

SAME SMALL BUSINESS CONFERENCE: MAKING CONNECTIONS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

By Victoria Mechtly

I wasn't even supposed to be there.

Only seven days on the job, and I found myself at the 2016 Society of American Military Engineers' (SAME) Small Business Conference (SBC) in Atlanta, Georgia, representing my new company, Tega, LLC. As a last-minute replacement in an unfamiliar industry, I wasn't sure where to begin. SAME is an organization that helps build collaborative relationships by connecting the federal market with private businesses like mine, so I set out to do just that. Connect.

First up was the SAME Young Member meeting. When I stepped into that meeting, I stepped into my future. In just one hour, I was hooked – ready to sign up and do whatever SAME needed to succeed. At the end of the meeting, I approached Lieutenant Colonel Matt Altman, chairman of the Young Member Council, and asked how I could get involved. Ideas were already forming in my mind on how to engage more young members.



The ideas continued to develop as I listened to Lieutenant General Todd Semonite talk about how vital federal-private collaboration is to developing innovative solutions for military challenges and heard Gil Brindley, PE, CPSM, discuss how companies can build their bottom line through targeted, federal business development. It is this kind of insight that makes the SAME and the SBC so valuable for companies like mine.

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From these sessions and numerous others I attended, my fundamental takeaway was how important it is to connect the people, ideas and resources necessary to keep American infrastructure strong and ever evolving for future challenges.

I see my future so much more clearly now. The two-day conference was an “ah-ha” moment for me, a personal and professional development experience leading me to discover my true passion for a career in federal marketing and business development. My passion runs deeper than my own development. I want to help college engineering students develop key soft skills (communication, problem-solving, teamwork, etc.) to complement their technical abilities and propel them to successful engineering careers and a lifetime of participation in SAME.

I'm reminded of what Brigadier General Joseph Schroedel, PE, F. SAME, USA (Ret.), told me on my first day at the conference when he said the real value of SAME participation is the relationships you build. I look forward to reaching out and building those relationships with more SAME members, Fellows and engineering students – connections that will make a difference.

Guess I really was meant to be there.

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