



FEDERAL CONTRACTING STARTER KIT

The Step-by-Step Beginner Guide to Getting Contract Ready
FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

[SMALL BUSINESS READY] [CERTIFICATION READY] [CONTRACT READY]

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REALITY STATEMENT

Government contracting is a long-term growth strategy, not a quick win. Success requires preparation, persistence, and continuous improvement. This guide gives you the foundation — but execution is up to you.

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WHY MOST SMALL BUSINESSES FAIL IN FEDERAL CONTRACTING

Most small businesses think registering on SAM.gov is enough. It's not. Without the right strategy, you're invisible to contracting officers.

- × Wrong NAICS codes selected
- × Weak or missing capability statement
- × No past performance documented
- × No agency targeting strategy
- × Incomplete SAM.gov registration
- × No subcontracting plan
- × Trying to win primes too early





THE 7-STEP FEDERAL READINESS BLUEPRINT

01

BUSINESS FOUNDATION

Legal structure, EIN, business bank account, insurance, and core operations in place.

02

CERTIFICATION STRATEGY

Identify which certifications (8(a), WOSB, SDVOSB, HUBZone) match your eligibility.

03

NAICS CODE STRATEGY

Select primary, secondary, and growth codes that align with your services.

04

SAM.GOV REGISTRATION

Complete registration with accurate entity info, NAICS codes, and assertions.

05

CAPABILITY STATEMENT

One-page document showcasing competencies, differentiators, and past performance.

06

AGENCY TARGETING

Research which agencies buy what you sell using USASpending.gov and FPDS.

07

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Attend industry days, connect with OSDBU offices, and find teaming partners.

Each step builds on the previous one.
Skipping steps creates gaps that
contracting officers will find.



CHOOSING THE RIGHT NAICS CODES

Your NAICS codes determine which contracts you're eligible for and how contracting officers find you. Choosing the wrong codes makes you invisible to the right opportunities.

THE 3-TIER NAICS STRATEGY

PRIMARY CODES

Your core services — what you do best and have the most experience delivering. These should match your capability statement exactly.

SECONDARY CODES

Adjacent capabilities you can deliver today. These expand your visibility without stretching your credibility.

GROWTH CODES

Future capabilities you're building toward. Position yourself now for contracts you'll compete for in 12–24 months.

NAICS SELECTION CHECKLIST

- Researched codes used by competitors in your industry
- Verified codes match your actual service delivery
- Checked agency spending under each code (USASpending.gov)
- Selected 3–5 primary codes maximum
- Identified 2–3 secondary codes for adjacent services
- Aligned codes with your capability statement



SAM.GOV REGISTRATION CHECKLIST

BEFORE YOU REGISTER

Unique Entity ID (UEI) obtained
Employer Identification Number (EIN)
Business bank account established
NAICS codes selected
Business structure documented
Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) info ready
CAGE code (assigned during registration)

THE 7-STEP REGISTRATION PROCESS

1. Create a login.gov account
2. Obtain your Unique Entity ID (UEI)
3. Complete Core Data (entity info, address)
4. Add Assertions and Representations
5. Enter financial/EFT information
6. Add your NAICS codes
7. Submit for validation (7–10 business days)

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- × Incomplete entity information
- × Wrong or mismatched NAICS codes
- × Failing to renew annually (every 365 days)
- × Not updating after business changes
- × Skipping assertions and representations
- × Using personal instead of business bank
- × Not verifying active status after submission

IMPORTANT: Your SAM.gov registration must be renewed every 365 days or you lose active status and cannot receive contract awards.



CERTIFICATIONS THAT CREATE OPPORTUNITY

SBA 8(a)

For socially and economically disadvantaged businesses. 9-year program with sole-source contracts up to \$4M (goods) or \$7M (services). Apply at certify.sba.gov.

WOSB / EDWOSB

Women-Owned Small Business and Economically Disadvantaged WOSB. Access set-aside contracts in 83 NAICS industries. Apply at certify.sba.gov.

SDVOSB / VOSB

Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned and Veteran-Owned Small Business. Sole-source up to \$5M. Government goal: 3% of contracts to SDVOSBs. Apply at vetcert.va.gov.

HUBZone

Historically Underutilized Business Zone. Must maintain 35% of employees in a HUBZone. 10% price evaluation preference. Apply at certify.sba.gov.



YOUR CAPABILITY STATEMENT

A capability statement is your one-page business resume for government buyers. It tells contracting officers exactly what you do, what makes you different, and why they should work with you.

CORE COMPETENCIES

Your primary services stated clearly and specifically. No jargon, no fluff.

DIFFERENTIATORS

What sets you apart from competitors. Certifications, methods, results.

PAST PERFORMANCE

Relevant contracts or projects with measurable outcomes.

CERTIFICATIONS

All active federal and state certifications with ID numbers.

COMPANY DATA

DUNS/UEI, CAGE code, NAICS codes, business size, contract vehicles.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Primary contact, phone, email, website, physical address.



THE 5 BIGGEST CAPABILITY STATEMENT MISTAKES

01 TOO GENERIC

Statements that could apply to any business. Contracting officers need specifics — industries served, measurable results, unique methods.

02 TOO MUCH TEXT

One page means one page. Dense paragraphs get skipped. Use bullet points, white space, and clear hierarchy.

03 NO DIFFERENTIATORS

If you can't answer "why you over the competition," neither can the contracting officer. Lead with what makes you unique.

04 WRONG NAICS ALIGNMENT

Your capability statement NAICS codes must match your SAM.gov profile exactly. Inconsistency kills credibility.

05 DOESN'T MATCH SAM PROFILE

Everything — company name, address, codes, certifications — must be identical across all documents. Mismatches raise red flags.



HOW TO FIND THE RIGHT AGENCIES

Don't chase every opportunity. Focus on agencies that already buy what you sell. Research their spending patterns and build relationships before RFPs drop.

USASPENDING.GOV

See exactly how much agencies spend and on what services. Filter by NAICS, agency, and contract size.

SAM.GOV

Search active and upcoming contract opportunities. Set alerts for your NAICS codes and target agencies.

FPDS.GOV

Federal Procurement Data System. Research historical contract awards, winners, and pricing.

AGENCY OSDBU OFFICES

Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization. Your direct connection to small business advocates inside each agency.

AGENCY TARGETING CHECKLIST: Identified 3–5 target agencies | Researched spending history | Found OSDBU contacts | Attended industry day | Set contract alerts



PRIME VS. SUBCONTRACTING

Most new businesses should start as subcontractors. It builds past performance, teaches you the process, and creates relationships with established primes — without the risk of managing an entire contract.

PRIME CONTRACTOR

- ✓ Full contract responsibility
- ✓ Direct relationship with agency
- ✓ Higher revenue potential
- ✓ Builds strongest past performance
- × Requires existing past performance
- × Higher risk and compliance burden
- × Must manage subcontractors
- × Harder to win without track record

SUBCONTRACTOR

- ✓ Lower barrier to entry
- ✓ Learn the process with less risk
- ✓ Build past performance quickly
- ✓ Create prime relationships
- × Less control over scope
- × Lower revenue share
- × Dependent on prime's performance
- × Less visibility with agency

RESOURCES: [SBA SUB-Net](#) | [USASpending.gov](#) | [Mentor-Protégé Program](#) | [Agency Subcontracting Directories](#)



HOW TO BUILD PAST PERFORMANCE

Past performance is how the government evaluates your ability to deliver. You don't need federal contracts to start building it — private sector, nonprofit, and local government work all count.

WHAT COUNTS AS PAST PERFORMANCE

- ✓ Private sector contracts
- ✓ State and local government work
- ✓ Nonprofit organization projects
- ✓ Subcontracting under federal primes
- ✓ GSA Schedule task orders
- ✓ Blanket Purchase Agreements (BPAs)

4-STEP DOCUMENTATION PROCESS

1. Identify all relevant projects from the past 3–5 years
2. Document scope, value, duration, and client contact info
3. Quantify results (cost savings, efficiency gains, deliverables completed)
4. Align descriptions with your target NAICS codes and capability statement

CONSISTENCY IS YOUR CREDIBILITY — Every document should tell the same story about your capabilities.



YOUR 90-DAY FEDERAL READINESS PLAN

MONTH 1: FOUNDATION

Week 1–2:

- Verify business structure (LLC/Corp)
- Confirm EIN and bank account
- Research and select NAICS codes
- Identify primary vs. secondary codes

Week 3–4:

- Create login.gov account
- Obtain UEI number
- Complete SAM.gov registration
- Submit for validation
- Set renewal reminder (365 days)

MONTH 2: POSITIONING

Week 5–6:

- Draft capability statement
- Define core competencies
- Identify 3+ differentiators
- Document past performance

Week 7–8:

- Research certification eligibility
- Begin 8(a), WOSB, or SDVOSB app
- Gather supporting documents
- Align cap statement with SAM profile
- Get peer review of all materials

MONTH 3: OUTREACH

Week 9–10:

- Identify 3–5 target agencies
- Research spending on USASpending
- Find OSDBU office contacts
- Register for contract alerts

Week 11–12:

- Attend industry day or matchmaking
- Identify 2–3 potential primes
- Submit capability statement
- Explore subcontracting opportunities
- Join Mentor-Protégé if eligible



FEDERAL CONTRACT READINESS SCORECARD

Score yourself honestly. One point for each YES answer.

Business legally structured with EIN and bank account

SAM.gov registration active and current

NAICS codes researched and strategically selected

Capability statement complete and aligned with SAM

At least one certification application in progress

Past performance documented with measurable results

Target agencies identified and researched

OSDBU contacts identified for target agencies

Attended at least one industry day or networking event

Subcontracting opportunities identified or pursued

YOUR SCORE

8–10 points: CONTRACT READY

You have the foundation to compete.

5–7 points: BUILDING FOUNDATION

Good progress. Fill the gaps.

0–4 points: NOT YET READY

Start with Step 1 of the Blueprint.



TAKE YOUR FREE ASSESSMENT

Get a personalized readiness report that tells you exactly
where you stand and what to do next.

- ✓ Identify your current readiness stage
- ✓ Discover which certifications you qualify for
 - ✓ Get your personalized next steps
- ✓ Understand your competitive positioning

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[Explore Our Resources](https://minoritybzhub.com/resources)

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