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New Mexico's National Labs are Here to Help Small Business

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Small businesses in need of technical assistance they can't get from private providers at a reasonable cost can apply for free help from the New Mexico Small Business Assistance (NMSBA) Program — a joint project of Los Alamos and Sandia national laboratories and the state of New Mexico. Qualifying businesses can get assistance from scientists or engineers at these two facilities — usually in the form of testing, design consultation and access to special equipment or facilities — and thus increase efficiencies and capabilities in their businesses. The labs cannot provide cash or equipment, only expertise.

Requests for help with individual projects — in the form of researcher hours valued between \$10,000 and \$20,000 — are accepted year round. But proposals for leveraged projects are reviewed once a year, and the deadline for 2010 pre-proposals is 8 a.m. Aug. 3, 2009. Leveraged projects allow a group of small businesses that share technical challenges to request assistance collectively for problems that are too large or complex to solve through an individual project.

NMSBA clients include businesses throughout New Mexico that work in diverse industries.

Ffhoenix Cuivre is a copper fabrication and insulating business in Santa Teresa whose power problems were affecting product pricing and the company's ability to meet production deadlines. Technical assistance from Los Alamos National Laboratory on altering power-use patterns is saving the company \$5,000 per month in energy costs, with potential additional savings of \$40,000 to \$60,000 per year if all recommendations are implemented.

Giggling Springs, a therapeutic soaking pool on the Jémez River, reduced its energy costs and carbon footprint by working with NMSBA. Sandia National Laboratories developed a heating-exchange system to heat the pool and on-site buildings with the hot water from an underground geothermal spring. In one peak-heating winter month, the new system saved Giggling Springs \$1,700 in propane costs. As a result of the cost savings and increase in customers, Giggling Springs hopes to hire two more employees.

NMSBA also partners with the New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) and the University of New Mexico Anderson Schools of Management to assist businesses with manufacturing processes and business issues. Santa Fe's La Puerta Originals, a company that salvages and restores doors and woodwork for custom homes, received training in lean manufacturing from MEP. The training allowed the company to increase its production time and improve capacity without compromising its commitments to sustainability and original

craftsmanship. With construction slowed by the economic downturn, La Puerta experienced a 10 percent drop in sales but it maintained a gross profit margin of 49 percent due to increased efficiencies.

In the Four Corners area, both Sandia and Los Alamos national laboratories are helping a group of companies as part of a leveraged project to evaluate and improve a pretreatment and reverse-osmosis system to decontaminate and desalinate water produced from oil and natural gas wells. As part of this project, NMSBA partnered with the New Mexico State University Agricultural Extension Service to test the effectiveness of the treated water on improving rangeland and riparian vegetation. The gas and oil companies are saving money once spent transporting and disposing untreated water and providing significant environmental benefits at the same time.

Businesses interested in a leveraged project should visit nmsbaprogram.org and follow application instructions. They will be expected to describe the problem faced by the small businesses, what expertise they seek from the lab but can't find in the private sector at a reasonable cost and the expected economic benefit to the participating small businesses. Successful pre-proposals will be invited to submit a full proposal. For more information, contact Lisa Henne by phone at 505-667-1710 or e-mail at henne@lanl.gov.

Finance New Mexico is an initiative of the New Mexico Small Business Investment Corporation (NMSBIC) and its partners to assist individuals and businesses in obtaining skills and funding resources for their business or idea. To learn more about resources available to New Mexicans, go to www.FinanceNewMexico.org.

