

Guide to Marketing to DoD

<https://business.defense.gov/Small-Business/Marketing-to-DoD/>

Are you a small business interested in working for 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 their first contract. Plan to invest significant time and resources becoming procurement ready, identifying potential opportunities, marketing to potential clients, developing proposals, implementing your first DoD contract and complying with DoD rules.

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. You can find your local PTAC [here](#).

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. You can find your local SCORE business office [here](#).

A list of public and private programs that support veteran entrepreneurs is [here](#).

Women Impacting Public Policy (WIPP), American Express OPEN and the Small Business Administration launched **ChallengeHER** in 2013 to boost government contracting opportunities for WOSBs. ChallengeHER provides free workshops, mentoring and direct access to government buyers.

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.

It's very important to understand the rules. For example, WOSB sole-source authority was established in 2015, but the WOSB sole-source authority works differently than the 8(a)'s sole-source authority. Many WOSBs believe they are entitled to sole-source contracts because the authority exists. It doesn't work that way. In the WOSB program, sole-source contracts are only authorized when only one WOSB can perform the requirement. And that has to be demonstrated through market research.

Step 3: Register in beta.SAM

The FAR requires all federal government contractors to be registered in the **System for Award Management** (SAM). Your local PTAC can help you complete your SAM registration for free. SAM's website includes FAQs, user guides, helpful hints and videos. If you have questions about SAM, you can contact the **Federal Service Desk** at 866-606-8220.

There is NO FEE to register or maintain your registration in SAM. If you receive an email from a company claiming to represent SAM, be cautious. If you get an e-mail from a company offering to help you register in SAM for a fee, be cautious. These messages are not from the federal government. 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 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes. Local PTACs also use SAM to notify small businesses about upcoming events.

Don't overlook the **Dynamic Small Business Search** (DSBS) profile of your SAM registration. This database is also used by government buyers seeking specific small businesses.

After you have registered in SAM, a **Commercial and Government Entity** (CAGE) code will be assigned to you if you don't already have one. This could take up to a week, and your SAM profile will not be active until your CAGE is assigned.

Step 4: Target Your Market

DoD employs more than 30,000 acquisition staff. In fiscal year 2017 DoD awarded more than \$60 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, key word, customer, place of performance and more. FPDS will help you understand who buys what you sell and how they buy it. You should review procurement forecasts. You can find links to DoD procurement forecasts [here](#).

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 2017 are [here](#). Subcontracting opportunities are also posted on **SUBNet**. You can also search for subcontract awards [here](#).

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 understand their organization's mission, culture, challenges and requirements. You can find links to DoD Small Business Offices [here](#). SBPs can also 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. These are technical experts and likely to appreciate the details about why your product or service is better than a competitor's.

The Small Business Administration's **Procurement Center Representatives** (PCRs) help small businesses obtain federal contracts. They review agencies' acquisition strategies to ensure that small businesses get their fair share of contracting opportunities. You can find your local PCR [here](#).

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 \$250,000 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 www.fbo.gov.

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. Have a plan for executing the contract to DoD's high standards.