

A continuing series designed to bring you perspectives and ideas from leading diversity professionals. Do you have a question for our thoughtleaders? Send your suggestions to [damianjohnson@diversityjournal.com](mailto:damianjohnson@diversityjournal.com).



## Walking the Long and Bumpy Road to Success as a Diversity Supplier

By Sonu Ratra

President, Akraya, Inc.

**B**ECOMING A CERTIFIED minority-owned business is a big step. But as I learned through the years, it is only the beginning of a journey.

Certification does not necessarily bring in new contracts. In fact, it took three years for my company, Akraya Inc., a minority and women-owned IT staffing and managed solutions firm to acquire new business with the help of its minority status.

After we received our NMSDC MBE certification at the end of 2007, we found ourselves facing a big question: Now what? Success didn't fall into our laps with the MBE status. In fact, we didn't even know how to put our certification to good use. How do we find the opportunities in our industry? What is the business etiquette in terms of approaching diversity procurement? We needed answers to questions like these.

The local Northern California Minority Supplier Development Council (NCMSDC) was more than helpful offering webinars, meet-the-buyer meetings, trade show opportunities etc. Their mentorship and the help of the free tools they offer can help you hit the ground running.

However, to be considered for contracts, you have to be proactive. We developed a target list of companies with strong diversity programs. We started researching the professional needs of each client and where our services could fit in. It is important to know that the diversity status only opens the door; your service offering and competitive pricing is what actually gets you the business.

► **"We started researching the professional needs of each client and where our services could fit in."**

Registering in the online supplier database of your target companies and updating your marketing collateral to reflect your diversity status is also crucial.

With the ground work done, we looked at how we could approach corporate diversity teams to introduce Akraya and start building relationships. We found it most useful to simply asking for help from corporations. We were pleased by the willingness to help and the support we received. In fact, Akraya is proud to have found diversity mentors from several corporations such as Chevron, Wells Fargo, PG&E, Cisco, AT&T.

Our diversity strategy brought results after three years. In 2010, Akraya acquired two new major accounts through our diversity status and capabilities. I have learned that the road to becoming a successful diversity supplier can be long and bumpy. However, with perseverance, your diversity status can become an important differentiator and the base on which the success of your company is built. **PDJ**

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*Sonu Ratra is the founder and president of Akraya Inc., an IT staffing and managed solutions firm in Sunnyvale, California. Sonu also serves as the vice chair of the Northern California Minority Supplier Development Council's MBE Input Committee and is a dedicated advocate and mentor of women in technology.*