



# DON'T CHASE, POSITION

INTRO GUIDE INTO GOVERNMENT  
CONTRACTING

TIFFANY LAIRDE

## Contracting Isn't a Starter Business

Government contracting is not the place to “figure it out.”

- You need a clear business identity first.
- Contracting multiplies what you already do — it doesn't create your business for you.
- If you chase every random contract, you'll end up scattered and untrustworthy to contracting officers.
- Pick a lane (janitorial, catering, IT, etc.), build credibility there, then use contracting to scale.

**Bottom line:** Don't use contracting to start your business. Use it to grow your business.

## Picking a Lane

The government buys everything — but you shouldn't sell everything.

- Specialize first. Choose one industry or service (janitorial, catering, IT, etc.).
- Clarity builds trust. Contracting officers want experts, not generalists.
- Focus = better bids. The more you stick to your lane, the stronger your proposals and references become.
- Expand later. Once you've built credibility in one area, then branch into related contracts.

**Bottom line:** A clear lane makes you look reliable. Scattering makes you look risky.

## Why Clarity Matters

The government buys everything — but you shouldn't sell everything.

- Specialize first. Choose one industry or service (janitorial, catering, IT, etc.).
- Clarity builds trust. Contracting officers want experts, not generalists.
- Focus = better bids. The more you stick to your lane, the stronger your proposals and references become.
- Expand later. Once you've built credibility in one area, then branch into related contracts.

**Bottom line:** A clear lane makes you look reliable. Scattering makes you look risky.

## The Right Time to Step Into Contracting

- You already have a clear niche (janitorial, catering, IT, etc.).
- Your business basics are in place (LLC, bank account, insurance, bookkeeping).
- You can fund upfront costs (cash, credit, or line of credit) while waiting on gov't payment.
- You have a professional presence (website, capability statement, references).
- You're ready to commit to one lane instead of chasing everything.

**Bottom line:** Step into contracting once your business is steady enough to deliver — not while you're still figuring it out.

## Organizations & Programs Entrepreneurs Should Be Affiliated With (Gov't Contracting & Small Biz Support)

- Core Small Business Support Networks
- SBDC (Small Business Development Center)
- Free business advising, help with SAM.gov, capability statements, and proposal reviews.
- SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives)
- Free mentorship from experienced business owners and retired executives.
- Women's Business Centers (WBCs)
- Specialized support for women-owned businesses, including certification guidance.
- Veterans Business Outreach Centers (VBOCs)
- Training and mentoring for veteran and service-disabled veteran entrepreneurs.
- Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA)
- Support, networking, and resources specifically for minority-owned businesses.

### Government & Procurement Programs

1. SBA (Small Business Administration)
  - Oversees certifications (8a, HUBZone, WOSB, SDVOSB).
  - Provides loan programs and procurement guidance.
2. PTAC/APEX Accelerators (Procurement Technical Assistance Centers → now APEX Accelerators)
  - Hands-on help with finding and bidding on contracts.
  - Often free training and direct connections to contracting officers.
3. GSA (General Services Administration)
  - Important for long-term federal contracts via the GSA Schedule.
4. State & Local Supplier Diversity Offices
  - Each state/city has its own agency for minority, women, veteran certifications.
5. Chamber of Commerce (Local + Minority Chambers)
  - General networking, local business resources, and advocacy.
  - Minority chambers (Black Chamber, Hispanic Chamber, Asian Chamber, LGBTQ Chambers) often host contract opportunity events.

## **Certifying & Advocacy Organizations**

### **1. NMSDC (National Minority Supplier Development Council)**

- Corporate supplier diversity certification for minority-owned businesses.

### **2. WBENC (Women's Business Enterprise National Council)**

- National certification body for women-owned businesses.

### **3. NVBDC (National Veteran Business Development Council)**

- Private sector certification for veteran-owned businesses.

### **4. Disability:IN**

- Disability-owned business certification and corporate partnerships.

### **5. ISO/Industry Associations**

- Depending on your industry (construction, IT, logistics, etc.), having relevant memberships/certifications can help credibility.

## **Networking & Industry Groups**

### **1. Industry-Specific Trade Associations**

- E.g., National Association of Government Contractors (NAGC), Associated General Contractors (AGC), etc.

### **2. BNI (Business Network International) or Local Networking Groups**

- Helps build connections, especially for subcontracting partnerships.

### **3. Federal OSDBUs (Office of Small & Disadvantaged Business Utilization)**

- Each federal agency has one; they help connect small businesses to opportunities within their agency.

### **4. Corporate Supplier Diversity Programs**

- Many Fortune 500s (PepsiCo, Walmart, Amazon, etc.) run supplier diversity initiatives that mirror government contracting.

### **5. Local Workforce Development Boards**

- Can connect you with labor, grants, and training for contracts.

## How Contracting Works

Agencies publish solicitations: RFP (Request for Proposal), RFQ (Request for Quote), IFB (Invitation for Bid). You carefully read the requirements; and yes sometimes this can be tedious because the requirements involve things like font size, attachments, page limits and if you don't adhere to this it will be considered non-compliant and is normally an automatic rejection.

Evaluators you should consider before bidding and submitting a proposal; **price, technical ability, past performance and compliance.**

*Be aware that Prime contractors often subcontract to meet small business requirements.* So subcontracting can help new businesses build past performance and credibility.

### Example:

#### Micro-Contract Example (Small Purchase / Low-Dollar)

- Scenario: A local federal office needs 100 office chairs with lumbar support.
- Contracting officer posts a micro-purchase or simplified acquisition.
- You source and submit a quick quote (often just price + delivery).
- If you're registered in SAM.gov and can fulfill the order, you win.
- Timeline: Days to weeks.
- Payout: Quick payment, usually Net 30, but sometimes Net 60, Net 90.

*This is how many small businesses get their first win — small, simple, and fast.*

#### Major-Contract Example (Large Award / Long-Term)

- Scenario: A federal agency is awarding a \$5M facilities maintenance contract (janitorial + landscaping across multiple buildings).
- They release a full RFP (Request for Proposal) on SAM.gov.
- You submit a detailed proposal (pricing, staffing, past performance, insurance, capability statement).
- Multiple rounds of evaluation (technical, past performance, pricing).
- Award may go to one prime contractor or be split into multiple awards.
- Timeline: Months (sometimes a year).
- Payout: Millions over multi-year contract, but requires upfront capacity, staff, and financing.

*This is where businesses scale — but only once they're structured and resourced to handle it.*

# **What Happens When You See an RFP (Request for Proposal)**

## **Read the Entire RFP Carefully**

- Don't skim. Contracting officers pack every requirement inside.
- Look for: scope of work, deadlines, required documents, evaluation criteria.

## **Check Eligibility & Requirements**

- Do you meet the NAICS code?
- Do you hold the right certifications (if required)?
- Can you actually fulfill the work (capacity, equipment, staff, funding)?

## **Decide: Prime or Subcontract?**

- If it's too big for you alone → team up as a subcontractor with a prime.
- If it's in your lane and within your capacity → go for it as the prime.

## **Outline a Proposal Strategy**

- Identify how you'll meet each requirement.
- Match your capabilities to their needs point-by-point.

## **Gather Documentation**

- Capability statement.
- Past performance examples.
- Pricing & cost breakdown.
- Compliance documents (insurance, bonding, certifications).

## **Write the Proposal (Mirror the RFP Language)**

- Use their exact wording where possible.
- Keep it clear, direct, and professional.
- Submit Before the Deadline
- Late = automatically disqualified.
- Follow exact submission instructions (portal upload, email, physical copies).

## **Prepare for Follow-Up**

Agencies may ask clarification questions.

Be responsive and professional.

## **Wait for Award Notification**

- If you win: confirm, review, and get ready to perform.
- If you lose: request a debrief — learn why and improve for next time.

## **CONCLUSION**

*When you see an RFP, don't panic. Break it down step by step, check if it fits your lane and capacity, and either bid directly or team with someone who can.*

# CERTIFICATIONS

Certification	Who's it For	Key Benefits
<b>8(a) Business Development Program</b>	Small businesses that are at least 51% owned and controlled by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals (e.g., certain racial/ethnic minorities, or those who can prove disadvantage).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to sole-source contracts (no competition, up to \$4M for goods/services, \$7M for manufacturing).</li> <li>• Entry into a 9-year program that includes mentorship, training, and business development assistance.</li> <li>• Opportunity to form mentor-protégé relationships with larger primes.</li> </ul>
<b>WOSB (Women-Owned Small Business) / EDWOSB (Economically Disadvantaged WOSB)</b>	At least 51% owned and controlled by women; EDWOSB requires meeting specific economic disadvantage criteria.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to set-aside contracts in industries where women are underrepresented.</li> <li>• Increased opportunities in federal contracting.</li> </ul>
<b>SDVOSB (Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business) / VOSB (Veteran-Owned Small Business)</b>	At least 51% owned and controlled by one or more veterans; for SDVOSB, at least one owner must have a service-connected disability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to set-aside contracts reserved for veterans.</li> <li>• VA and DoD strongly prioritize awarding to SDVOSBs.</li> <li>• Pathway to partner with large primes needing veteran partners.</li> </ul>
<b>Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB)</b>	At least 51% owned and controlled by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition across federal agencies.</li> <li>• Helps primes meet subcontracting goals (they're required to subcontract to SDBs).</li> </ul>
<b>HUBZone (Historically Underutilized Business Zone)</b>	Businesses located in designated HUBZone areas (must maintain a principal office in the zone and at least 35% of employees must live in a HUBZone).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eligibility for set-aside and sole-source contracts.</li> <li>• 10% price evaluation preference in full and open contract competitions.</li> <li>• Supports economic development in disadvantaged communities.</li> </ul>
<b>SBA Mentor-Protégé Program (MPP)</b>	Small businesses seeking to partner with larger, more experienced contractors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Larger companies can provide financial, technical, and management support.</li> <li>• Joint ventures with mentors are eligible for small business set-asides.</li> <li>• Fast-tracks credibility and past performance.</li> </ul>
<b>Native American/Alaska Native/Tribal/Native Hawaiian-Owned Certifications</b>	Companies owned by federally recognized tribes, Alaska Native Corporations (ANCs), or Native Hawaiian Organizations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special access to sole-source awards with higher thresholds.</li> <li>• Ability to leverage 8(a) status more flexibly.</li> </ul>



- Many certifications stack (e.g., a woman-owned firm in a HUBZone can qualify under multiple categories).
- Agencies often have annual set-aside goals (e.g., 5% for WOSB, 3% for HUBZone, 5% for SDVOSB, 5% for SDB, etc.). Certifications make you the “go-to” when contracting officers need to meet quotas.
- These are federal-level certifications. States and cities may have their own certifications like MBE (Minority Business Enterprise) or DBE (Disadvantaged Business Enterprise) that matter for local contracts.