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Bismarck State College Powering Training for Saudi Arabia's Future Utility Workers

Bismarck State College (BSC) has been delivering its world class power technician training curriculum in the US for many years. It is now delivering it directly to Saudi Arabian utility worker trainees since September 2018. The program is part of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, where organizations such as Saudi Aramco are helping to establish at least 15 vocational and technical training academies throughout the Kingdom over the next 10 years. When Aramco announced its request for proposal (RFP) for international training providers to operate its \$200 million National Power Academy (NPA) on a five-year turnkey contract basis, U.S. Commercial Service (CS) Saudi Arabia Commercial Specialist Tareq Ghazal shared the RFP through the U.S. Commercial Service Education Team. CS North Dakota Director Heather Ranck is on the Education Team and made sure BSC was aware of the opportunity.

In April 2017, Ghazal collaborated with Aramco Services Company to organize a pre-proposal workshop in the US for 12 National Power Academy officials and over 25 U.S. candidates, and the US program included a visit to BSC's campus in Bismarck, where CS North Dakota Export Assistant Carter Pedersen participated. CS supported BSC at many points along the way, including when Ghazal successfully advocated for an extension of the original RFP deadline and liaised with the RFP decisionmakers to underscore concerns of U.S. bidders (for example, the revised proposal increased the minimum per head per year guarantee, and allowed submissions solely for the training components of the RFP). Mr. Ghazal also advised BSC on local payment options, ways to avoid payment delays, and he provided a list of local Saudi attorneys who could assist BSC with Saudi commercial law.

"The framework and background work the U.S. Commercial Service provided allowed BSC to successfully negotiate and secure the bid to operate the National Power Academy," said Zak Allen, General Manager of the BSC Innovations Foundation.



First class to enroll into Saudi Arabia's National Power Academy, whose curriculum was developed by Bismarck State College.



Saudi trainees learning by doing with the BSC curriculum

The first year of BSC's training was focused on technical English, with the newly started second year of the training focusing on technical skills. New training equipment has recently been installed at the center, and a second cohort of students was recruited in May 2019.

"As our students enter the technical phase of their training at the National Power Academy and our laboratories are built, we are excited to see the enthusiasm of these young Saudi adults as they gain new skills and knowledge for a lifelong career in the energy industry," said Allen.

This complex project required significant commitment and focus for BSC, and was not an easy lift. Not only was the project large and complicated, but the laws and culture are significantly different in Saudi Arabia, requiring significant technical and cultural competency. "Starting a new campus is a major task for any institution; starting one in a foreign country makes the task appear ever more daunting," said Allen. "One of the pivotal resources BSC utilized throughout both the RFP process and startup was the U.S. Commercial Service. From day one in the RFP process to providing on-ground, local, and trustworthy knowledge of the KSA, CS was, and still is, a large part of our success in the KSA. As a US institution in a foreign country, it is comforting to know we are not alone."

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