

Chenhall's Staffing Finds Long-term Adviser in CIRAS

Business owners in search of customers understand intuitively that government agencies need materials and equipment. But one Davenport firm has used CIRAS' help to break into an often-overlooked area for government contracting: providing people.

A government market exists for all types of personnel services, including security, design, IT, or administrative employees, said CIRAS government contracting specialist Beth White. Chenhall's Staffing & HR Network matches companies with talented candidates while helping workers find permanent positions.

When White joined CIRAS five years ago, Chenhall's already was a client and was gearing up to apply for the 8(a) Business Development Program offered through the U.S. Small Business Administration. Certified businesses are given special preferences for federal government contracting, but the application process is complicated and can be frustrating, White said.

The small business program requires that a "socially and economic disadvantaged" person own the applying company, and the owner of Chenhall's is of Cherokee ancestry. White said Chenhall's obtained status approval in 2012 (it's good for nine years) and is enjoying many benefits.

The program permits the federal government to offer contracts directly to these companies without competition. It also allows member companies to partner with larger businesses through mentoring agreements, something that White believes Chenhall's has taken advantage of with great success.

"What we have learned... is that there is always more to know about government contracting," said Chenhall's President Bob Hickman. "The most valuable lessons we have learned may be when to walk away from pursuing an opportunity, as well as how to make the most of the limited resources we, as a small business, have available. CIRAS has taught us how to be smart about defining what makes a 'good' opportunity for Chenhall's, and when it makes sense to develop partnerships as opposed to trying to compete on our own."

CIRAS staff now serve mainly as a support system for Chenhall's contract applications, White said—"a second set of eyes." Among other things, the business has landed a staffing contract with the USDA and a multimillion dollar contract (shared with a mentor) with the Rock Island Arsenal to provide IT and staffing services.

AT A GLANCE

Chenhall's Staffing & HR Network

LOCATION: Davenport, Iowa

EMPLOYEES: 7

FOUNDED: 1950

FOCUS: Provides temporary and temporary-to-permanent employees, as well as help with recruitment, pre-employment screening, employee training, career counseling, and payroll transfer services.