

Project Solutions is currently in its tenth year of contract with the South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT) for the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Program. The DBE program is a Civil Rights program that is designed to level to playing field for women and minority business owners. We serve approximately 90 businesses across the state, most in very rural area, on the nation's smallest DBE budget.

The objectives of the DBE program are:

- Ensure nondiscrimination in the award and administration of federal– aid contracts.
- Create a level playing field on which DBE's can fairly compete for federal– aid contracts.
- Ensure that the Department's DBE program is narrowly tailored.
- Ensure that only firms that fully meet the eligibility standards are permitted to participate as DBE's.
- Help remove barriers to participation of DBE's in federal– aid contracts.
- Assist in the development of firms that can compete successfully in the marketplace outside the program.

When the contract was first awarded, the DOT had established an outline of what they wanted the program to entail. We have taken those requirements and built a program for disadvantaged businesses by evaluating the business and providing basic business principles. We have made great strides in identifying the businesses with growth potential and grooming them to expand their areas of construction or increase their bidding to become better DBE's for the SDDOT projects.

As the years go on we identify other areas of need for our DBE participants, through the use of a "DBE Needs Assessment Survey". The survey results allow us to tailor the program to suit the unique needs of South Dakota business owners. DBE's are eligible to receive the following supportive services from the SDDOT at no cost to them, through Project Solutions:

- Business plan development, financial planning, accounting systems, record keeping, DOT pre-qualification requirements, securing insurance, bidding and estimating, bonding and loans or lines of credit, computer applications and work diversification.
- Orientation for newly certified DBE's to the SDDOT bidding process.
- A monthly newsletter with upcoming bid information, small business information and changes to the bidding process.
- Job shadowing and mentor opportunities
- Seminars and workshops
- On– line plan reading courses

We also maintain an online directory of all the DBE businesses as well as a printed directory. Both directories contain a full color with a photo and description of services for each DBE. The printed DBE directory is sent out to Prime Contractors, DBE's, state agencies, local federal agencies, and other DOT offices in our region.

