

## ACCC taps into IFIs

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"I work specifically with the IFIs, marketing the national system of colleges and institutes as a comprehensive and integrated training agent to industry, labour and government," explains Sabas, who gained his knowledge of the IFI procurement process through his previous employment with the Philippine National Economic and Development Authority.

### Register with IFIs

Sabas's efforts to market the ACCC to the AsDB began with registering the Association with the AsDB's database of consultants, DACON. "You have to register your firm with each IFI to be included on their active list of consultants," explains Sabas.

The second step, Sabas advises, is to introduce your organization to the project officers at the IFI. "You have to get to know the project officers who develop the projects. You have to connect with them before the bidding process begins."

Sabas visited the AsDB twice in 1995, discovering the challenge that the ACCC faced in selling its expertise in education. That niche is not on the academic side of education, but on the "non-formal" side of skills training, labour development and women and technology — areas that are well suited to the needs of developing countries.

The next step, according to Sabas, is to match your firm's capabilities with upcoming projects — a list of which is published on-line — and to submit an expression of interest. "Find out what is in the pipeline as early as possible," he advises. "Match your capabilities to what's in the pipeline and make that known to the Bank."

### Define your niche

Sabas cannot overstress the importance of defining one's niche. "The shotgun approach, where a company submits expressions of interest for all the projects within their sector, is a waste of time. Narrow down the projects to the ones that match your specific area of expertise."

In 1996 ACCC submitted expressions of interest for three upcoming AsDB technical assistance projects — one in Cambodia for developing a project encouraging the employment



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of women, one in Thailand for providing advisory services in skills development, and the Bangladeshi project to strengthen the Directorate of Non-formal Education in delivering its literacy programs.

Getting short-listed was the next challenge. "The process is very competitive. When the AsDB short-lists firms, it is short-listing the key consulting firms in each country. So as a Canadian firm, you have to show that you are the best Canadian firm for the job. The key is to sell your niche."

### Sell your niche

Having clearly sold the AsDB on its niche abilities, the ACCC was short-listed in 1996 for all three projects for which it had submitted expressions of interest. "That's the maximum a firm can get in one year — and then we won them all," says Sabas proudly. "We entered the IFI market with a big bang."

However, preparing the proposal that decides the winner is, according to Sabas, the most difficult part of the process. He identifies three key elements to the preparation of a successful proposal: finding appropriate local

partners, undertaking a site visit to gather project and country information, and selecting the right team.

### Find a local partner

The best source for finding a local partner, says Sabas, is through the Canadian trade officers in the relevant country. For the project in Bangladesh, the Canadian High Commission in Dhaka gave the ACCC the names of five potential local firms, two of which became its partners.

The next step was undertaking the site visit. "It's not required to do the site visit before you do the proposal, but it's worth the investment — especially on a US\$3.5-million project."

The Association paid particular attention to the screening process for selecting the team, as well as to reviewing and rewriting its consultants' curricula vitae to ensure they highlighted skills relevant to the project. "We spent about 70% of our time on this process," admits Sabas.

The ACCC's methodical approach not only won it the three AsDB projects, but has proven successful with other IFIs, including the World Bank.

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Spring 2002

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