SUPPLIER DIVERSITY PROGRAMS ENHANCE GROWTH PROSPECTS FOR HISPANIC BUSINESSES

CORPORATIONS AND THE ECONOMY BENEFIT TOO

Hispanic small business owners are among the fastest growing entrepreneurs in the U.S. Even so, many continue to face challenges increasing their revenue and accessing a larger piece of the marketplace. These entrepreneurs, though, have found new opportunities for growth through certified supplier diversity programs, which focus on utilizing businesses that are owned and operated by minorities, women, persons with disabilities, veterans or persons who identify as LGBTQ. Such programs can help Hispanic businesses expand their reach within the private sector as well as with federal, state and local governments.



Richie Grullard, President & Founder of MidSpan Telecom, a Charter supplier



The MidSpan Telecom team



FOR CHARTER COMMUNICATIONS, a leading broadband connectivity company serving more than 31 million customers in 41 states through its Spectrum brand, supplier diversity is beneficial for the company, its suppliers and the communities it serves. Charter has exceeded $1 billion in spending with diverse-owned businesses for three consecutive years ending 2020. According to Michelle Hawkins, Charter's Senior Vice President of Strategic Procurement, a diverse pipeline of suppliers helps the company gain access to new business networks and markets, and has the potential to foster economic growth in traditionally underinvested communities. "To overlook diverse suppliers would be a missed opportunity for Charter, as they can contribute to innovation and enhance our products and services for customers," Hawkins said.

One such supplier is MidSpan Telecom, a Hispanic-owned business, which got its first contract with Charter to upgrade cable wiring on a New York construction project. Today, MidSpan's business with Charter has grown to provide residential and commercial installation support as well as construction services to Charter's Spectrum in a much broader area.

"Being a supplier for Charter has been life-changing," said Richie Grullard, MidSpan Telecom's President and Founder. "I thought I was going to have a small construction company, but our relationship with Charter took us to the next level. We started with four technicians and now we have more than 80 employees."

MidSpan Telecom's partnership with Charter is a success because the two companies' values are aligned: to provide excellent products and services that exceed customer expectations. "Charter has great products, and our job is to deliver those products to their subscribers, which we do with integrity and great customer service," Grullard said.

What qualifies a business as a potential diverse supplier?

To be recognized as a diverse supplier a business must be at least 51 percent owned, operated and controlled by minorities, women, persons with disabilities, veterans, service-disabled veterans or those who identify as LGBTQ. In addition, for a diverse-owned business to participate in supplier diversity programs, they must become certified. The certification process is, in many cases, unfamiliar to these same businesses, but there are programs and companies that will help guide participants. For example, Charter works with a third party to help eligible existing suppliers become certified with partners like the National Minority Supplier Development Council and the Supplier Clearinghouse.

"Procurement within the private and public sector represents multi-billion dollar opportunities for minority-owned businesses," said Pauline Gebon, Vice President of Corporate Relations at the National Minority Supplier Development Council. "Our mission is to provide a platform for minority businesses to get certified, develop capacity, make connections and advocate for the inclusion of minority suppliers in the procurement process, resulting in economic growth for communities of color."

Helping diverse suppliers grow

The opportunities that come with certification are significant, explains MidSpan Telecom's Grullard, who considered getting certified after a member of Charter's procurement team suggested he look into it. "It took about 90 days to get the official certification, and it turned out to be worth the time," he said.

Charter also helps some of the diverse suppliers it works with by offering scholarships to enroll in the Tuck Executive Education Program at Dartmouth College. "We want our suppliers to succeed," Hawkins said. "Our partnership with Tuck helps diverse suppliers learn how to run their businesses more efficiently and grow."

Looking forward

For 2021 and beyond, Charter will focus its supplier diversity program on three key areas – growing spend, growing suppliers and growing the company's impact in the communities where it operates. "These actions will help us drive greater innovation for our company and customers, and Hispanic-owned businesses have a key role to play as partners in this growth," Hawkins said.

Grullard sees it that way as well. He is looking forward to expanding MidSpan Telecom's footprint into neighboring states in the years ahead.

For more information about Charter's supplier diversity program, visit **corporate.charter.com/supplier-diversity** and download its resource guide on opportunities and how to become a Charter supplier. ●