

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

***Guide to Using This
Document***

Braddock's

The Winning Edge

2014 Edition

***How Government and
Corporate Buyers
Select a Small
Business Supplier***



Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government Procurement Process

Federal Procurement Methods

Finding Procurement Opportunities

Federal Contractor Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for Subcontractors

Selling to Large Corporations

Determining Your Place in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation Checklist

Sample Capabilities Statement

Sources of Assistance and Counseling

Sponsor's Section

Guide to Using This Document



Dear Entrepreneur:

Small-and-midsized businesses (SMBs) are the lifeblood of the U.S. economy. Your innovation and passion create jobs and build community. That's why Microsoft is committed to helping you realize your full potential. We are proud to support initiatives that help you pursue growth opportunities for your business.

Whatever the size, scale or background of your company, there are tremendous opportunities to serve the needs of both the government and large corporations through supply chain opportunities. The federal government is the largest buyer of products and services in the country, and its goal is to spend 23 percent of its contracting budget on American SMBs.

Large corporations also allocate part of their yearly budget to small businesses and diverse suppliers. Last year, for example, Microsoft spent more than \$1.9 billion with diverse suppliers. We see no limit to the potential we can achieve together.

Microsoft is proud to sponsor *Braddock's The Winning Edge* which is designed to help business owners and decision makers navigate the process of competing for government and large corporate contracts, and provide insider tips on how to be more successful in winning those contracts.

Technology can help your business scale and successfully deliver on contract obligations, and also play an essential role in ensuring compliance with governmental and large corporations' requirements for privacy and security. With Microsoft services like Office 365, your business can meet customer needs and gain a competitive edge.

I hope you find the content of this guide valuable to your business. I wish you and your business great success!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cindy Bates".

Cindy Bates
Vice President, U.S. Small-and-Midsized Business
Microsoft Corporation

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

**Guide to Using This
Document**



Every entrepreneur dreams of making a big sale – the kind that can transform your company and take you to the next level. For many, this sale comes in the form of winning a government contract or becoming a supplier to a large corporation. Because both the government and large companies spend huge sums on all kinds of products and services, winning just a small portion of that business can set you on a path to long-term growth.

That's why we are pleased to provide you access to this edition of *Braddock's The Winning Edge • 2014 Edition*. This unique publication gives you an inside look at what it really takes to win business from the federal government and large corporations. What is it about *your* business that determines whether you get the contract? More importantly, what can you *change* to improve your chances of success?

While there are many factors that determine success, one of the big lessons in this book is that the government and large companies want to buy from well-managed suppliers that are reliable and professional. That's where your local Small Business Development Center can play a vital role. Through management and financial training, marketing and technical assistance, and one-on-one counseling, your SBDC is a great resource to get you "contract ready." Many SBDCs even participate in vendor fairs and other procurement events, putting you directly in touch with potential customers.

America's SBDC represents the more than 1,000 SBDCs nationwide. Together with our members and supporters such as Microsoft, the generous sponsor of this edition, we help small businesses like yours benefit from new opportunities every day. For more information about ASBDC programs or to find the SBDC nearest you, visit www.asbdc-us.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C. E. 'TEE' R." The signature is stylized and cursive.

C.E. "Tee" Rowe
President & CEO

America's Small Business Development Center

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

***Guide to Using This
Document***

Braddock's The Winning Edge How Government and Corporate Buyers Select a Small Business Supplier 2014 Edition



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Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

***Guide to Using This
Document***

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Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

Guide to Using This Document

Guide to Using This Document

- Use the Quick Links at left to jump instantly to any section of the book.
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Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

**Guide to Using This
Document**

Braddock's The Winning Edge

How Government and Corporate Buyers Select a Small Business Supplier

Title Page **i**

Acknowledgments **ii**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview **1**

**Section One: The Government Procurement
Process** **2**

- Federal Government Procurement Methods 3
- How to Find Procurement Opportunities 6
 - Federal Government Procurement Opportunities 6
 - Subcontracting Opportunities 7

**Section Two: Keys to Success — What
Government Buyers and Prime Contractors
Look for in Small Business Suppliers** **10**

- How Small Businesses Are Evaluated for
Government Contracts 10
 - Past Performance 11
 - Capabilities and Capacity 12
 - Specifications and Responsiveness 12
 - Price 13
 - Technology Utilization and Compatibility 14
 - Preferences and Setasides 15
 - Best Value and Lowest Risk 16
 - Environmental Impact 16
- Additional Evaluation Factors for Subcontractors 17
 - Low Risk 17

Table of contents continues on next page

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

**Guide to Using This
Document**

– Familiarity with the Government Contracting Process	18
– Financial Stability	18
– Internal Controls and Security	19
– Knowledge of the Prime Contractor's Needs	19
– Specific Expertise or Specialization	20

Section Three: Selling to Large Corporations 21

• Keys to Success in Selling to Large Corporations	22
– Do Your Research	22
– Pursue Supplier Diversity Opportunities	23
– Make Contact Early and Be Persistent	23
– Network	24
– Emphasize Quality and Results	24
– Maintain a Narrow Focus and Specialize	25
• Determining Your Place in the Supply Chain	25

Mentor-Protégé Programs 26**Procurement Preparation Checklist 28****Sample Capabilities Statement 30****Sources of Assistance and Counseling 32****Sponsor's Section 36**

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government Procurement Process

Federal Procurement Methods

Finding Procurement Opportunities

Federal Contractor Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for Subcontractors

Selling to Large Corporations

Determining Your Place in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation Checklist

Sample Capabilities Statement

Sources of Assistance and Counseling

Sponsor's Section

Guide to Using This Document

Overview

If you are a small business owner or executive trying to win government contracts or sell to large companies, you need to know what government and corporate buyers are looking for when evaluating a small business. This publication is designed to give you a practical look at the evaluation process and selection criteria so you can take action, prepare, and hone your own winning edge.

Of course, as the saying goes, you have to be in it to win it. **Section One** of *Braddock's The Winning Edge* gives you a quick overview of how to get in the game: Why being a small business can be an advantage; what methods the government uses to procure goods and services and how the method used affects the evaluation process; and how to get started finding opportunities within the government and with its prime contractors.

Section Two provides a detailed look at various evaluation criteria for government contracts and subcontracts. By weighing these factors against your own company's strengths and weaknesses, you'll be able to create a strategy that can improve your chances of winning.

Section Three deals specifically with selling directly to large corporations. It provides additional insights into how corporate buying decisions are made, and what actions you can take to become part of the corporate supply chain.

Finally, *Braddock's The Winning Edge* provides some practical tips that you can quickly act on and next-step resources to get expert help at every step in the process.

Note: This publication is a companion to *Braddock's Procurement Opportunities Guide*, which provides a more comprehensive view of the overall procurement process, including state and private-sector procurement. To download a free copy of the other *Guide*, visit <http://www.asbdc-us.org>.

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

**Guide to Using This
Document**

Section One The Government Procurement Process

The federal government of the United States is the largest buyer in the world of literally thousands of products and services, from computer services and office supplies to vehicles and aircraft. Make no mistake: With over \$500 billion in procurement in 2011, federal contracting is big business.

But there is still a big role for small companies, including most likely yours. In fact, of the more than \$500 billion spent in 2011, over \$100 billion was spent with small businesses.

It is no accident that the federal government spends so much on goods and services from small businesses. There are government-wide and agency-specific procurement targets for small businesses, including those owned by women, minorities, and veterans, and those located in HUBZones. While these goals are not always met, they are significant because government purchasers actively seek qualified small businesses to help them meet their goals.

Government-wide Small Business Contracting Goals

Category	2012 Goal
Small Business	23%
Women-owned Small Business	5%
Small Disadvantaged Business	5%
Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business	3%
HUBZone*	3%

* Historically Underutilized Business Zone. As defined by SBA, HUBZone businesses must be small and have principal offices and at least 35 percent of employees reside within a geographic area designated as a HUBZone.

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

***Guide to Using This
Document***

What's more, large business prime contractors holding contracts over \$650,000 (\$1.5 million for construction) are required to include plans for subcontracting portions of the work to small businesses, including those owned and operated by veterans, service-disabled veterans, disadvantaged individuals, women, and companies certified by the SBA as HUBZone small businesses.

How well large business prime contractors carry out their subcontracting plans is an important evaluation criterion for contract performance. Failure to carry out subcontracting obligations can result in penalties or, at the extreme, termination for default.

What does all this mean for your small business? In a word: Opportunity. Federal government buyers and their large prime contractors are eager to spend money with small businesses, including those owned by women, minorities, and service-disabled veterans. You need to give them a reason to spend that money with you.

The purpose of this publication is to give you the advantage of knowing what federal buyers and prime contractors are looking for. How do they evaluate you as a potential contractor or subcontractor? What can you do to improve your chances for profitable contracting and subcontracting?

Federal Government Procurement Methods

The way that federal buyers evaluate potential small business suppliers depends in part on the method of procurement. As the value or complexity of a contract increases, the procurement methods become more detailed and process-driven.

Purchases under the Simplified Acquisition Threshold of \$150,000 are generally set aside for small businesses. The agency can negotiate with and award contracts to local businesses using less formal procedures than those used for larger contracts.

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

***Guide to Using This
Document***

Micro-purchases

Purchases of individual items under \$3,000 or multiple items with an aggregate value under \$3,000 are considered micro-purchases. Micro-purchases do not require competitive bids or quotes, and agencies can simply pay using a Government Purchase Card (credit card).

Sealed Bidding (Invitation for Bid)

When the requirements for a purchase are clearly known and able to be specified, the agencies typically use a sealed bid procurement process. Bids are evaluated according to the criteria set forth in the solicitation. Usually the contract is awarded to the lowest bidder fulfilling the requirements of the invitation, but other criteria may be used in certain circumstances. Such evaluation criteria other than price will be clearly stated in the invitation.

Requests for Proposal (RFP)

Many government requirements are defined by their objectives, rather than the products or services used to achieve the objectives. Technically complex work, scientific research, and management consulting are examples of this type of requirement. In such cases, the agency will issue an RFP rather than an Invitation for Bid, and it is up to the bidders to propose the best way to meet the requirements. Submitted proposals are subject to negotiation before a contract is awarded. Contracts resulting from an RFP are typically awarded on a "best value" basis.

Sole-source Contracts

From time to time the government will have a need for a product or service for which there is reasonably believed to be only one qualified supplier. Patents, other intellectual property, proprietary processes, geographic location, unique capabilities or scale of operations, or the ability to perform within a required time frame can all be used as justification to award a contract on a sole-source basis. Sole-source contracts are negotiated directly without a competitive bid process.

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

***Guide to Using This
Document***

Multiple Award and IDIQ Contracts

There are certain products and services that are used by most government agencies — computers, copier maintenance and telecommunications for example. For these items, the government uses consolidated contracting methods to negotiate better prices and reduce administrative costs. The best-known example of such consolidated contracting is the General Services Administration's Multiple Award Schedule (also known as the GSA Schedule).

Under a multiple award contract, an agency such as GSA negotiates prices and terms with the vendor and awards the contract. This contract does not involve a sale. Rather, it creates an agreement whereby any participating government agency may purchase the products or services covered by the contract according to the prices and terms specified.

A **Government-Wide Acquisition Contract (GWAC)** is a task-order or delivery-order contract for information technology established and administered by one agency under authorization by the Office of Management and Budget for governmentwide use.

A **Blanket Purchase Agreement (BPA)** is often used by federal buyers to procure supplies and services on a recurring basis. BPAs simplify the acquisition process and essentially serve as a type of charge account with the vendor, against which the vendor bills the agency after supplies or services are ordered. As with multiple award contracts, BPAs are negotiated rather than bid out.

An **Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ)** contract is used when the purchasing agency cannot predetermine an exact amount of product or service that may be needed over a certain period of time. It allows for negotiated prices for products and services, which the government can order as needed during the contract period. IDIQ contracts typically have a minimum and maximum award value.

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

***Guide to Using This
Document***

How to Find Procurement Opportunities

Federal purchasing agents and large business prime contractors are actively looking for qualified small businesses to help them meet their purchasing targets and subcontracting requirements. You can make their job easier by actively searching for them too. In fact, your chance of being considered for federal contracts and subcontracts depends almost entirely on the effort *you* put into identifying and pursuing the opportunities that are there. Simply waiting for them to find you will almost certainly lead to disappointment.

Federal Government Procurement Opportunities

Keep in mind that the Federal Government itself is not your customer; rather, it is the individual agencies and program offices that do the buying. Your goal is to identify the departments, agencies, bureaus, branches and offices that are buying the products and services you provide.

The best place to start is FedBizOpps at <http://www.fbo.gov>. FedBizOpps is the government's designated portal for advertising government-wide information about federal contract solicitations and awards with an estimated value of \$25,000 or greater. A simple search here will reveal a wealth of information about who is buying, how often they buy, and how much they spend. You will even find out who your competitors are, if you don't already know.

Keep in mind that FedBizOpps only covers contract awards of more than \$25,000 and solicitations with an expected value of more than \$25,000. If the typical sale of your product or service is less than \$25,000, visit the Federal Procurement Data System (FPDS) at <https://www.fpds.gov/>. FPDS contains detailed information on contract actions over \$25,000 as well as summary data on procurements of less than that amount.

FedBizOpps and FPDS will paint a picture of which agencies have purchased your classification of products, from whom they

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government Procurement Process

Federal Procurement Methods

Finding Procurement Opportunities

Federal Contractor Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for Subcontractors

Selling to Large Corporations

Determining Your Place in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation Checklist

Sample Capabilities Statement

Sources of Assistance and Counseling

Sponsor's Section

Guide to Using This Document

are currently buying, and what prices they are paying. While past buying activity can be indicative of future opportunities, you can also get a general idea of an agency's *future* plans by viewing their procurement forecast.

The procurement forecast provides an inside look at potential future buying activity for the agency, and gives you the opportunity to plan ahead for a successful bid. See Acquisition Central at http://www.acquisition.gov/comp/procurement_forecasts/index.html.

Procurement forecasts represent what the agency plans to purchase during the coming year, but are not actual solicitations. Some items listed in the forecasts are not, in fact, sent out for solicitation over the course of the year due to budget constraints or changes in the agency's planning and priorities.

Another resource is <http://www.usaspending.gov>, which contains a database of contracts awarded by agency, including place of performance, the amount of the award, and the contractor. The database also includes information about subcontractors as reported by the prime contractors.

Subcontracting Opportunities

If your strategy is to work as a subcontractor to a prime contractor instead of seeking contracts directly with the federal government, identifying specific opportunities can require more effort. There is no central clearinghouse of subcontracting opportunities, but there are some websites that can get you started:

FedBizOpps - This is the government's portal for solicitations with an expected value of \$25,000 or more. By searching this site, you can identify solicitations that are likely to result in subcontracting opportunities for the products and services you provide. By informing potential bidders of your capabilities, you can improve your chances for being considered in their subcontracting proposal. Visit <http://www.fbo.gov>.

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government Procurement Process

Federal Procurement Methods

Finding Procurement Opportunities

Federal Contractor Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for Subcontractors

Selling to Large Corporations

Determining Your Place in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation Checklist

Sample Capabilities Statement

Sources of Assistance and Counseling

Sponsor's Section

Guide to Using This Document

Sub-Net - A service of the U.S. Small Business Administration, Sub-Net provides a forum where prime contractors can post subcontracting opportunities and small businesses can search for them. Because there is no requirement for prime contractors to post on Sub-Net, it does not contain a complete listing of opportunities. Visit <http://web.sba.gov/subnet/>.

SBA Dynamic Small Business Search (DSBS) - DSBS is used by federal purchasing agents and by prime contractors to identify potential small business contractors and subcontractors. To include your business in the search database, you must complete the registration process at the System for Award Management (SAM) at <http://www.sam.gov>. If you previously registered with the Central Contractor Registration (CCR) and self-certified as a small business, you should already be included in the database.

In addition to these websites, there are other resources you can contact to help you identify subcontracting opportunities and navigate the government and prime contracting process, including these:

- Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (PTAC)
- Small Business Development Centers (SBDC)
- Offices of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU)

See page **31** for more detailed information about these resources, including services offered and contact information.

Finally, it is important to understand the significance and effectiveness of **networking** when seeking work with prime contractors. There really is no substitute for *knowing* key decision-makers at large companies. Remember that they have to include your business in the subcontracting plan that they submit as part of their contract bids, which means they have to know you *before* the contract is awarded. If you can be part of their plans at an early stage, you can vastly improve your chances of winning a share of the subcontracting work.

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

***Guide to Using This
Document***

Fortunately, there are plenty of opportunities to network with federal prime contractors. You can start by contacting your local PTAC or SBDC to see whether they have a schedule of local events. The General Services Administration, the Department of Defense, and many other federal agencies sponsor vendor fairs and so-called "meet-and-greet" events that are attended by representatives of large contractors.

TIP: When networking, it is a good idea to print key information about your company on the back of your business card, including your DUNS number, CAGE code, NAICS code(s) and certification status (small, women-owned, small disadvantaged, or service-disabled veteran). Prime contractors can use this information to quickly reference your capabilities and know whether you are a potential supplier on upcoming prime contracts.

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government Procurement Process

Federal Procurement Methods

Finding Procurement Opportunities

Federal Contractor Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for Subcontractors

Selling to Large Corporations

Determining Your Place in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation Checklist

Sample Capabilities Statement

Sources of Assistance and Counseling

Sponsor's Section

Guide to Using This Document

Section Two

Keys to Success — What Government Buyers and Prime Contractors Look for in Small Business Suppliers

Once you have identified potential customers at agencies within the federal government or at their prime contractors, you can start pursuing specific opportunities by responding to government solicitations or working with prime contractors on their responses.

Your goal is to win the business, so the obvious question to ask is, "What does a winning bid or proposal look like?" There is no simple answer to this question, but one important thing to remember is that it does not always come down to price alone. Being the lowest bidder does not automatically result in a contract award for your business unless that is the only evaluation criterion. In fact, if your price is significantly lower than competing bids, it might raise questions about your business in the minds of procurement officers.

There are, however, instances where the price *is* the most important evaluation criteria. Typically these are Invitation for Bid (IFB) procurements in which the products or services to be procured are specified in detail. In such cases, the government will usually select the lowest bid that conforms to the specifications.

How Small Businesses Are Evaluated for Government Contracts

If it's not just price, what are government buyers and prime contractors looking for? What is it about your business and your bid or proposal that really makes a difference? The following

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

***Guide to Using This
Document***

are key areas that buyers evaluate for federal contracts and subcontracts. Please note that these are not necessarily listed in order of importance. There are additional factors that prime contractors may consider when selecting a subcontractor, and these are addressed separately beginning on page [17](#).

1. Past Performance.

Your company's past performance on government contracts or subcontracts is crucially important when federal buyers evaluate a bid or proposal from you. They want to see a contractor with a proven track record of delivering on time and within specification. When they see such a track record, it equates to lower risk for them compared to other bidders without such a record.

To establish a past performance record, it may be necessary to start with small contracts - even some that you ordinarily would not pursue. By starting small and working your way up to larger awards, you can demonstrate that you are a reliable, low-risk supplier or service provider that the buyer can depend on. For this reason, government procurement officers and purchasing agents at prime contractors prefer to deal with established companies that have been in business for at least two years.

If you do not have a track record of government contracts to demonstrate your reliability, you can highlight similar work performed in the private sector, preferably for large, well-known firms especially those that hold federal prime contracts. Such experience will be considered. Prime contractors may also look at your private-sector record when evaluating your past performance, but federal contracting officers may consider it.

Federal contracting officials use the Past Performance Information Retrieval System (PPIRS), to evaluate your past performance. This database contains report cards about your performance on previous federal contracts. Late deliveries, poor quality, and noncompliance with terms on past contracts will count heavily against you when you seek future business with

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government Procurement Process

Federal Procurement Methods

Finding Procurement Opportunities

Federal Contractor Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for Subcontractors

Selling to Large Corporations

Determining Your Place in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation Checklist

Sample Capabilities Statement

Sources of Assistance and Counseling

Sponsor's Section

Guide to Using This Document

the federal government. Existing government contractors may view the information on file about themselves to ensure its accuracy. See <http://www.ppirs.gov/> for more information.

2. Capabilities and Capacity

One reason past performance is so important is that it is an indicator of your capabilities. The understanding is that if you did it before, you can do it again. Through your past performance record and your response to a solicitation, you must demonstrate that you have the capability, capacity and resources necessary to carry out the work on time and according to the specifications.

Again, keep in mind that your customers within the federal government or at a prime contractor are looking for *low-risk* suppliers. Your response to a solicitation should document that you have the technical expertise, facilities, labor, financing, and technology to perform on the contract, and that you possess the ability to deal with contingencies.

How do you demonstrate this? If applicable, include in your response background information on key personnel who will be working on the contract — their academic degrees, technical or professional certifications, experience, publications, patents, etc. This may also include work on other government contracts that an individual performed while with a previous employer. List equipment, facilities, and other resources that are relevant to the work. If your financial resources are in doubt, a contracting officer may request a bank reference letter, but it is best not to submit one unless requested.

3. Specifications and Responsiveness

In most cases, your bid will not even be considered if it is determined to be "non-responsive." A responsive bid is one that meets the specific technical requirements stated in the solicita-

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government Procurement Process

Federal Procurement Methods

Finding Procurement Opportunities

Federal Contractor Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for Subcontractors

Selling to Large Corporations

Determining Your Place in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation Checklist

Sample Capabilities Statement

Sources of Assistance and Counseling

Sponsor's Section

Guide to Using This Document

tion. This includes quantities, descriptions, materials, delivery dates, delivery destinations, packaging, etc.

Furthermore, your bid must comply with the procedural and informational instructions stated in the solicitation or invitation. These instructions may cover such matters as:

- The deadline for receipt of bids; both date and time are important. If no time is stated on the solicitation, it is assumed to be 4:30 PM local time in the office to which responses are submitted.
- Agreement to any terms and conditions referenced in the solicitation.
- The form of submission (most require electronic submission).
- Required attachments, such as financial statements, compliance reports, or licenses.

4. Price

The importance of price in selecting a winning response depends a great deal on the type of solicitation. Procurements conducted as Invitation for Bid (IFB) are determined largely on price — the lowest price among responsive bidders usually gets the award. But there are many other instances where price is one of many factors weighed in determining what constitutes the "best value" for the government. Micropurchases (under \$3,000) do not even need to be bid out, so as long as your price is reasonable and competitive in the eyes of the purchaser, it will not be a hindrance in your getting the business.

More complicated solicitations such as Request for Proposals (RFP) will include in the solicitation the evaluation criteria. The type of RFP where price is the most important element is the Low Price Technically Acceptable (LPTA) procedure. In other cases, the price and other elements of the final contract may be subject to negotiation after the proposal has been submitted.

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

***Guide to Using This
Document***

5. Technology Utilization and Compatibility

Your adoption and use of industry-standard technology is not something that will show up on a check-box in the solicitation, but it can make a big difference in how you are perceived. It can also have some practical applications to set you apart from competitors that are lagging in this area.

First and foremost, the federal government and its large prime contractors have largely moved to an electronic procurement environment. You will be receiving solicitations, submitting documents, managing your contracts, and communicating with your customers and partners via the Internet. High-speed access is virtually required. You need modern computers, current e-mail clients and secure servers, and current versions of standard software for word processing, spreadsheets, and document viewing. If your industry uses more specialized software, such as image-editing, CAD, etc., you'll want to make sure that you have current versions so you won't run into problems when sharing files with others or using files submitted to you.

Technology can also help make you a low-risk supplier. Off-site backup of data, cloud computing and data storage, and secure e-mail servers mean you can deal with many contingencies that would disrupt other businesses. In general, federal purchasers and prime contractors are looking for innovative solutions that incorporate the latest technologies and best practices to serve their needs.

Prime contractors and federal purchasers also like to do business with suppliers that work the way they work. Virtual meetings, the ability to securely share large files, and compliance with government data retention and management regulations can all be easily accomplished with the right technology.

Finally, technology can help you establish and manage detailed recordkeeping protocols so that you can track time, expenses and performance on any contract. This should include business accounting software, electronic payroll records, and

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government Procurement Process

Federal Procurement Methods

Finding Procurement Opportunities

Federal Contractor Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for Subcontractors

Selling to Large Corporations

Determining Your Place in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation Checklist

Sample Capabilities Statement

Sources of Assistance and Counseling

Sponsor's Section

Guide to Using This Document

retention of electronic communications. Such tools are indispensable if you are ever audited on a contract and need to substantiate claims for time and expenses. For more information about auditing requirements, see the Defense Contract Audit Agency website at <http://www.dcaa.mil/>.

6. Preferences and Setasides

Some contracts, including most under \$150,000, are set aside for small businesses. Preferences and setasides are also given to specific types of small businesses, including small businesses owned by veterans, service-disabled veterans, members of minority groups, Native Americans, or women, as well as businesses located within a recognized HUBZone and businesses in the 8(a) Business Development Program. HUBZone businesses, for example, are eligible for sole-source contracts, and receive up to 10% price evaluation preference in full and open contract competitions.

If your business has one or more of the characteristics that carries preference, you need to make sure buyers in both the federal government and at prime contractors are aware of it. When you register with SAM.gov, you can self-certify as a small business with some of these characteristics. Others require a specific certification, including:

- Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) and Veteran Owned Small Businesses (VOSB) — contact the Center for Veterans Enterprise at <http://www.vetbiz.gov>.
- HUBZone Business — contact the U.S. Small Business Administration at <http://www.sba.gov/hubzone/>.
- 8(a) Business Development Program for small disadvantaged businesses — contact the U.S. Small Business Administration at <http://www.sba.gov/content/8a-business-development-0>.

Women-owned businesses can be certified for federal contracting purposes through the U.S. Small Business Adminis-

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government Procurement Process

Federal Procurement Methods

Finding Procurement Opportunities

Federal Contractor Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for Subcontractors

Selling to Large Corporations

Determining Your Place in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation Checklist

Sample Capabilities Statement

Sources of Assistance and Counseling

Sponsor's Section

Guide to Using This Document

tration's Women-Owned Small Business Program (<http://www.sba.gov/content/women>). Prime contractors accept third-party certification through a number of certifiers, including these:

- Women's Business Enterprise National Council (<http://www.wbenc.org>)
- National Women Business Owners Corporation (<http://www.nwboc.org/>)
- U.S. Women's Chamber of Commerce (<http://www.uswcc.org/certification>)

Minority-owned businesses can be certified for private-sector purposes by an affiliate of the National Minority Supplier Development Council. See <http://www.nmsdc.org>.

7. Best Value and Lowest Risk

The overall goal of the various evaluation criteria is for the government or prime contractor to get the best value with the lowest risk at a competitive price. Solicitations will provide guidance as to how proposals will be scored and how the various criteria will be weighted. Your job is to paint a picture that your company is capable, reliable, competitive, and easy to do business with. Do not be shy about using your status as a member of a group with procurement preferences to give yourself an edge — you are doing the contracting decision-makers a favor by helping them meet their preferential procurement goals.

8. Environmental Impact

One final area of evaluation is environmental impact. By executive order, agencies may consider the environmental impact of a proposal when evaluating it. Proposals that include commitments to environmentally friendly practices, use of recycled materials, pollution control and abatement, reduction of greenhouse emissions, and other factors may receive a preference.

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government Procurement Process

Federal Procurement Methods

Finding Procurement Opportunities

Federal Contractor Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for Subcontractors

Selling to Large Corporations

Determining Your Place in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation Checklist

Sample Capabilities Statement

Sources of Assistance and Counseling

Sponsor's Section

Guide to Using This Document

Additional Evaluation Factors for Subcontractors

The previous section described evaluation factors that apply when dealing with federal government contracts and with subcontracts to prime contractors. If your federal contracting strategy focuses on performing as a subcontractor to a prime contractor, there are additional evaluation criteria that may affect your ability to win subcontracts.

Because these are private-sector to private-sector dealings, they can be less formal than transactions governed solely by the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR). Keep in mind, however, that when you are performing as a subcontractor on a federal contract, many of the terms and conditions on the prime contractor apply also to subcontractors.

1. Low Risk

This is a factor that was described in the previous section, but it is worth repeating in a different context when you are trying to become a subcontractor to a prime contractor. Simply stated, prime contractors cannot afford to place their performance on a large prime contract at risk because of the nonperformance of a single subcontractor.

Because they are relying on you, they have to *know* — not just believe — that you will perform as required. For this reason, past performance is one of the most important selection criteria. They prefer to work with established businesses with the following characteristics:

- At least two years in operation
- Prior federal contracting or subcontracting experience
- Full-time staff and facilities (not a "mom-and-pop" or home-based business)

Because these are typically informal preferences, exceptions can be made. If your business does not have these char-

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government Procurement Process

Federal Procurement Methods

Finding Procurement Opportunities

Federal Contractor Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for Subcontractors

Selling to Large Corporations

Determining Your Place in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation Checklist

Sample Capabilities Statement

Sources of Assistance and Counseling

Sponsor's Section

Guide to Using This Document

acteristics, however, it will be more difficult to convince a prime contractor to rely on you and include you in their subcontracting proposals.

2. Familiarity with the Government Contracting Process

A prime contractor's main objective is to serve the government, and they want subcontractors that are ready to hit the ground running to help them do that. They do not want a subcontractor that has to have the government's procurement jargon explained at every step, or walked through the compliance process.

The best way to gain familiarity with the government contracting process and the related acronyms and terminology is to bid on and win some small contracts. Working with a counselor at a Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) or Small Business Development Center (SBDC) can also help you understand the process. If you can speak the jargon and complete the required paperwork and certifications without constant supervision by the prime contractor, they will take you more seriously and view you as more prepared to join their team on a prime contract.

3. Financial Stability

Your perceived financial stability equates to lower risk in the eyes of prime contractors. They require subcontractors who are not in danger of ceasing operations in the middle of a contract, and signs of financial weakness will work against you.

Many prime contractors will view third-party credit reports on your business, particularly those from Dun & Bradstreet. If your business is a sole proprietorship or partnership, they may also check your personal credit history from a consumer credit reporting agency. Regardless of how you view your business's financial situation, it is a good idea to check your credit report from Dun & Bradstreet and the consumer credit reporting agen-

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

***Guide to Using This
Document***

cies to ensure that what a potential customer sees is an accurate reflection of your condition. If there is derogatory information in your credit file, you should be prepared to explain it if you are asked about it.

4. Internal Controls and Security

When you work with a prime contractor, you may necessarily become aware of information, processes, or contacts that the prime contractor deems proprietary or sensitive. You also need to be able to track costs and project progress and report it accurately to the prime contractor.

To ensure that you can keep their information private and report accurate, verifiable information to them, prime contractors prefer subcontractors with robust technology, systems, and procedures in place. You should be able to demonstrate that you have secure, virus-free IT systems and the ability to track time and expenses using standard accounting and reporting software. Background checks on employees — which may be required for some contracts — are a plus regardless of the nature of the work. Finally, you should have systems and processes in place that allow you to restrict, monitor, and log access to sensitive information, both electronically and physically.

5. Knowledge of the Prime Contractor's Needs

When you approach a prime contractor seeking subcontracting work, you should already have done your homework by knowing the prime contractor's needs. Visit the company's website and talk with employees to gain a sense of their mission goals and key markets. If possible, find out as much information as you can in the following areas:

- What past and current federal contracts has the prime contractor won?
- On what future prime contracts will the contractor likely be bidding?
- What types of work does the contractor typically subcontract?

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

***Guide to Using This
Document***

- Are there specific areas of expertise that the contractor requires for upcoming solicitations?
- Who are the current subcontractors supplying the prime contractor?
- Where is the work performed or delivery made?
- What does the prime contractor's corporate organization look like (who reports to whom)?
- What are the prime contractor's payment terms to subcontractors?

If you are able to speak knowledgeably about the prime contractor and its requirements, you'll be in a better position to demonstrate that your company has the characteristics they need to perform on their next contract.

6. Specific Expertise or Specialization

Large business prime contractors often use small business subcontractors simply because it is required of them by the federal government. In other cases, however, prime contractors will seek out subcontractors who possess skills or expertise that the prime contractor lacks internally.

If your business is highly adept in performing a very specialized task or producing a unique product, the prime contractor can leverage that to improve its chances of winning the prime contract. Other characteristics that can set you apart and improve your chances of being selected as a subcontractor on the prime contractor's team are the following:

- Patents applicable to contemplated contracts
- Adoption of leading-edge technology, processes or methods
- Specific personnel who are known as being among the best or most experienced at what they do. This may include individuals who have made breakthroughs in research or who have published highly-cited professional papers.
- Personnel who already have required security clearances.

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government Procurement Process

Federal Procurement Methods

Finding Procurement Opportunities

Federal Contractor Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for Subcontractors

Selling to Large Corporations

Determining Your Place in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation Checklist

Sample Capabilities Statement

Sources of Assistance and Counseling

Sponsor's Section

Guide to Using This Document

Section Three

Selling to Large Corporations

Many of your company's characteristics that lead to success in government contracting and subcontracting can also give you the winning edge in an even larger market — selling directly to large corporations. America's large corporations' collectively spend trillions of dollars every year for raw materials, components, wholesale goods for resale, business and IT services, facilities construction and maintenance, and administrative products and services.

With government budgets tight for the foreseeable future, the opportunities with corporate America are gaining in importance. At the same time, many large corporations are actively increasing their purchases from small businesses to supply needed products and services and to serve their strategic objectives. Some of the trends working in favor of small companies include:

- **Continued high levels of outsourcing**, as large companies look for ways to streamline their operations and focus on their own core competencies.
- **Supplier diversity and social responsibility.** Many large businesses take pride in their efforts to expand opportunities for small businesses, women-owned businesses, minority-owned businesses, and veteran-owned businesses. These efforts include outreach and support initiatives, contracting goals, and MOUs with organizations representing these types of small companies.
- **Specialization and total solutions.** As technology and the economy become more complex, large businesses can gain a competitive advantage by promoting themselves as one-stop solution providers to their clients and customers. The result: big companies will team with smaller companies with the right expertise so they can better serve their customers.

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

***Guide to Using This
Document***

Keys to Success in Selling to Large Corporations

Every corporation is different, so it is difficult to make sweeping statements about the specific processes that guide the decisions within any particular corporation. In general, however, the rules governing purchasing in large corporations tend to be more flexible than they are for federal procurements, with a considerable amount of authority delegated to division or program managers.

But even though the corporate purchasing environment may be less regulated than government purchases, many of the same evaluation criteria used for federal procurements and subcontracting apply when selling to corporate customers. The most important among these are past performance and your company's capabilities. Although price is always important, many large corporate customers are just as concerned about your proven track record of reliability and the quality of your offerings.

How can you stand out from the crowd, get your foot in the door, and seal the deal? There are no guarantees, but the following strategies and tactics can improve your chances of becoming noticed and winning business from large corporate clients.

1. Do Your Research.

This sounds trite, but it is incredibly important. Before approaching a large corporation, find out everything you can about the business, its needs, its corporate structure, the missions of various programs, current suppliers, and strategic direction. When you meet with a decision maker, you don't want to waste their time having them recite their requirements — you should already know them. You'll do much better when you open a meeting by saying something like, "I understand you are pursuing a new initiative in XYZ field, and I think we can help you with one of the tougher aspects of that." If you haven't done your

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government Procurement Process

Federal Procurement Methods

Finding Procurement Opportunities

Federal Contractor Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for Subcontractors

Selling to Large Corporations

Determining Your Place in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation Checklist

Sample Capabilities Statement

Sources of Assistance and Counseling

Sponsor's Section

Guide to Using This Document

research, you won't be able to offer relevant solutions or focus on issues important to the customer.

Sources of information are varied, and you'll find some companies much more closed than others. But in general, you can use the following resources to learn more about your potential corporate customers:

- Follow their social media outreach on Facebook, Twitter, and other channels to get an ongoing sense of their activities and what is important to them.
- For public companies, read annual reports and 10k reports filed with the SEC.
- Peruse their public websites and press releases.
- Read industry trade periodicals, which often contain articles and briefs on what large companies are planning to do. These publications also focus on challenges facing the industry or a particular company, which may be opportunities for you.

2. Pursue Supplier Diversity Opportunities.

Many large corporations have specific initiatives to increase purchases from small businesses, especially those owned by women, minorities, and veterans. Be sure to obtain a third-party certification proving that your business qualifies for these diversity opportunities. See page [15](#) for more information on third-party certifications.

In the same vein, some large companies maintain approved supplier lists. Simply being on that list, whether or not your small business is women-, minority-, or veteran-owned, can generate opportunities and make it easier for program managers to buy from you. Find out early in your prospecting whether your target corporation has such a list and if so, how to get on it.

3. Make Contact Early and Be Persistent.

Don't expect to make a sale on the first contact. In fact, don't expect even to talk with the decision-maker on the first contact.

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

***Guide to Using This
Document***

A better strategy is to attempt to reach the decision-maker by phone, following up with letters or e-mails. Your goal is to increase and maintain your visibility within the decision-maker's environment so that he or she is aware of you, whether or not you have yet had the opportunity to make a pitch.

Once you have made contact with the decision-maker, stay in contact. Follow up every week or two with a message or note about your company, suggestions, or news, or simply check on progress. The key is to be "appropriately aggressive," where you are not quite being a pest, but rather are demonstrating confidence that you can be of benefit. Keep in mind that most corporations work from quarterly or annual budgets, and you'll need to be patient enough for your customer to plan your offerings into next quarter's or next year's budget.

4. Network.

Use your networking skills not only to reach decision-makers, but also to get information about your prospect and plug your company to others who may have influence. Attend local or national trade events, join your chamber of commerce, or simply ask colleagues who they know at your prospective corporate customer. The information and insights that you obtain through networking can be just as valuable as the people you reach.

5. Emphasize Quality and Results.

Corporate buyers are themselves evaluated on the performance of their suppliers. One of the biggest hurdles to overcome is convincing them that you will make them look good. If you are a manufacturer, be prepared to discuss the process controls and procedures you use to ensure consistent excellent quality. Point out any industry awards or certifications that your company or employees have received.

Focusing on the quality and results you have achieved in the past and explaining how you can deliver the same in the future for a new customer can go a long way in overcoming the "you're

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

***Guide to Using This
Document***

too small" objection. You can reinforce the message of quality by projecting professionalism in everything a prospective customer sees about your business, including your marketing materials, attire, demeanor, and business communications.

6. Maintain a Narrow Focus and Specialize.

This is where your research can really pay off. Target corporations or divisions within a corporation that would benefit from the one or two products or services where your company truly excels. Customize your capabilities statement and marketing materials for each target customer, so that your stated strengths closely match their needs and demonstrate that you understand their business.

Although you should approach a corporate prospect with a clear idea of what you want to sell, listen to your contact and follow his or her lead. If there is an interest in a different product or service than what you had in mind, you should be flexible and adapt your proposal based on what you learn directly from the decision maker.

Determining Your Place in the Supply Chain

Knowing how your product or service will be used can help you identify the best point of entry when marketing. Chances are your product or service falls into one of three categories:

- **Business products and services.** These are the things a business needs to do business, and include products and services in categories such as: office supplies and equipment; marketing and advertising; facilities (construction, maintenance, security and repair); human resources; general administrative and management; information technology; travel and transportation; and other products and services dealing with the ongoing operations of the corporation. Generally, these items are purchased at the level they serve. For example, landscaping is usually contracted for a single building, so the decision maker would likely be local. Financial

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government Procurement Process

Federal Procurement Methods

Finding Procurement Opportunities

Federal Contractor Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for Subcontractors

Selling to Large Corporations

Determining Your Place in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation Checklist

Sample Capabilities Statement

Sources of Assistance and Counseling

Sponsor's Section

Guide to Using This Document

planning and advertising, on the other hand, generally serve the entire corporation and would be headquarters functions.

- **Raw materials and components.** These are items that are physically incorporated into the corporation's products and are part of the corporation's supply chain. Depending on the value, complexity and importance of the item, these may be purchased at the plant level or by headquarters purchasing.
- **Goods purchased for resale by a retailer.** Wholesale purchasing decisions can be made at the store, regional, or national (headquarters) level, depending on the product and the corporate structure. You can start by speaking with the manager of a local store and working your way up to the level appropriate for your product within that company.

Mentor-Protégé Programs

There are 13 mentor-protégé programs in major agencies throughout the federal government. Their goal is to promote the development of qualified small business contractors by pairing them with experienced prime contractors. The prime contractor as mentor provides advice, procurement and management training, and experience to the small business protégé. The relationship often spawns subcontracting opportunities for the small business, and in fact, the programs of some agencies require such opportunities for participation in the program.

The mentor-protégé relationship benefits both parties. The mentor may gain access to unique capabilities or technologies possessed by the small business protégé. Depending on the agency, the mentor may also receive proposal evaluation and/or subcontracting credit for participation in the program. Contracting officers tend to favor mentor-protégé partnerships because they perceive lower risk based on the mentor's support of the protégé.

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

***Guide to Using This
Document***

Because a federally-sponsored mentor-protégé relationship involves a formal agreement between the mentor and a small business, the mentor will carefully evaluate any small business mentoring partner before entering the relationship.

All of the evaluation criteria listed in the previous section would apply, but often the mentoring company is looking for a more established business to be its protégé. They typically want to work with a small business that is large enough to absorb the management training provided — a small business with ten employees or more. Having experience on two or more government contracts will help ensure that the small business does not require too much "hand-holding" on the basics of government procurement, including the jargon, acronyms and standard terms and conditions.

Finally, because the mentor will be working closely with the protégé for a year or more, it is important that their corporate cultures and personalities are compatible. For this reason, there is often some type of relationship — business, professional, or social — so that the key players already know each other and feel comfortable working together before a formal agreement is made between the companies and with a federal mentor-protégé program.

Federal mentor-protégé programs are typically administered through the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) of agencies with a mentoring program.

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government Procurement Process

Federal Procurement Methods

Finding Procurement Opportunities

Federal Contractor Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for Subcontractors

Selling to Large Corporations

Determining Your Place in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation Checklist

Sample Capabilities Statement

Sources of Assistance and Counseling

Sponsor's Section

Guide to Using This Document

Procurement Preparation Checklist

Before you submit your first bid or proposal, you likely have some homework to do — certain basic things you need to know and do before you go after your first federal contract. The following checklist will help make sure you have the administrative and business infrastructure in place to pursue government business and subcontracts successfully.

- 1. Get a D-U-N-S number.** The *Data Universal Numbering System* uniquely identifies your business entity and is the standard business identifier for federal contracting purposes. It is required if you want to do business with the federal government. You can get a D-U-N-S number at no charge by visiting the Dun & Bradstreet website at <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform>.
- 2. Determine your Federal Supply Codes and Product Service Codes (FSC/PSC) and your North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes.** These are the codes the federal government uses to identify specific products and services. You will need them for classification purposes and for conducting acquisition research.
- 3. Register with the System for Award Management (SAM) at <https://www.sam.gov>.** When you register at SAM you must provide the NAICS codes for your business and other information to determine whether your business is considered small for your industry. The information you provide when registering at SAM may be used to determine preferential status (small, minority-owned, women-owned, HUBZone certified, service-disabled veteran-owned, etc.). Registration at SAM.gov is free. Central Contractor Registration (CCR) and Online Representations and Certifications Application (ORCA)

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

***Guide to Using This
Document***

have been consolidated into SAM. If you have registered previously with CCR and ORCA, your information must be migrated by you to SAM. Visit <https://www.sam.gov> or the Federal Service Desk at <https://www.fsd.gov> for more information or for technical assistance. Your local Procurement Technical Assistance Center also may be able to help; visit <http://www.aptac-us.org>.

4. **Make sure you have adequate insurance.** For construction bidding, you must also have sufficient bonding capacity for the contract size contemplated. Bonds are required on construction contracts exceeding \$150,000, unless waived by the contracting officer.
5. **Ensure that you have modern computers with high-speed Internet access and secure e-mail services.** Most procurement actions require electronic communications and data exchange via the Internet. Your software should include packages that allow you to open and work with common spreadsheet and word processing files.
6. **Draw up a business plan that includes your anticipated government contracting activities.** This should include a statement of capabilities and a marketing plan.
7. **Have adequate financing in place** (cash reserves, line of credit, or the ability to obtain a working capital loan) so that you have the ability to perform on any contracts you receive.
8. **Establish detailed recordkeeping protocols** so that you can track time, expenses and performance on any contract. This should include business accounting software, electronic payroll records, and retention of electronic communications. Government auditors have been stepping up their activities to ensure that contractors perform and that their prices are fair and reasonable.

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

***Guide to Using This
Document***

Sample Capabilities Statement

You should have a Statement of Capabilities ready to go when approaching or meeting with potential federal customers or prime contractors. Typically one page, this statement provides a snapshot of what your company can do, including applicable industry codes so that customers can quickly map what you do against their own requirements. The sample on the following page shows the type of information typically included, and was adapted from samples developed and used by the San Diego Contracting Opportunities Center PTAC.

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

**Guide to Using This
Document**

SAMPLE COMPANY, INC.

Your Partners in Performance

Key Capabilities

- Landscape design/build
- Brick, stone, decorative concrete
- Retaining walls
- Water containment/runoff management
- Accent and security lighting
- Masonry repair, sealing and maintenance
- Excavating and debris removal

Quick Reference Codes

D-U-N-S#: XXXXXXXX
Cage Code: XXXX
NAICS Codes: XXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXX
State Contractor
License #: XXXXXXXX
Bond#: XXXXXXXX
Veteran-Owned

About Sample Company, Inc.

Founded in 1987 by John Jimenez, Sample Company, Inc. is an integrated landscape contractor known for outstanding quality and on-time completion of projects. Mr. Jimenez has a B.S. in civil engineering from Springfield State University and is a member of the Landscape Architects Guild. Sample Company was Springfield Small Business of the Year in 1992 and 2007 and has 24 skilled trades employees, 13 trucks, and numerous pieces of heavy equipment. The majority of projects are within 75 miles of the Springfield metro region.

Recent Performance Highlights

- New decorative concrete patio, walkway and steps for GSA building in Newton completed on time
- Attained all performance incentives on runoff containment pond with landscaping for Walters Air Field
- Seventeen private-sector projects completed since January 2012, including nine for repeat clients

Contact

Sample Company, Inc., 1234 Main St., Springfield 98765
Phone (555) 555-1001 • Fax: (555) 555-1002
E-mail: info@samplecompanyinc.biz
Web: www.samplecompany.biz

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

**Guide to Using This
Document**

Sources of Assistance and Counseling

Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (PTAC)

The U.S. Department of Defense, through the Defense Logistics Agency, awards grants to various organizations throughout the country to assist businesses wanting to do business with federal, state and local governments. Highly trained and experienced personnel are available to provide procurement assistance through one-on-one counseling and/or procurement conferences/seminars. Those who consult PTACs have a higher rate of winning government contracts.

Specific PTAC services may include:

- Identifying marketing opportunities
- Providing bidding opportunities
- Advising and assisting businesses in the preparation and submission of applications, certifications, and registrations
- Assisting with post-award functions such as quality, accounting systems, and payment
- Explaining government procurement regulations, terms and procedures, etc.
- Identifying subcontracting opportunities with prime contractors

Refer to <http://www.aptac-us.org> for the PTAC nearest you.

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

Guide to Using This Document

Small Business Development Centers (SBDC)

Local SBDCs are an excellent source of information, counseling and assistance for state and local procurement opportunities. Many offer formal procurement seminars or one-on-one counseling by procurement experts in topics such as:

- Access to capital
- Accounting and recordkeeping
- Business plans
- Marketing
- Operations

In addition to educational services, some SBDCs sponsor vendor fairs, trade shows, and matchmaking events to help their small business clients obtain government business. Visit the website of America's SBDC at <http://www.asbdc-us.org> to find the location of the SBDC nearest you.

Local Chamber of Commerce

Local chambers of commerce vary widely in the resources and services offered to members. Most, however, provide an excellent forum for networking and learning about the local business environment. Joining your local chamber and becoming involved in its activities can help your business build visibility and credibility, which can be especially valuable if the chamber's membership includes large corporations with which you hope to do business.

Because chamber executives and staff are typically very knowledgeable about local businesses and government agencies, they can serve as pivotal networking contacts by pointing you in the direction of new opportunities and introducing you to key players within the government and in large corporations. They can also serve as a bridge to chamber contacts in other regions where a corporate prospect is located.

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government Procurement Process

Federal Procurement Methods

Finding Procurement Opportunities

Federal Contractor Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for Subcontractors

Selling to Large Corporations

Determining Your Place in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation Checklist

Sample Capabilities Statement

Sources of Assistance and Counseling

Sponsor's Section

Guide to Using This Document

Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU)

Every federal agency with significant procurement activity has an OSDBU. OSDBUs are responsible for ensuring that an equitable share of the total prime contracts and subcontracts awarded by its agency are awarded to small businesses, small disadvantaged businesses, and women-owned businesses.

The primary activities of OSDBUs are geared toward establishing and meeting small business contracting goals. There are, however, specific resources many OSDBUs provide that are invaluable to small businesses:

- Forecast of contracting opportunities – an annual report of planned procurements by the agency, which small businesses can use to identify specific opportunities.
- A list of prime contractors used by the agency to help small businesses identify subcontracting opportunities.
- Contracting outreach programs, such as specialized training and vendor fairs for small businesses, including women-owned businesses and SDBs.
- Mentor-protégé programs, which pair small businesses with larger prime contractors to gain management and technical experience.

Women's Business Centers

The Women's Business Center program is administered by the SBA's Office of Women's Business Ownership. Through a network of over 80 centers, Women's Business Centers provide long-term training, mentoring and counseling on a variety of topics, including federal contracting. For a list of centers, visit <http://www.sba.gov/content/womens-business-centers-directory-0>.

Quick Links

(click links below to jump to other sections of this book)

Message from Microsoft

Message from
America's SBDC

Acknowledgments

Detailed Contents

The Government
Procurement Process

Federal Procurement
Methods

Finding Procurement
Opportunities

Federal Contractor
Evaluation Criteria

Additional Criteria for
Subcontractors

Selling to Large
Corporations

Determining Your Place
in the Supply Chain

Mentor-Protégé Programs

Procurement Preparation
Checklist

Sample Capabilities
Statement

Sources of Assistance and
Counseling

Sponsor's Section

***Guide to Using This
Document***

Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA)

MBDA provides funding for a network of Minority Business Development Centers (MBDCs), Native American Business Development Centers (NABDCs), and Business Resource Centers (BRCs), which provide minority entrepreneurs with one-on-one assistance in writing business plans, marketing, management and technical assistance and financial planning to assure adequate financing for business ventures.

The MBDA Federal Procurement Center focuses on federal contracting, serving minority-owned companies that have annual revenues of at least \$1 million. See <http://www.mbdcontracts.com> for more information about the MBDA Federal Procurement Center.

For more information about MBDA, visit <http://www.mbda.gov>.



Win Big Business For Your Small Business

Last year, the federal government allocated \$158 billion of their \$400+ billion budget to small businesses.¹ Large corporations spent hundreds of billions more.

How can you help improve your chances of winning this business?

Agencies and organizations need to ensure that the company they select is reliable and can do the job.

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- A subscription to Office 365.² Your Office 365 subscription provides enterprise-grade tools with no upfront infrastructure investments, backed by robust security and a 99.9% uptime guarantee.
- A consultation with a Credit Advisor and a Microsoft certified partner.

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¹ US Government Small Business Dashboard
²Subscription to Office 365 is limited to one user license for 12 months. Terms and conditions may apply.

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Credible

- Prepare your company to bid on government proposals and corporate supplier contracts
- Confirm that information is accurate in your D&B® Business Credit File
- Monitor government, corporate and subcontractor opportunities to help compete for new business
- Get email alerts about changes to scores and ratings in your business credit file
- Market your business online with a customizable profile in the D&B Credibility online business directory
- Many supplier contract applications require a D&B D-U-N-S® Number.³ Receive an expedited D&B D-U-N-S Number in 5 business days or less. This process could otherwise take up to 30 days



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- Office 365 is compliant with many world-class industry standards and regulations, including ISO 27001, one of the best security benchmarks available across the world
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- IT-level web support and 24/7 phone support for critical issues
- Access your Office applications and documents and respond to business needs from virtually anywhere at anytime
- Get business-class email, including a 25 GB mailbox with shared calendars and tasks
- Collaborate productively with online tools, including HD video conferencing and a central location to access and edit the latest team documents



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Learn more at www.dandb.com/supplierconnect



³ For information on receiving a free D&B D-U-N-S Number for Government Contractors and Grantees, see <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform>.