Great Lakes
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Candace Waterman’s new WIPP role fuses politics and policy
WBENC honors top corporations for WBE development

2018 Conference Issue
CDW spends over $1 billion annually with diverse suppliers

BY PETER PRETTY

CDW LLC, a global technology provider of technology products and professional services, has recently celebrated its 10th year with an official supplier diversity program. Since 2014, the organization has spent over $1 billion per year with diverse suppliers—an accomplishment few organizations have been able to achieve.

Like many organizations competing in today’s economy, CDW is supply-chain dependent. And understandably, CDW senior manager of supplier diversity Kristie Malek sees the company’s unwavering commitment to supplier diversity as a means of strengthening the procurement process. Equality is an important aspect of our procurement vision.

“We know that we need a deep supply chain. We have been able to consistently grow by always looking at supplier diversity as a solution for customers,” she said. “There is always an invitation to do business at CDW. We have been fortunate to onboard 10 to 12 diverse suppliers each week. We see this as an imperative to meet our customers’ needs.”

However, the biggest benefit of having a strong program is that diverse businesses are growing in step with CDW, Malek explained. “When we are successful, it is a win-win-win. Our customers win because we are able to deliver diverse solutions, diverse suppliers win because they secure opportunities to grow and we win because we are playing a role in facilitating business for all.”

Time to turn the whisper into a roar

Although CDW has been spending over $1 billion annually with diverse suppliers since 2014, the organization has never applied to be a part of the Billion Dollar Roundtable. “We have just been focused on meeting customer needs, there was not a step that we needed the extra title or recognition,” she said. “It is, however, a goal this year because we want to stand proudly with the other 28 global companies.”

Malek told Women’s Enterprise that she wants to focus on the immediate impact that supplier diversity has in diverse communities. “I think it is the most immediate way to make an economic difference because it puts resources back into a community,” she said. “We are going to focus on finding ways that we can continuously get better at understanding our footprint. We want a future that has great economic empowerment and where we have made a powerful impact in the communities we serve.”

CDW’s supplier diversity team has always been designed around solutions rather than chasing. As such, the supplier diversity story has been somewhat of a whisper—even internally. To change the tide and keep the company’s 8000 team members apprised of supplier diversity’s role, Malek is currently placing an emphasis on education. “We are working on training content for our sales organization and developing ways to get the collateral into everyone’s hands,” she said. “We are also looking to partner with [original equipment manufacturers] and internal stakeholders to develop models that naturally create diverse solutions.”

Case in Point

It is often the successes that tell the true story. For instance, CDW was awarded the New York City contract about three years ago. Although initially met with adversity, CDW’s team immediately started working with the mayor’s office and local agencies to build out a portfolio of NYC diverse businesses.

“We onboarded 80 diverse suppliers and brought them into the fold. We have since spent $60 million with these talented NYC M/WBE suppliers,” Malek said. “It has been a big win for diverse businesses in the city—and for CDW—because we are honoring the customer request to bring about change that puts small businesses on the frontlines.”

Road Ahead

Malek would like to duplicate and scale the successes it has seen with the NYC contract into other regions across the country. “There’s a craving to bring these small businesses into the mix and we have succeeded at supporting growth for and with these companies,” she said.

One of Malek’s goals includes scaling the mentor-protégé initiative into a highly structured program leveraging assistance from a like-minded educational institution. “I would also love to see us involved in gaining a better understanding of our impact in the community,” she said. “It is always about responsible solutions. We want to be on the right side of history with our economic impact.”

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