

The National 8(a) Association Small Business Conference

Atlanta, GA

Trip Report



Image: Exhibit Hall featuring over 100 matchmaking tables at the National Association 8(a) Small Business Conference 2024 Atlanta, GA

Conference Details:

Name: The National Association 8(a) Small Business Conference

Date: 5-7 February 2024

Venue: Hyatt Regency

Location: Atlanta, SC

Attendee(s):

Steve Carioti

Amelia Moore

About:

The National 8(a) Association Small Business Conference offers educational sessions, matchmaking, networking, and resources for small, disadvantaged businesses including: minority, aspiring, current and graduate 8(a), HUBZone, SDVOB, VOSB, SDB, WOSB, DBE, and teaming partnerships. The Conference attracts hundreds of federal agencies, large business primes, and corporate companies providing multiple opportunities for small businesses to grow in the federal contracting arena.

The National 8(a) Association is a non-profit whose mission is to provide education and guidance for small 8(a) businesses. The Association connects small, disadvantaged businesses with Joint Ventures (JV), federal agencies, prime contractors, industry professionals, and business vendors.

The Small Business Administration (SBA) 8(a) Business Development Program is a business assistance program for small, disadvantaged businesses. The 8(a) Program offers a broad scope of assistance to firms that are owned and controlled at least 51% by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals.

Conference Highlights:

1. *Businesses Met:* Throughout the (3) three-day event the NAVSEA SBIR/STTR Outreach Representatives met with 60+ businesses (20+ during matchmaking sessions) of varying size and technology focus.

- Discussions included an overview of the NAVSEA SBIR/STTR Program and basic requirements for participation.
- An introduction to valuable resources available to small businesses navigating the government contracting world. Resources discussed included:
 - a. Navysbir.com
 - b. Navysbirsearch.com
 - c. SAM (Systems for Awards Management)
 - d. SBA (Small Business Administration)
 - e. Navy STP (SBIR/STTR Transition Program)
- An overview of the solicitation process including the release of the 24.1/A Broad Agency Announcements (BAA) and the 2024 Open Topic set for release in the summer of 2024.

2. *Networking:* The Outreach Team continued to forge strong relationships within the federal government and pertinent organizations by offering to educate small businesses on the many benefits of the SBIR/STTR Program. Networking discussions included the following agencies and organizations.

- NAVFAC OSBP (Discussions with SB Director Bianca Henderson included the possibility of a NAVSEA/NAVFAC SBIR/STTR event)
- NAVY OSBP (Discussions with Staff Analyst Shawn Smith regarding new events to promote the SBIR/STTR Program including future NAVY WEEK events)
- NAVSEA OSBP (Discussions with SB Director Anne Bannister regarding possibly hosting the NAVSEA OSBP Industry Day giving NAVSEA SBIR/STTR a stronger presence – August 2024)

- The National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development Apex Accelerator (Discussions regarding attendance at APEX Accelerator events and a Teams meeting with Program Manager George Williams to discuss future collaboration/networking opportunities)
- Minority Business Development Agency Export Center – U.S. Dept. of Commerce (Discussions involved future events focused on small, disadvantaged businesses and possible workshops hosted by the SBIR/STTR Outreach Team)

3. *By the Numbers:*

- 1,700+ registered attendees
- 100+ exhibit hall booths
- 250+ federal representatives
- 200+ matchmaking sessions
- Approximately 75% of the small businesses were not familiar with the SBIR/STTR program.

Key Takeaways:

1. *Solicitations:* The BAA process was of great interest to small businesses and firms representing small businesses. Most notably, businesses were interested in the upcoming 2024 Open Topic format.

2. *Footprint:* An exhibit booth at the next 8(a) Conference would provide a greater opportunity for the NAVSEA SBIR/STTR Outreach Team to connect with a greater number of small businesses.

3. *Collaborations:* The NAVSEA SBIR/STTR Outreach Representatives engaged in networking with federal agencies and organizations established to assist small, disadvantaged businesses. Additionally, the Outreach Team learned of several pertinent events worth possibly attending in the future.