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Ohio Business Expo targets small, minority- and women-owned businesses

COLUMBUS – To support continued efforts to expand access to state contracts for small, minority- and women-owned businesses, the State of Ohio is hosting its annual *Ohio Business Expo* on Tuesday, April 19 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Ohio History Center, located at 800 E. 17th Ave., Columbus, 43211.

“The governor has made it a priority to help Ohio’s small businesses grow, especially small, minority- and women-owned entrepreneurs. The *Ohio Business Expo* is designed to help these businesses learn more about ways they can partner with state government for the services and goods they provide,” said Robert Blair, director, Ohio Department of Administrative Services (DAS). “Ohio’s commitment to helping all small businesses grow coupled with recent reforms that eliminated the state income tax for many small businesses is making Ohio one of the best states to start and grow a business.”

This free event brings representatives from state agencies, boards and commissions together to meet one-on-one with businesses to cultivate relationships and open doors that lead to opportunities for everyone to succeed. The *Ohio Business Expo* is an excellent networking opportunity for businesses certified through the state’s Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) or Encouraging Diversity, Growth and Equity (EDGE) programs, as well as those interested in learning more about becoming certified.

Ohio’s MBE program requires all state agencies to set aside 15 percent of their annual purchases for goods and services for certified minority-owned businesses. The EDGE program helps facilitate access to state government contracts and business services for socially and economically disadvantaged businesses.

“The State of Ohio has made diversifying the suppliers with whom it does business a priority. In Fiscal Year 2015, the state’s efforts culminated in record-setting spending with MBE- and EDGE-certified businesses,” said Gregory Williams, deputy director and state equal employment opportunity coordinator at the Ohio Department of Administrative Services. “As the state looks to further diversify its supplier-base, it is seeking additional certified businesses to provide the products and services it needs in construction and construction-related services, goods and services, information technology and professional services.”

“With millions of dollars being spent on goods and services by the state, it is important that small and minority businesses are included,” said Jeffrey Johnson, chief of the Minority Business Development Division at the Ohio Development Services Agency. “This event provides opportunities for Ohio small businesses to make real connections with state buyers.”

In addition to networking opportunities and scheduled “matchmaking” appointments with purchasing officials, workshops are scheduled on a variety of topics, including:

- Available Financing Programs;
- How to Register to Do Business with the State of Ohio and Receive Bid Notifications;
- How to Respond to a State Bid Request; and
- How Did We Do It? Lessons Learned – Panel Discussion.

Additionally, an on-site computer lab will be available to help attendees begin to complete applications for MBE and/or EDGE certification, recertification or cross certification. Participants also will be able to begin to complete the required forms to do business with the state and receive bid notifications. Finally, help will be available to assist small businesses in navigating the state procurement website, procure.ohio.gov.

Admission and parking are free.

Businesses are encouraged to register for the Expo by April 13, but walk-ins are welcome. To register or learn more about this event or the state's MBE and EDGE programs, visit the Ohio Department of Administrative Services website at das.ohio.gov/eod or call 614-466-8380. For information about the Minority Business Assistance Centers, operated by the Ohio Development Services Agency, visit minority.ohio.gov or call 614-466-5700.