

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
SBIR/STTR TRANSITION PROGRAM
SPOTLIGHT

Company: Premier Solutions HI, LLC
 Website: <https://www.premiersolutionshi.com>

POC: Steve Brennan
 Phone: (808) 396-4444

Address: 600 Kapiolani Boulevard,
 Suite 302, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Premier Solutions HI Builds Tools to Streamline Navy Logistics

By Jennifer Reisch

Premier Solutions HI, LLC (Premier), a woman-owned small business based in Honolulu, has been awarded more than \$7.1 million in Phase III SBIR contracts to help the Navy and Marine Corps streamline supply and inventory processes. The company's FACET system and services help automate Navy receiving and inventory processes, reducing the time it takes Sailors and Marines to comply with audit requirements. The contracts were awarded to Premier through Phase III of the Department of the Navy's Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program.

The contracts include three delivery orders of Financial Audit Compliance Enhancement (FACET) systems and services from the Naval Supply Systems Command, and a definitive contract from the Marine Corps Regional Contracting Command for FACET systems and services for Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 24 at Marine Corps Base Hawaii.

Premier's Hawaii-based engineering team created the FACET system, which is used across the Navy's global fleet to digitize and retain audit compliant transactional data, leveraging embedded barcodes to streamline receiving and inventory. FACET is deployed on every ship in the fleet and hundreds of ashore activities, said Steve Brennan,



Photo courtesy of Premier

Robert Smith, Navy SBIR/STTR director, center, with Dave Tribble and Steve Brennan from Premier Solutions HI LLC meet in the HTDC INNOVATE Hawaii booth at the National SBIR Conference in National Harbor in October 2021.

Premier's director of business development. The CLIPBOARD module uses mobile devices and scanners to digitize formerly paper-based shipping and inventory documents.

"The FACET system was developed through a series of 8(a) contracts and then we improved it with innovation through our SBIR Phase I and Phase II awards from the Naval Supply Systems Command. Additional funding and assistance came from the State of Hawaii's Technology Development Corporation's INNOVATE Hawaii program, which helped us conduct a series of customer discovery

sessions to understand the technology needs and preferences of Navy supply personnel,” Brennan explained.

Premier started as an 8(a) woman-owned small business. The company’s first Navy contract was a document scanning contract with Naval Supply Systems Command (NAVSUP) Business Systems Center (BSC) at Pearl Harbor. That contract evolved into developing the FACET system. “The FACET system was built to comply with the Navy and DoD-wide mandate for audit readiness. That presented a big challenge for Pacific Fleet because they essentially have to keep receipts for six months at a time while they are out at sea on a carrier with 5000 people on it and all kinds of daily operations that are really financial transactions,” Brennan said. “The FACET system is used to scan the paper records of all those financial transactions and make the data both audit compliant and actionable. That contract with BSC led to a contract with Pacific Fleet for all their afloat vessels and then some of the shore commands, and then United States Fleet Forces command picked up FACET and now the system is deployed fleet wide and supports every unit in the fleet as well as Marine Corps Aviation Logistics Squadrons.”

The FACET system gives users the capability to scan, index and store years of financial records for easy retrieval later. FACET is accredited for use with Navy- Marine Corps Intranet (NMCI) or afloat networks, letting FACET users automatically upload data to networked systems such as R-Supply and Food Service Management (FSM). In addition to supporting audit readiness, FACET

improves material availability and logistics transparency while reducing data-entry errors and the workload on Sailors. It supports seamless handoff of offsite scanning and enables financial improvement and audit readiness compliant inventory in warehouses and depots.

The newest version of the system, FACET-CLIPBOARD, was developed through the Navy’s SBIR program to enable financial improvement and audit readiness (FIAR) compliance using mobile devices such as tablets, phones, and scanners. FACET-CLIPBOARD supports commercial supply chain best practices such as barcode-based receiving and inventory.

“The genesis of FACET-CLIPBOARD was our SBIR and prior FACET work; we saw Navy logistics specialists were still using pencil and paper dockside and in the galleys to make notes and keep what they called key supporting documents. Everybody carried a clipboard. Our goal was to give them a mobile technology on tablets and mobile phones so that they didn’t have to keep track of lots of different pieces of paper; things would start digital and the entire process would be auto compliant using all digital data,” Brennan explained.

“Our PI Dave Tribble is great at talking to people and doing what we call design thinking, or focusing on what the user wants and needs. He has done a great job of developing software applications that do what the client needs and do it well. User-centered design is really about working side by side with Sailors and Marines to come up with these processes. He really respects the

users and listens to them. I'm very proud of the team that he's built here and the way we are able to approach making the warfighter's day a little better," he said.

"All of our SBIR success was driven by interactions with warfighters. While we were implementing FACET we started talking to Sailors and Marines and asking them about their particular problems. Through the SBIR program we were able to win a competitive topic and improve the FACET system with mobile devices, and then expand that into using artificial intelligence and machine learning techniques to do a better job of tracking and using the data that is generated from all those paper receipts and from different financial transactions."

Working side-by-side with Sailors helped Premier's system developers understand the realities of life at sea: "There are lots of systems that read UPC barcodes on packaged food. But one of the things we found was that the first thing that Sailors do when they get a can of something and have to store it in an out of the way compartment is they get rid of the label. Otherwise the labels fall off. They actually write a national stock number on it in magic marker. So we had to come up with a way to solve that problem—for them to get down in the hatch and be able to search by the NSN. We had to learn the realities of the situation; it's not as easy as reaching up on a shelf and scanning the barcode. The Navy needs better software but the software needs to be flexible enough to adapt to the Navy's unique business processes. Because we were able to work closely with Sailors here in

Hawaii, we were able to develop a solution for specific warfighter needs."

Another advantage of being in Hawaii is state support. The Hawaii Technology Development Corporation (HTDC) is a state agency that provides matching funding and also provides training and support for small companies. "They teach SBIR companies to find all the resources that are available. HTDC has been particularly helpful in overcoming some of the disadvantages of being located in Hawaii. They provide a competitive matching program and they also provide training and support. If we need help with graphic design or product design they have relationships with companies out here that can do that. They help us use Hawaii-based talent so that we aren't just growing a company, we are helping to grow an industry."

"Premier Solutions is a great transition success story of a company that took full advantage of the SBIR program along with the HTDC matching grants to bring their technology to Phase III," said Cindy Matsuki, HTDC's INNOVATE Hawaii SBIR program manager. "With SBA FAST grant funds, HTDC was able to offer Premier Solutions a subsidized Technology Driven Marketing Intelligence project to help them define their market opportunities."

HTDC has been providing matching grant funds to Hawaii companies that receive Federal SBIR awards since 1988, one of the longest running state matching grant programs in the nation, Matsuki explained. The state matches 50% of Phase I awards, up

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to \$75,000. “Being in Hawaii, our companies have the disadvantage of being located a great distance from SBIR program and topic managers, as well as not having as many manufacturing resources as companies in the continental United States,” she said. The matching grant funds can be used for travel to meet face-to-face with customers and SBIR program staff as well as other expenses not allowed with federal funds. HTDC is also the NIST Manufacturing Extension Partner (MEP) Center for Hawaii, allowing them to provide manufacturing and prototyping support for companies that need specialized or custom equipment, raw materials, or services.

“In addition to HTDC, the Navy’s SBIR/STTR Transition Program and the NAVSUP Office of Small Business Programs were invaluable resources in helping us navigate the path to a Phase III contract. Chris Espenshade, director of the Office of Small Business Programs at NAVSUP, took an interest in what we were doing to help the warfighter, and he really helped make our transition success happen,” said Brennan.

“I sat in on an overview of Premier’s technology and thought ‘we have an opportunity here to leverage this technology across some additional NAVSUP products and services, specifically audit readiness and compliance,’” said Espenshade. “It was great working with Premier, because they represented the best attributes of small business: consistent communication and a commitment to working with us in order to make the best product possible for our mission. The benefit of FACET and

CLIPBOARD is the tremendous reduction in manual effort required for receiving and documenting acceptance; instead, these resources can now focus on core mission responsibilities.”

Brennan recommends companies invited to participate in the DoN SBIR/STTR Transition Program (Navy STP) immerse themselves in the opportunities the program provides. “The best part of Navy STP might be the relationships we made at the program kickoff. I was able to sit down with Matt Williams, who at the time was the SBIR program manager for NAVAIR. I learned more about the basic ordering agreement mechanism and then we worked with NAVAIR to create the BOA and made NAVSUP an ordering activity under that. Having the chance to sit down with Matt and talk about what our eventual transition path could be was super valuable. Also, the Navy STP library of documents on offices and platforms is extremely useful. I don’t think there is another resource like that in the Navy.”

Premier Solutions HI LLC provides innovative information technology solutions and services to government customers, including technical solutions to supply and logistics challenges in the most demanding environments. For more information, visit the company’s website at <https://www.premiersolutionshi.com/>.

