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DBE On Site Interview Preparation Kit

I prepared this kit based on my experience over the last 20 plus years in helping many firms receive DBE Certification. I have sat in on many site visits with clients and even been through the interview myself (my business is DBE certified base on my Native American ancestry). I have seen numerous times what the reviewers are looking for and heard the questions they ask. I have worked with many clients to help prepare them for the interview, and they have successfully received DBE certification

That is what is in this kit. I have taken my experience, written it down for you here. It will help you prepare for the on-site interview.

All of this information is important. I encourage you to read it all and not just skip around and look for the things that seem important to you.

So, let's look at some questions about this process.

What is the on-site interview and what is its purpose?

Here's is what DOT's regulation says about the on-site interview. The reviewer must

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Perform an on-site visit to the firm's principal place of business. You must interview the principal officers and review their resumes and/or work histories. You may interview key personnel of the firm if necessary. You must also perform an on-site visit to job sites if there are such sites on which the firm is working at the time of the eligibility investigation in your jurisdiction or local area."

Your principal place of business is defined as, "*the business location where the individuals who manage the firm's day-to-day operations spend most working hours and where top management's business records are kept*".

The goal of the onsite visit (or eligibility investigation) is to establish that you, the owner of the business, meet the requirements for DBE certification. The two basic requirements are that you must 1) own and 2) control the business. By the time the interview happens, the DOT will have verified, by reviewing your company documentation, that you are the majority owner of the business (i.e., at least 51%).

- Deeper Insight: If the non-disadvantaged owners are the ones doing the "real work" or are the primary decision-makers, it could indicate that the disadvantaged owner is merely a figurehead, which goes against the spirit of the DBE program.
- b) Leadership and Direction:
- Why it's important: While non-disadvantaged owners can provide valuable input and expertise, the business's direction, leadership, and success should not be solely dependent on them.
 - Deeper Insight: The business should be structured in such a way that the disadvantaged owner is at the helm, guiding the company's trajectory. If the non-disadvantaged owners were to leave, the business should still be able to function effectively under the leadership of the disadvantaged owner.
- c) Competence and Experience:
- Why it's important: It's perfectly acceptable for non-disadvantaged owners to be competent and experienced. Their expertise can be invaluable to the business. However, their roles should complement, not overshadow, the disadvantaged owner's role.
 - Deeper Insight: The non-disadvantaged owners can bring a wealth of knowledge and skills to the table, but the disadvantaged owner should also possess the necessary skills and knowledge to run the business independently if needed.
- d) Business Resilience:
- Why it's important: The business's ability to survive and thrive should be primarily attributed to the disadvantaged owner's leadership and involvement.
 - Deeper Insight: This resilience testifies to the disadvantaged owner's capability, dedication, and genuine control over the business. It's a testament to the owner's ability to navigate challenges and lead the company to success.

In conclusion, when answering this question, it's crucial to highlight that while non-disadvantaged owners can play significant roles in the business, the disadvantaged owner remains the primary force behind the company's operations, direction, and success. The business's resilience and growth should be a reflection of the disadvantaged owner's leadership and involvement.

Tips regarding the answer to this question: This should be the disadvantaged owner, especially since money is involved. As the company grows, you might delegate this, but you will always be informed and give guidance.

17) Have you ever subcontracted any of your company's contracts?

Why?:

To what firm? _____ Dollar Value: \$ _____

The question seeks to understand the subcontracting practices of the DBE applicant firm. Let's break down the question and its potential implications:

a) Subcontracting Practices:

- Why it's asked: The question aims to determine if the DBE firm is genuinely performing a commercially useful function (CUF) or if it's merely acting as a "pass-through" entity, where it subcontracts most or all of its work to other firms.
- Potential Implications: If a DBE firm frequently subcontracts a significant portion of its contracts, especially to non-DBE firms, it might raise concerns about whether the DBE firm is genuinely performing the work or merely serving as a conduit to help other firms benefit from the DBE program.

b) Reasons for Subcontracting:

- Why it's asked: Understanding the reasons behind subcontracting can provide context. For instance, subcontracting due to a lack of expertise in a specific area is different from subcontracting the majority of a contract without a valid reason.
- Potential Implications: If the reasons for subcontracting suggest that the DBE firm lacks the capability to perform its contracts, it could raise questions about the firm's qualifications and the genuineness of its DBE status.

c) Subcontracted Firm:

- Why it's asked: Identifying the firm to which work is subcontracted can help reviewers determine if there's a pattern of consistently subcontracting to a particular firm, especially if it's a non-DBE firm.
- Potential Implications: If the same non-DBE firm is consistently receiving subcontracts, it might suggest a close relationship that could be scrutinized