

# Navy program designed to help businesses get shipshape

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**BY SEAN OLSON**  
THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

NORFOLK - The Navy is offering \$2 million to help train small businesses that apply for shipbuilding contracts. The money will be awarded through the Navy Technical Assistance Pilot Program. NTAPP will train women, minorities and veterans who own and operate small businesses to win Navy contracts and complete them more efficiently. Those businesses, however, must deal with ship building or repairs. Program manager Dan Forbes, of the Fleet Technical Support Center in Norfolk, hopes the Navy will benefit, too, by getting better service. Forbes said that some contractors have had problems delivering for the Navy. "I've had personal experience with companies that have bid on a job and, in order to be competitive, underbid. Then they can't complete the contract efficiently. . . . A lot of businesses, to get a contract, come in low. This will help them market that kind of thing better and learn to deal with the government in all aspects of the negotiations." Businesses apply on the Fleet Technical Support Center Web site and are selected by an independent

review board composed of representatives from the U.S. Small Business Administration, Norfolk Naval Shipyard and other government organizations. A civilian firm, Quality Technical Services Inc. of Virginia Beach, has been hired to administer the program. QTS will assess the cost and time needed to train applicants, then make recommendations to the NTAPP board. NTAPP decides whether the investment in that business will be an efficient allocation of resources. If it is, the company is given free training with QTS, signing to a committed schedule. Training will consist of technical support, marketing, business development and contract negotiations - in short, anything that will help businesses obtain and complete ship building, repair or maintenance contracts. The idea for the NTAPP program came from a similar program, started in 1998 for the Air Force, called Manufacturers Technical Assistance Pilot Program. That program is aimed at aircraft maintenance and repair. To maintain the NTAPP grant, the program has to begin training businesses by September. Although no businesses have entered training yet, six have applied and are being evaluated. If it's successful, Forbes hopes the pro-gram will get continued funding and be used to connect even more businesses with Navy contracts.

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