

# **VETS** Brings IT Opportunities

**NEW GOVERNMENTWIDE SERVICE CONTRACT BENEFITS BOTH FEDERAL AGENCIES AND SMALL FIRMS OWNED BY SERVICE-DISABLED VETERANS.**

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The long-awaited Veterans Technology Services (VETS) governmentwide acquisition contract (GWAC) is open for business, offering qualified service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses (SDVOSB) to provide IT services to defense and other federal agencies.

The General Services Administration (GSA) in February announced its notices to proceed to 43 SDVOSB technology firms on the VETS GWAC. This is the first GWAC set aside for SDVOSBs.

The VETS GWAC, valued at \$5 billion over 10 years, makes available 43 SDVOSBs for federal procurement. The multiple-award contract provides a five-year initial term and a five-year option period. The contract vehicle is designed to provide worldwide information technology solutions to federal agencies, while strengthening federal contracting opportunities for SDVOSBs.

GSA's Small Business GWAC Center in Kansas City, Mo., will manage the VETS procurement.

The program received a major boost in April, with the release of a letter from Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Kenneth J. Krieg urging military officials to provide the 43 teams in the program "the maximum practicable opportunity to participate" in DoD buying activity, to the extent they meet the relevant requirements.

Krieg called on the acquisition community and major commands to use the contract to use the contract vehicle to meet the congressionally established goal of 3 percent of procurement for SDVOSBs. "While we have made progress toward meeting the goal, we still have a long way to go. We must pursue this goal with vigor," he said.

"Many more disabled veterans will return from the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan and will seek to participate in DoD procurements, including GWACs, such as this one. By contracting with these teams of businesses owned by service-disabled veterans, we acknowledge their service as warfighters and appreciate their acumen as entrepreneurs and vendors to the department," Krieg concluded.

VETS provides cutting-edge technology solutions to federal agencies without the expense and time involved in open market set-aside procurements. The 43 industry partners on VETS represent highly qualified firms that have met high standards in past performance, technical capabilities and contract performance plans.

VETS is a direct result of an executive order signed by President Bush in 2004, which called for strengthening opportunities in federal contracting for SDVOSB concerns. In awarding the VETS GWAC, GSA met a section of the order that required the agency to establish a GWAC reserved for participation by these businesses.

The Veterans Entrepreneurship Act and Small Business Development Act of 1999 established an annual governmentwide goal of not less than 3 percent of the value of prime contract and subcontract awards for participation by SDVOSBs. To date, however, the government has not even reached 1 percent of its goal, according to Mary Parks, GSA Small Business GWACs Center director in the Heartland Region.

A big reason, agencies have claimed, was their contracting officers could not locate SDVOSBs that meet their requirements.

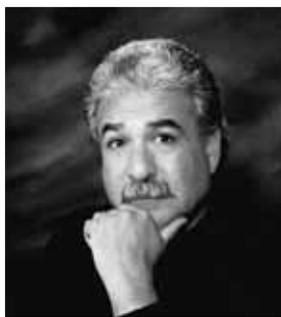
"It is difficult for agencies to find the companies," said Jim Ghiloni, acting director of the Center for GWAC Programs at



**Mary Parks**



**Jim Ghiloni**



**Harry M. Siegel**



**Ronald S. Fishbeck**

GSA. "The VETS GWAC reassures agencies that we have gone through a very thorough process of reviewing the capabilities of these companies before giving them an award. It gives agencies a vote of confidence and makes it easy for them to say here's a vet that I can use to meet this goal."

The VETS GWAC is being hailed widely as mutually beneficial for both federal agencies and SDVOSBs. Federal government agencies can now place orders through the contract.

"VETS GWAC is important to SDVOSBs because it singles them out as a group and gives them an opportunity to compete for government contracts," Parks noted.

"Winning the VETS GWAC has financial and historic significance for HMS Technologies and our contemporaries," said Harry M. Siegel, president and chief executive officer of the Martinsburg, W.Va.-based company that bears his initials. "Our company has experienced record growth already, and by adding this contracting vehicle to our arsenal, we believe that that growth will continue at an even greater rate. This one-of-a-kind procurement award has given the winners instant credibility since they have been 'vetted' by GSA themselves.

"Most of us know each other and have either competed against one another or teamed together to win and deliver. We are honored to be one of the awardees and to continue to serve," Siegel added.

"One of the potentially great things is this could become the contract of choice for some agencies," said John P. Moliere, president of Standard Communications, a Hume, Va.-based firm selected for the VETS GWAC.

An avid advocate of the VETS GWAC, Moliere believes the contract could have a profound effect on contracting this year and the years to come, by being

a dramatic addition to the information technology arena and as a tool in the quiver of all contracting officers.

## **THOROUGH EXAMINATION**

Winning a spot on the list of pre-screened and approved SDVOSBs for the VETS GWAC contract was no small feat.

"The government issues competitive multiple awards for a fixed period of time," Parks explained. "The solicitation was posted March 2005, with the contracts awarded in December 2006."

Overall, more than 260 companies applied for the VETS GWAC contract, of which only about one in six were selected.

To be selected as a VETS GWAC prime contractor, companies had to submit extensive proposals that met the government requirements based on technological capabilities in one or both of the two functional areas: systems operation and maintenance.

"The companies had to give examples of experience in each work scope element, as well as provide pricing for each labor category outlined in the solicitation," said Parks.

In reviewing each SDVOSB, GSA checked the company's past performance and analyzed its technological capabilities, line item pricing and total price case.

"One of the things that we requested to review in the SDVOSBs' proposals was who their teams and subcontractors were going to be," said Parks. "Many of the awardees teamed with other disabled-veterans-owned small businesses. How they are going to manage their subcontracting was key."

The SDVOSBs can subcontract with other SDVOSBs, and that work counts as if they had done it themselves. They can also subcontract with a larger company, as long as the SDVOSB does 51 percent of the work.

"The point is to include as many disabled vets as possible



**Mark Harrington**



**Ed Jesson**



**Ted Manakas**

in the procurement so that the veterans coming home from the war who are injured have opportunities with these awardees to subcontract and do business with the federal government as well," Parks explained.

The approved SDVOSBs can add new team partners during the contract award period. The first option runs until February 2012.

"It was difficult to come up with the best awardees," Parks acknowledged. "We had so many experience scope elements to which the companies needed to respond. But in the end, this vehicle brings forth 43 companies that are technologically sound and capable of performing. This is a big accomplishment for these companies to have gotten these awards."

The benefit for agencies of using GWACS, in general, is that these companies are focused on solutions.

"The program is set up the way it is because we want the prime contractors to be free to construct the solution for a particular requirement," Ghiloni said. "That may mean teaming or subcontracting to different companies and different circumstances. Sometimes it may make sense to bring in a large company to assist with a complex requirement. But, overall, the SDVOSBs in the VETS GWAC are learning to team with other service-disabled companies."

"The VETS GWAC is a significant first step towards leveling the playing field among the set-asides," noted Navy Captain Ann Yahner (Ret.), an executive with Penobscot Bay Media. "There are many SDVOSBs that are very capable of performing task orders on a federal contract, and it's nice to see they are finally being recognized. However, the contracting officers in federal agencies need to treat SDVOs the same way they treat other set-aside programs, such as 8(a), as it pertains to sole-source, non-competitive awards. There needs to be parity among the set-asides."

Yahner recently testified before the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, telling lawmakers that "of all the procurement preferences, the service-disabled preference is the only one that is earned."

Yahner attributes her company's selection as a VETS prime to its dogged determination to plow through the solicitation and dot every "i" and cross every "t."

"GSA made it clear that responding to the RFP thoroughly was in and of itself part of the selection process, and we were determined not to miss a thing. However, we attribute our selection to the quality of our SDVO teammates and their extensive track record of delivering top shelf solutions to their federal customers," she said.

## **BUILDING A TEAM**

Vietnam-disabled veteran Ed Jesson, who is chief executive officer of Carolina Management and Technology (CMT), sees the program as taking the politics out of programs that assist service-disabled veterans.

"Up until now, the government has not properly addressed what becomes of the disabled vets after they return from war," Jesson said. "There has been nothing like this available before to service-disabled vets."

CMT is one of the SDVOSBs selected for the VETS GWAC contract. The government services company, which was formed in March 2004, offers services in information management, security and logistics.

Jesson attributes CMT's winning the VETS GWAC contract to his firm's thorough response to the request for proposal (RFP), a very active mentor-protégé venture program for disabled veterans coming home from Iraq, and its team-centric approach to solutions.

"We put together a very good team," he said. "We took a group of small businesses with a broad spectrum of skill sets and made certain we met all of the requirements of the RFP. We put together a team of the best subcontractors with the most experience along with the best people to do the work."

Those subcontractors include other firms, some of which are SDVOSBs, as well as large companies such as Unisys.

Unisys joined their team after CMT was included in the contract. According to Ted Manakas, engagement director for federal outsourcing at Unisys, the VETS GWAC is the right contract for the right reason at the right time.

"This promises to be huge," he said. "When you look at the contract awardees, a good number, if not most, of them have large companies on their teams. There is a good reason for that, because any number of them could not support the broad scope of the work that might come. Most of these companies are very small. But the VETS GWAC gives them a real shot at bringing forward their technology to the customer base."

Based in Fayetteville, N.C., CMT has 18 full- and part-time employees. Included in its government contracting support services are personnel for the North Carolina Military Business Center. CMT Solutions was the only North Carolina firm awarded one of these contracts, and in April became the first to obtain a task order from the VETS GWAC program.

"This award marks the first opportunity for VETS contractors to secure business since the

notices to proceed were issued in February," said Parks.

CMT received the task order from GSA's Greater Southwest Region for database systems support services worth an estimated \$495,523 for 42 months, including three 12-month options.

"Utilizing the VETS contract vehicle was easy and allowed us to obtain a solution to our requirement in a timely manner," said Tyree Varnado, assistant regional administrator for GSA's Federal Acquisition Service in Fort Worth, Texas. "Most importantly, it provided an opportunity for us to support a service-disabled veteran-owned business."

Jesson sees the GWAC program as being a springboard for more business. "We have money behind us now," he said. "It will push us. It allows us to build our infrastructure, hire additional technical people and expand our business in the real competitive world."

Another company selected is Systems Made Simple, of Syracuse, N.Y. It is a provider of custom software solutions, systems integration, Web application development and hosting, with a primary focus on health care.

"Through our VETS team, TeamSMS, we provide full IT services," explained Chief Executive Officer Ronald S. Fishbeck. Since opening for business in 1991, the company has provided over 300 IT solutions to government and commercial clientele. Employing 36 people, the company currently has contracts at the Department of Veterans Affairs, Social Security Administration and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

"As an SDVOSB, we recognized that the president's executive order setting aside 3 percent of federal spending for IT services to SDVOSBs was going to be a major growth strategy for any SDVOSB," Fishbeck said. "We felt it was imperative that we bid as a prime on this contract if we were to see significant growth in the federal marketplace."

Consequently, the company's strategy going into the VETS GWAC proposal was to establish a robust team with as many qualified SDVOSBs as it could identify that complemented its skills and capabilities.

"Our team consists of 39 partners, 18 of which are SDVOSBs. The remainder of the team consists of woman-owned, 8(a), Native American-owned, and small businesses."

The mix ensures that the company is able to comply with the Government's requirement that 51 percent of the work contracted must be performed by SDVOSBs.

"We had RS Information Systems [RSIS] as our only large business partner," Fishbeck said. "RSIS has a tremendous growth history through the use of GWAC contract vehicles, and we felt offered us the benefits of a mentor relationship with a company that had already 'been around the block' with respect to GWAC contracts. This was the other piece of our strategy that rounds out our offering to federal agencies while also providing the depth of resources across many of the service areas in the two functional areas of the contract."

RSIS is a federal systems integrator providing advanced technical and business solutions in information technology, systems engineering, telecommunications, scientific support and management consulting.

## **CLIENT RESPONSE**

Mark Harrington, director of business development for Information Innovators Inc. (Triple-I), headquartered in Springfield, Va., attributes his firm's making the list of approved VETS GWAC contractors to its strong team and proposal.

"The proposal was very specific on how you had to respond to the requirements," said Harrington. "It was all about how you to respond to clients. There was also an extensive task performance area where we needed to show extensive past performance across entire work groups, not only for Triple-I, but the team in general."

Triple-I's mission is to establish close and collaborative relationships with clients so that it can anticipate their IT needs and provide the best services and solutions available. The company brings process-based solutions to high-risk, complex initiatives in federal government agencies and offers a range of services including program and project management, security and information assurance, systems design and integration, and enterprise architecture support.

Founded in 2001, the company now employs more than 100 full-time workers. All contracted employees are security screened using the Joint Personnel Adjudication System. Approximately 20 percent of employees hold "top secret" clearances,

20 percent hold “secret” clearances, and 50 percent have undergone “public trust” security checks.

Outside of the VETS GWAC, the company currently has 16 contracts for work with multiple agencies within the Defense Contract Management Agency, Department of Transportation, EPA, Defense Logistics Agency and Patent and Trademark Office. Partner firms include SAIC, BearingPoint, IBM, Hewlett-Packard, CACI, Project Performance Corp. and Nortel Government Solutions. In addition, approximately five SDVOSBs are on its team.

“The VETS GWAC gives us an avenue to focus more on direct prime contracting business,” Harrington said.

MED Trends, of Rockville, Md., is also on the VETS GWAC list.

“This historic U.S. government-funding vehicle represents a very significant and exciting opportunity for our company,” said Roger Malik, executive vice president of MED Trends. The company’s solutions span business process management, software engineering support services, infrastructure support services, information assurance and security services, and health care information technology services.

## **GSA SUPPORT**

GSA is supporting the VETS GWAC by training contracting officials on how to utilize the contract.

“We will do our best to train and encourage agencies to use these companies,” said Ghiloni. “Obviously, there are some agencies that have a vested interest in veterans, such those within the Department of Veterans Affairs and DoD. This is where we are focusing our delegation and cross promotion efforts right out of the gate. They are the ones who generally have a focus on these issues.”

GSA has also been holding numerous Web seminars with its veteran partners and its customers.

“We are training over 100 contracting officers within GSA right now,” said Parks. “We have seen a lot of success and interest in that training.”

As Parks explained, the VETS GWAC was a competitive solicitation that identified who the best companies were for the contract.

“Part of this GWAC is a competitive process,” she says. “These awardees will have to compete for task orders. What we do is when agencies want to use a contract, we walk through the process of the contracts, what they can do, what they shouldn’t do, and how to use it.”

Vendors will also need to understand the different systems that GSA uses and the time frame in which they will need to respond.

“It is important to us because, in the end, we have to report to the Office of Management and Budget on received contracts. We are trying to build relationships with our customers so that they know how to use the contracts properly and that we know what they are doing on the contracts,” Parks said. ★

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# VETS AWARDEES

*Following is the list of companies selected to participate in the VETS governmentwide acquisition contract, as announced by the General Services Administration in March:*



Advanced Systems, Inc.  
Aero Tech Service Associates  
American Veterans  
C Watkins & Associates  
C2-Revolent  
Carolina Management & Technology  
Catapult Technology  
Centuria Corp.  
Client Server Software Solutions  
Compumatics  
Council for Logistics Research  
Craig Technical Consulting  
DV United  
Engineering Services Network  
FTDATA  
Global-BSC Systems Joint Venture  
HMS Technologies  
Hoffman Technologies  
Ian, Evan & Alexander Corp.  
Information Innovators  
Innovative Management Concepts  
INTECON  
ISI/PSS Group Joint Venture  
Kingfisher Systems  
KT Consulting  
MED Trends  
Mandex  
Mettters Industries  
Milvets System Technology  
Native American Industrial Distributors  
Penobscot Bay Media  
Professional Solutions  
Standard Communications  
Symphony Consulting Group  
Systems Made Simple  
Triumph Technologies  
Tseva Group  
Veteran Corps of America  
Veteran Engineering & Technology  
Veteran Enterprise Technology Services  
Veterans Enterprise Technology Solutions  
Vetsamerica Business Consulting  
Vision Technologies