

Q&A with Dr. Srini Neralla, CEO of SIA SOLUTIONS LLC an Engineering and Consulting Firm providing Program and Project Specific Solutions in Environmental, Remediation, Energy, Water Resources, Radiological Services and Infrastructure Asset Management



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CEOCFO: *Dr. Neralla, the first thing I see on the SIA Solutions LLC site is, “Developing Solutions and Delivering Results.” For what are you developing solutions and for what are you providing results? What is your focus?*

Dr. Neralla: SIA Solutions LLC (SIA) is a professional services engineering and consulting firm specializing in program and project specific solutions in Environmental Consulting, Engineering, Remediation, Radiological Services, Infrastructure Asset Management, Public-Private (P3) and Public-Public/Public-Private (P4) partnerships (P3/P4), Energy, and Water Resources. We believe that successful infrastructure asset management decisions and solutions require a multi-disciplinary, integrated approach that facilitates interaction and communication across legal, policy, planning, financial, engineering, environmental, real estate and other functional areas. Through our experience working with government, commercial and industrial clients, we bring a depth of knowledge and understanding to all aspects of the decision-making process. So, our focus is to develop the most practical solution that is acceptable and offers the best solution to the client.

CEOCFO: *That is a pretty wide range. Would you give us a couple example projects?*

Dr. Neralla: I would like to talk about our clients first, because, it is very important to understand who the clients are when you talk about what kind of projects you do. About ninety percent of our clients are federal government clients, primarily the various divisions within the US Department of Defense (DoD). Our projects range from supporting characterization and; decontamination of radiologically contaminated material; to providing a full range of environmental services such as environmental compliance, planning, and documentation services for the development, planning, facilitation, coordination, and documentation of environmental initiatives.

Aging infrastructure across the United States combined with significant federal, state, and local government budget challenges has driven a focus on privately financed partnerships (P3/P4) for military, civilian and government agencies. Our understanding and experience with capital investment and infrastructure strategies has placed us at the forefront of alternative financing solutions for critical infrastructure projects. The infrastructure asset management projects include supporting the DoD in assessing development alternatives for different mission critical infrastructure assets; utilizing Geospatial Intelligence Systems (GIS) analysis, modelling and simulation, and other data tools, to assist with informed decision-making on critical encroachment management actions; facilitating stakeholder engagement, relationship-building, and collaboration toward problem-solving.

We help our clients establish energy resilience master plans for their installations, helping them to prepare for and recover from energy disruptions that affect mission assurance. Our experience includes evaluation of a broad spectrum of renewable energy technologies, including photovoltaic (PV) fixed tilt, single- and dual-axis tracking systems, solar thermal, concentrating solar power (CSP), wind, geothermal, biomass, biogas, and energy storage options throughout the United States.

CEOCFO: *How do you navigate some of the challenges working with the government? What have you learned over time to make that an easier process?*

Dr. Neralla: My experience over the last eighteen years has been primarily working in the federal government space. The federal government is a great client to work with as long as you invest in fully understanding their rules, regulations, policies and comply. The challenges include a thorough understanding of funding which is a critical part of serving the government. As with any client, it is very important to build and maintain a trusting relationship and deliver on time and within budget. At the end of the day it does not matter how well you know somebody. If you do not deliver the quality services you are required to and expected to deliver, they are not going to trust you with another project ever again.

CEOCFO: *Do you have a large range geographically?*

Dr. Neralla: We do have a relatively large range spreading across the coast, for a company our size. We have offices in Houston, TX, Baltimore, MD, Alexandria, VA, Sacramento, CA and Chicago, IL. Additionally, we also have some employees that work from their home locations or directly at our client locations. Our decision to draw upon our staff is based on the skills needed to develop cost effective solutions for the client. We also use staff from our teaming partners to augment our resources. Therefore, we have the ability to assemble the resources in the right place at the right time.

“The success of SIA Solutions is based on our culture of understanding our clients, assembling a team of highly skilled professionals and delivering solutions of great value to the client every time.”- Dr. Srinii Neralla

CEOCFO: *Does your history working within the government for a long time help you get a foot in the door, or is it kind of a level playing field each time?*

Dr. Neralla: I think it is generally a level playing field. If you had asked me this question about twelve or thirteen years back I would have said that it does give us a little bit of an edge. However, right now the way it works, the technical approach that we propose and the ability to show that we have hands on working experience and demonstrated success on the type of expertise required plays a big role in addition to offering a competitive price. That is where we have the edge, where our past performance on a similar project for another government client gives us the edge.

CEOCFO: *You utilize cutting edge technologies and innovative technologies. How do you know when the technology is ready to be used and not still maybe a little iffy? How do you vet the technology?*

Dr. Neralla: That is a great question. The way we look at it, we are generally not the ones that are developing technologies. We are the ones that are implementing proven technologies. Our innovation at SIA is focused on tailoring of an available technology that is time tested and use that for the benefit of our clients in solving their challenging issues. We have some very good current examples of doing this with beneficial reuse technology and robotics technology. Therefore, we take an available technology that has been used before and then adapt it to the client's needs. If you ask, “Are you developing a technology, how do you know your technology is ready,” then we will have to say, no we do not develop technology, we just implement proven technologies effectively.

CEOCFO: *You mentioned earlier innovative products. What do you have available for your clients that others do not?*

Dr. Neralla: One of the things we believe we do better than most of our peers & competitors is to think outside the box effectively. The focus generally is to always ask the client, “Tell us what problem you would like for us to solve”. Once we understand the problem to be solved, we focus on developing the most cost effective practical solution acceptable to the client. One of our unique key services is in the public-private partnership (P3) arena. One example is a recent project where a DoD base had invested in a state of the art water/waste water treatment plant and subsequently a few years later the base was downsized due to BRAC actions. Therefore, the DoD did not need the full capacity of the plant moving forward. However, the plant had a high market value due to the surrounding local communities who require additional capacity for growth with very little options in which to obtain this. We were able to assess the value of the plant and basically marry the local communities' needs with the excess capacity of the DoD plant. This is a “win-win” situation for everybody, by providing a solution and reducing costs for both government agencies through the transfer of the asset! These are the innovative solutions that I am talking about.

Another unique challenge we are currently supporting the US Army in the application of robotics to help improve health and safety risk related and other efficiencies in the erosion control, water quality, and navigation of the Mississippi River.

CEOCFO: *What do you understand on the financial side or bringing in private entities, as that is not typically what an engineering company would be involved in? How have you developed that aspect of your business?*

Dr. Neralla: We do have experts that are from the financial field within our company. We have built that capability based on fully understanding our federal clients' needs. We often play the role of supporting our clients' needs in supporting large scale infrastructure projects when they may not have the full budget available to accomplish the project. In these cases, we will help secure financial/private investment into government infrastructure projects through P3 & P4 structured deals.

CEOCFO: *Are there particular types of projects you like to take on as a company, given a choice?*

Dr. Neralla: Yes. We like to take on our clients most difficult and challenging projects. We thrive on listening to our clients and taking on projects that most firms may not be able to address in their primary business lines. We enjoy taking on challenges, especially when it is within the purview of our strongest expertise areas. Obviously, we are not going to perform heart surgeries and design rockets, but we have done a lot of innovative things. We thrive on solving our client needs within our skill sets.

CEOCFO: *How do you spend your time as CEO? What is your agenda day to day?*

Dr. Neralla: That is a very good question! We are a small company, and as it is with any small business the CEO will end up doing lot of things that others may not be as skilled. My primary focus is the vision, the mission and the culture of the company, and then the strategic direction that we want to take the company in. Being a small business, one of the things that I end up doing daily, but also enjoy most is that I am personally involved with our clients and with our staff and the satisfaction of knowing that you know every client and every employee on a personal basis and you work with them closely is awesome.

CEOCFO: *SIA Solutions was recognized on the Inc 5000 list, quite high on the list, so I know business is good. How do you continue the trajectory?*

Dr. Neralla: We were privileged to be recognized by the Inc Magazine. We have a very focused and dedicated team of professionals at SIA and wonderful clients that are very supportive, who have helped us in our growth. We believe that continuing that trajectory is easy if we can stay focused on our "clients first" philosophy, take care of our people and continue to provide outstanding project delivery. The success of SIA Solutions is based on our culture of understanding our clients, assembling a team of highly skilled professionals and delivering solutions of great value to the client every time.

CEOCFO: *There are many companies providing services to the government and many companies in your industry. Why choose SIA Solutions LLC?*

Dr. Neralla: First let me take the liberty of sharing my beliefs with you. I believe in our company's vision. I believe in the direction in which we are going. I believe in our culture, which to me is unique and so do many of our clients. I am inspired and excited to wake up every day thinking about working with our great team of professionals to serve our clients' biggest challenges and needs. We focus on our clients and their needs and our clients really appreciate our passion, our commitment and the results that we deliver. We help our clients, we help our country, and we will help the world environment. It is exciting to have the opportunity to do what you love to do and grow a financially strong and sustainable business and help your clients' needs. We have the right team, we have done it before, we can do it now and we can do the same in future.

