



DoD Office of Small Business Programs

GUIDE TO MARKETING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

What Small Businesses Need to Know

Are you a small business interested in working for the Department of Defense (DoD)? Pursuing DoD contracts is not for everyone; it requires patience, persistence and an in-depth understanding of federal acquisition rules.

It typically takes at least 18 months of planning before a government contractor wins its first contract. Plan to invest significant time and resources in becoming procurement ready, identifying potential opportunities, marketing to potential clients, developing proposals, complying with DoD rules and implementing contracts. While it's not easy, several government resources and tools can help you win your first DoD contract. This step-by-step guide explains how to get started.

Step 1: Enlist Your Support Network

DoD's support network serves you. In 1985, DoD created the Procurement Technical Assistance Program (PTAP), which is administered by the Defense Logistics Agency, for the specific purpose of helping small businesses that want to learn about doing business with DoD.

The PTAP's **Procurement Technical Assistance Centers** (PTACs) help small businesses compete for and execute contracts with DoD and other federal agencies. Most PTAC services are free.

Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) provide aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners free one-on-one training in business plan development, finance and marketing.

SCORE holds events and workshops across the country to match entrepreneurs with local, volunteer mentors.

Step 2: Understand the Rules

Review the **Federal Acquisition Regulation** (FAR) and the **Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement** (DFARS). These rules, which govern DoD acquisitions, are complex.

Step 3: Register in SAM

The FAR requires all federal government contractors to be registered in the **System for Award Management** (SAM.gov). Your local PTAC can help you complete your SAM registration for free. SAM's website includes FAQs, user guides, helpful hints and videos.

After your initial SAM registration, you must update your registration every year. It's important to keep your SAM registration current because Contracting Officers and Small Business Professionals use SAM to search for small businesses that have capabilities in specific **NAICS** codes.

Step 4: Target Your Market

DoD employs more than 30,000 acquisition staff. In fiscal year 2016 DoD awarded more than \$57 billion in prime contracts to small businesses.

Find your niche. Don't try to be everything to everybody. You should only market your products and services to potential customers that buy what you sell.

Step 5: Create a Capabilities Statement

Create a one-page capabilities statement that summarizes your experience. Your capabilities statement should not include any typos and should include your CAGE code.

Your longer capability briefings should be tailored to the specific customer you are meeting and demonstrate how you can address their challenges, including how your service or product has a positive impact on a Program Manager's cost, schedule and performance.

When marketing to potential customers, don't lead with your socioeconomic status. What really matters is whether you can perform the work.

Step 6: Identify Prime Contracting and Subcontracting Opportunities

You can identify potential buyers of your services by searching the **Federal Procurement Data System** (FPDS), which contains detailed information about federal government contract awards. The system identifies who bought what, from whom, for how much, when and where.

You can sort data in FPDS by NAICS code, key word, customer, place of performance and more. FPDS will help you understand who buys what you sell and how they buy it.

You can identify upcoming requirements by reviewing **procurement forecasts**.

You should monitor **FedBizOpps** for sources-sought notices, requests for information and unclassified solicitations.

Don't forget about **subcontracting opportunities**. Contact details, including emails and phone numbers, for DoD prime contractors that filed individual subcontract reports (ISRs) in fiscal year 2016 are posted on business.defense.gov. Additional subcontracting opportunities are on **SUBNet**. You can search for subcontract awards on **usaspending.gov**.

Step 7: Pound the Pavement

DoD's **Small Business Professionals** (SBPs) are advocates for small businesses. An SBP should be your first point of contact inside an agency, but don't request a meeting with an SBP unless the agency they support buys what you sell. For an existing requirement, you should request a meeting with an SBP at least 18 months before a contract expires.

SBPs can help you prepare for meetings with **Contracting Officers** and **Program Managers**. Contracting Officers have the legal authority to make large purchases on behalf of the federal government. Program Managers use the products and services that vendors provide. They are technical experts and likely to appreciate the details about why your product or service is better than a competitor's.

Step 8: Bid on Your First Contract

Get in the game! To succeed, you need to be resilient. You may have only 30 days to put together a top-notch technical proposal.

It's not uncommon for small businesses to spend hundreds of hours and hundreds of thousands of dollars developing proposals that they don't win. If your first proposal is rejected, don't give up.

You may wish to start with **simplified acquisitions**. Procurements worth \$150,000 or less are typically set aside for small businesses under simplified-acquisition procedures. One way to find such procurements is to search for "simplified acquisition" on FedBizOpps.

Step 9: Win Your First Contract

Congratulations, you won your first contract!

Step 10: Provide Stellar Performance

Winning your first contract isn't the end; it's just the beginning. Develop a plan for executing the contract to DoD's high standards. Plan your work and work your plan.



About

We are the **DoD Office of Small Business Programs**. We maximize opportunities for small businesses to contribute to national security by providing combat power for our troops and economic power for our nation.