

# THE JOURNEY TO SUBBING

WINNING THROUGH STRATEGIC ALLIANCES



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Language Directions first decided to pursue federal contracting opportunities ten years ago as a Prime Contractor. Our research showed many opportunities involving our expertise in language and regional culture. But a candid analysis of our capabilities, documented past performance in military-related projects, and other factors, revealed the impracticality of this approach for the young company we were at the time.

Subject matter expertise and quality of course delivery were not an issue. We had a good deal of success in language and cultural skills training in the private sector. Some solicitations contained components totally unrelated to our expertise and we didn't feel comfortable or qualified to recruit for skills completely outside our core capabilities or experience. Also, as a business new to defense procurement, we had no past performance with military students. Like getting your first job, everyone wants to hire "experience," but how do you get experience?

There was also the proposal preparation: the amount of research,

recruiting, and administrative effort involved. The time and dollars required to submit a bid might seriously stretch the resources of the young company we were at the time and compromise our existing business. We thought it might make more sense to be part of a team where each member would have a valuable and essential contribution to make. So, we started down the road to subcontracting: searching for large and small team members to satisfy the varied requirements of each solicitation. Language Directions has great expertise in specialized language and regional culture training to bring to the team and each team member has its own individual strengths. One of our core principles is that the highest level of success is achievable by doing what we do best and working together with businesses who do what they do best.

Since those early days, we've learned a lot and gained traction in the subcontracting world. We grow and learn with each new opportunity. We are now part of an active consortium of large and small businesses supporting one another in seeking teaming opportunities. Every solicitation brings new lessons, insights, and challenges.

Based on our experiences, these are our best practices of successful subcontracting:

- Show up. Attend Vendor Days, procurement, and contracting events. Meet people face-to-face. There is no better way to quickly establish rapport. Chatting with a

Prime informally at a Vendor Day began a relationship resulting in our first subcontract.

- The truth, the whole truth. Honestly represent your capabilities and limitations. Don't exaggerate. Be sure you can back up your assertions. Primes need to be confident in the quality of their subcontractors. Don't expose your company or the Prime to negative consequences because you can't meet expectations and find yourself off the team. Primes will help you navigate the waters if you are candid about your ability to swim.

- Be responsive to all inquiries and data calls. Primes have always complimented us for delivering information promptly. Conform to timeline and submission formats. Be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

- Don't be a diva. Be willing to step up and help where needed. Always remember you are there by invitation, not by entitlement. Be flexible and pleasant. They'll come back to you if you are easy to work with.

- Leave them wanting more. A long-term mutually beneficial relationship with Primes is based on being indispensable to their success in projects involving your expertise and being a business partner who can be counted on. The quality of your work reflects either positively or negatively upon you, the Prime contractor, and ultimately the success of the entire project.

## Give Me 5: The Risks and Rewards of Subcontracting

Course Instructor: Lauren Weiner, President/CEO, Wittenberg Weiner Consulting, LLC

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