



State Helps Businesses Obtain Certification That Puts Major Contracts Within Reach

By Jeff Abrams, Innovation Director, New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership

Winning government contracts can enrich a business and workers in the community where the business is based. But getting contracts from government agencies and private industries that value quality-management certification can seem daunting at first.

To simplify the process for eligible businesses, the state Economic Development Department, in partnership with New Mexico MEP, created New Mexico 9000, or ISO 9000 — a class that trains businesses to procure the ISO 9001:2008 certification that is critical to winning big contracts and doing business with privately held national and international companies.

ISO stands for International Organization for Standardization; it's a set of quality management standards recognized by 178 countries. Most major companies and agencies of the U.S. government require their suppliers to be ISO registered because it assures the contracting agency or company that a business can be trusted to provide services or supplies as promised.

Companies can become ISO certified on their own or with help from quality consultants. But workshops can make the process easier and cheaper.

Through New Mexico 9000, businesses pay to attend training classes, and the cost of attendance is based on each company's gross receipts. A company making less than \$500,000, for example, pays \$550 per participant, while a business bringing in \$5 million or more pays \$3,300 for the first participant and \$550 for each additional attendee. Companies whose gross receipts fall between those two benchmarks pay according to a sliding scale. Costs associated with obtaining, maintaining, and renewing ISO registration are tax deductible.

Kristine Olson, an accountant at Syndetix Inc., attended the most recent class with two colleagues at the Las Cruces company that designs and manufactures communication gear for the federal departments of Defense and Justice and local law enforcement. The Syndetix group and their 12 classmates from six other companies received their certificates May 11.

“By taking this class, we hoped to establish and document quality standards for our products and services and gain the education and training necessary to be successful in obtaining our ISO

certification,” Olson said. “The classes have been a tremendous help in getting together our quality plan and moving forward with certification.”

The New Mexico 9000 process can be completed in as little as four months, with participants setting the pace. The course consists of six four-hour workshops held every two to three weeks; in these workshops business representatives learn how to interpret the ISO standard, what procedures to follow and who to consult on business-specific ISO concerns. Training includes a two-day internal audit class, as certification requires an audit of a company’s internal procedures to verify that the registered company is following the quality-management system. This system fosters continuous improvement in a company’s management practices through the use of corrective actions, internal auditing and management review.

New Mexico 9000 is an alliance of the New Mexico Economic Development Department and the New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership. Since the program started, 155 companies have completed the training program, leading to the creation of more than 1,000 new jobs in New Mexico. A new class will begin its training in June or July on dates to be announced.

For more information, visit <http://nm9000.org/>.

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