvantaged-businesses), women-owned small businesses, service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses, and small businesses that are located in historically underutilized business zones (HUBZones).

“I am very pleased with the district's second such event,” Carroll said. “Last year we had approximately 180 attendees. This year we exceeded that amount with 250, with the majority from the Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin area. We are looking forward to taking the feedback received to plan for next year's event.”

Additional information about the event and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Chicago District is available at [www.lrc.usace.army.mil](http://www.lrc.usace.army.mil).