

Nova Scotia wants you

by Barbara Webber

THE NOVA SCOTIA government is working with small- and medium-sized businesses in the province on opening up new markets.

The government's procurement branch has launched a major initiative recently aimed at making small- and medium-sized businesses aware of new marketing and selling opportunities, inside and outside of the province.

The initiative – called the Supplier Development Program – uses tools such as formal trade shows and supplier directories to assist businesses in their selling efforts.

“As a government we want to help Nova Scotia businesses become more competitive and grow, at the local, national and international level,” said Economic Development Minister Ernest Fage. “We want them to be able to compete successfully, whether it's for government tenders in an open and transparent tendering process, or with private-sector companies from around the world.”

Fage says the Supplier Development Program goes with a larger initiative, Brand Nova Scotia, which aims to highlight Nova Scotia product availability and desirability (based on quality, price, and delivery) and to assist the marketing of the province's products at home and abroad.

Nova Scotia's procurement branch, part of the government's Office of Economic Development, is spearheading the Supplier Development Program. Director of Procurement Rick Draper says reverse trade shows had been conducted *ad hoc* for a number of years. He wanted to formalize the process so procurement staff could better communicate with vendors who wanted to do business with government.

“Government has decentralized purchasing over the last number of years and this made it more difficult for the vendor



to reach into government and find out who buys what,” says Draper. “So, the purpose of the trade shows is to inform the vendor community how to sell to government. And it's called a reverse trade show because it's really government going to the vendor instead of them coming to us.”

The first show was held in Amherst and was extremely successful. “There was much positive feedback from vendors and the people that were there from sectors outside of government purchasing like the housing authorities, school boards, and municipalities,” says Draper. “They were very surprised to learn about the number of businesses that they were not aware of, and they were pleasantly surprised with the number of people that could supply their needs.”

Draper pointed to an example in Amherst, where a local battery manufacturer became aware of opportunities to bid on tenders through a reverse trade show and

then won a tender for battery supplies for the Nova Scotia government.

Another tool to assist business is the recently produced Public Sector Purchasing Guide. “This guide is a list of everybody in government who buys, and it makes it easier for people who want to sell in a certain sector,” says Draper. “There are so many people who buy so it was hard for people to know who to go to. They spent a lot of time trying to find direct access.” Problem solved.

The Supplier Development Program still has elements such as workshops and a new outreach service that are in the planning stages. Draper says these will be rolled out no later than this fall.

The reverse trade show element has produced excellent results and the procurement branch has had contact from several communities wanting the show in their area. Draper says the procurement branch has limited resources and will use others such as regional development staff for government or staff from agencies of government to spread the word about supplier development using a “train the trainer approach.”

Draper also emphasizes: “The big thing here is procurement will not support any one business. It is strictly an opportunity for these people to build a base. This is just a stepping stone to larger markets. One of the parts of the trade show is to show vendors how to access procurement opportunities from other provinces so they can bid in those markets as well. The objective is to get them bidding in other jurisdictions. Our main objective is for vendors to promote quality products at competitive prices.”

Barbara Webber is a freelance journalist based in Halifax.