**PRESS RELEASE**

Project Engage SMME business incubator launched at SPU

**Department of Higher Education sets ambitious empowerment and skills development targets**

**31 March 2022:** Four training sessions have already been held for the 15 Small, Micro and Medium Enterprises (SMMEs) providing services to the R3.8 billion development of the three Sol Plaatje University (SPU) campuses in Kimberley in the Northern Cape, one of the first two tertiary education developments in post-apartheid South Africa. A key focus of the project has been community involvement and upskilling of SMMEs. Specific targets for local participation, empowerment and skills development have been set in conjunction with the Department of Higher Education, reports SPU Client Representative **Christine-Ann Paddon**, Advisor to the Office of the COO.

The SMMEs have been selected for the year-long Project Engage business incubator developed by global trusted infrastructure consulting firm [AECOM](http://www.aecom.com), in conjunction with SPU, as part of its Enterprise and Supplier Development (ESD) commitment to the flagship project. AECOM’s role as principal agent for the client means that it has overseen more than 30 projects to date, from refurbishments to new-build infrastructure, all managed by a 16-strong team.

AECOM ESD Manager **Yumna Ameer** was appointed to the SPU project team to keep track of the construction development targets. These covered the commercial terms and conditions that the main contractor had committed to in terms of contributing to job creation, local procurement, and skills development. “The client and I started engaging about potential legacy projects to invest time and resources in,” explains Ameer.

Launching Project Engage for SPU has involved stakeholders such as the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) and the Small Enterprise Finance Agency (SEFA). A roadshow was embarked on for all relevant stakeholders, including SARS, the Department of Public Works in the Northern Cape and the Department of Economic Development and Tourism. AECOM itself provided its in-house expertise in project management, based on best practice such as PMBOK (Project Management Body of Knowledge).

It is important for the SMMEs to understand how to transition into a project management role and resource and schedule a project. Other modules cover specific health and safety issues such as the critical role that safety-file readiness plays on any project, for example. Basic labour relations and the impact of the Protection of Personal Information (POPI) Act on a small business are included, as is understanding the competitive landscape, and pitching a small business from a marketing point of view.

The subject matter of these different modules was derived from an intensive needs analysis carried out with all qualifying SMMEs identified by the main contractors and includes some previously appointed small contractors. A range of assessment tools will be put in place to gauge feedback. To ensure there is a satisfactory uptake of knowledge, each beneficiary will develop a portfolio of evidence, based on notes, tutorials, completion of set exercises and using the actual SPU campus development project as a ‘live’ example. The aim is for the targeted SMMEs to ultimately be able to apply for an improved Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) grading.

“We are proud to be part of such a complex skills transfer programme at this major project. It is all due to being able to work with a visionary client like SPU, which has ensured that community involvement and supplier development remain at the top of the agenda,” concludes Ameer. To date, the overall project has provided employment for about 1 000 local people.

***Ends***

**Notes to the editor**

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