

The Advocacy Center

A little-known U.S. government agency carries big influence

"We thought that U.S. government advocacy was for corporate giants. We learned first, that these services are available for small companies, and second, that they really work."

- Jeff Tuel, VP Sales & Marketing, Global Atmospheric, Inc.

MANY AMERICAN COMPANIES believe that only the Fortune 500 can afford high-powered government relations advocates in Washington. You know, the kind of people - often highly-paid lawyers or former government officials - who can close a deal just by making a few phone calls. Representatives of The Advocacy Center, a U.S. government central coordinating agency, were recently in Shanghai to spread the word that American companies of all shapes and sizes already have powerful advocacy resources at their disposal.

The Advocacy Center was established in 1993 to promote U.S. exports by coordinating high-level government support to U.S. companies competing for international opportunities.

The Center emphasizes that it is "not just another government agency," but rather a unique coordination office marshaling the resources of 19 U.S. government agencies within the Trade Promotion Coordinating Committee. Its mission is to bring these resources to bear in situations where American companies find themselves:

- Competing for contracts against foreign competitors who receive assistance from their home governments;
- Receiving unfair treatment from foreign government decision-makers;
- Bidding against foreign competitors whose bids are linked to concessionary financing or promises of foreign aid by their governments; or
- Waiting for action from government bureaucracies that tie their tenders up in red tape.

Bruce Blakeman, Special Counsel to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce who has recently relocated to Beijing in order to advocate for American business in China, says that the Advocacy Center's goal is to "move the ball forward - determine who the players are and develop an appropriate strategy to help ensure that U.S. companies are given fair



Bruce Blakeman is Special Counsel to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, based in Beijing

consideration in international deals." Such assistance might include:

- A timely letter to a foreign government decision maker;
- A phone call to a high-level foreign official;
- A meeting between a foreign official and a U.S. ambassador, an embassy staffer, or other U.S. government official; or
- A Cabinet-level or subcabinet-level trade mission to a foreign country.

The earlier a company seeks assistance, the better, says Daniel John Bloom, the Advocacy Center's director. "Companies often come to us only when they've exhausted their own efforts and are looking to pull out all the stops," says Bloom. "We can be much more effective early in the process."

But if your project needs just a final push, the upcoming visit of Vice Premier Wu Yi to the United States provides a timely opportunity for advocacy, say Blakeman and Bloom. Wu and ten ministerial-level officials are traveling to Washington for a meeting of the Joint Commission on Commerce & Trade (JCCT), and both the U.S. and China will be looking to close deals on the sidelines of these bilateral trade talks.

To access the Center's resources, U.S. companies should complete an "Advocacy Questionnaire," available on the agency's website: www.trade.gov/advocacy.

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