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Procurement's Raul Gonzalez, senior departmental systems analyst (standing), and Theresa Chow, departmental systems analyst (standing), help two small business owners register in Metro's vendor database. Gonzalez estimated that 50 vendors registered in the database during the Vendor Fair, compared to the usual three to five per day.



Photos by Josh Southwick

## 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Vendor Fair Targets Small Businesses

- Metro helps vendors understand procurement processes

By NED RACINE, Editor

(March 28, 2008) The 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Greater Los Angeles Vendor Fair, held March 25 at the Los Angeles Convention Center, drew thousands of attendees interested in contracting with Metro and other Los Angeles County agencies.

"Last year we estimated about 1,500 [attendees] but it was well over that amount this year," said Nicole Starks-Murray, administrative supervisor for Procurement Client Vendor Services. "What was unusual this year was that we had an influx of attendees wanting to participate. Usually it is the other way around, meaning lots of exhibitors."

Metro joined the City and County of Los Angeles, and the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California in hosting the day-long event, designed to provide information businesses need to compete for



Metro joined with the City and County of Los Angeles, and the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California to host the Greater Los Angeles Vendor Fair.

hundreds of millions of dollars in contracts.

The fair also included a trade show presenting vendors that provide specialized products and services for businesses working with public agencies.

"I also got feedback from attendees and exhibitors about our One-On-One Networking event we had in the afternoon," Starks-Murray said. "The procurement teams from all the host agencies saw over 160 people in that setting. It put a great end to the day for our participants and was one of the key factors in their wanting to attend our next event."

Metro's Procurement & Material Management department works closely with vendors interested in meeting Metro's requirements. The Diversity & Economic Opportunity

department specifically helps small, disadvantaged women, and minority-owned businesses participate in Metro's contracts by certifying eligible small firms, ensuring their prompt payments, and providing workshops describing Metro's procurement process.

Sherman Gay, small business outreach officer for the Diversity & Economic Opportunity department, has attended multiple vendor fairs and finds them a great opportunity to reach vendors across the country.

"They get a chance to display all their product lines and it gives other companies the chance to find out . . . what product lines that Metro has."

"Small businesses are really the hub of the local economy," he explained. "[The fair] gives them the chance to participate in [the] large public sector. They can also give us better prices "Gay noted that small businesses take tax dollars and recycle them back into the community. "It's a win-win on both sides."

"Most people you see in small businesses have an entrepreneur spirit," Gay said. "They know it's a hard road. They already know these are steps [they] have to go through."

Commuter Ride Share, Ethics, Facility Maintenance, Information Technology Services, Investment Recovery Sales and Vehicle Technology and Support also participated in the Vendor Fair.