

NASA Langley Seeking Local Partners

Center's director says it's actively scouting commercial tech firms

NASA Langley Research Center in Hampton could get as much as \$829 million in fiscal year 2016, or about \$60 million more than its current budget.

And it's looking to spend a lot of that money right here in Hampton Roads.

In fact, the center's new acting deputy director, Clayton P. Turner, said they're actively looking for commercial partners from among the Peninsula's 14,000 small businesses as they continue their work in aeronautics, Earth science and space exploration and technology.

"Langley has a very robust and healthy budget for our contributions to the agency and the nation," Turner said Tuesday. "We have a number of contract opportunities that range from \$9 million to \$400 million that small businesses can partner on and solicit for, and all of those are publicly available."

Turner was speaking before local business professionals at the Virginia Peninsula Chamber of Commerce. Current and upcoming contract opportunities at NASA Langley are listed on the website procurement.larc.nasa.gov.

Opportunities range from construction contracts as the center continues its 20-year revitalization plan to tear down aging buildings on campus and erect more efficient ones to hiring employees with the "emerging skills" that NASA needs to meet 21st century challenges, he said.

"A lot of people, when they think of NASA, they think about the technology and the whiz-bang things that we get to do, which is great," Turner said. "But none of that happens without the people."

Much of the center's 2016 budget is going toward building a 175,000-square-foot Measurement Systems Laboratory, considered a world-class facility for research and development.

"There's a \$94 million price tag on that," Turner said, "and 30 to 45 percent of that investment will be for small businesses in the area. So that's a pretty big chunk."

Construction on the lab is expected to begin in April 2016 and finish in 2018.

But other opportunities abound, Turner said.

This month, NASA Langley announced it awarded a five-year, \$25 million contract to Science and Technology Corp. (STC) in Hampton to build test articles for them under the center's Electronics, Mechanical and Composites Fabrication Support Services.

"They'll bring us a concept, a drawing, a one-of-a-kind item that their engineers have come up with, and one of our guys will work doing the welding to metal cutting to machining, developing composite models," said Rink Wood, STC's chief financial officer.

This is the company's third contract with NASA Langley in the past 10 years. In that time, its contracts included work to support such projects as the Space Shuttle, the crew escape system for the new Orion crew capsule and the SAGE III Earth science instrument that's expected to launch to the International Space Station in 2016. SAGE stands for Stratospheric Aerosol and Gas Experiment.

According to Timothy Wood, head of the Advanced Fabrication Processes Section at NASA Langley, such contractors can fill a temporary need at the center that its own civil servants sometimes can't.

"The purpose of this contract is to allow the government to have flexibility and adaptability," Wood said.

Under the new contract, he said, STC will be providing electronics fabrication, cable fabrication for satellite payloads and some composites fabrication.

According to NASA Langley, in 2014 the center oversaw more than 90 Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Contracts worth nearly \$30 million.

As a result of its "aggressive" pursuit of such contracts, Turner said, NASA Langley received the Small Business Administrator's Cup from NASA.

Also in 2014, the center's economic impact in Virginia was more than \$870 million in support of 7,394 jobs.

The lion's share of that economic impact was in Hampton Roads, at \$779 million that supported 6,544 jobs.