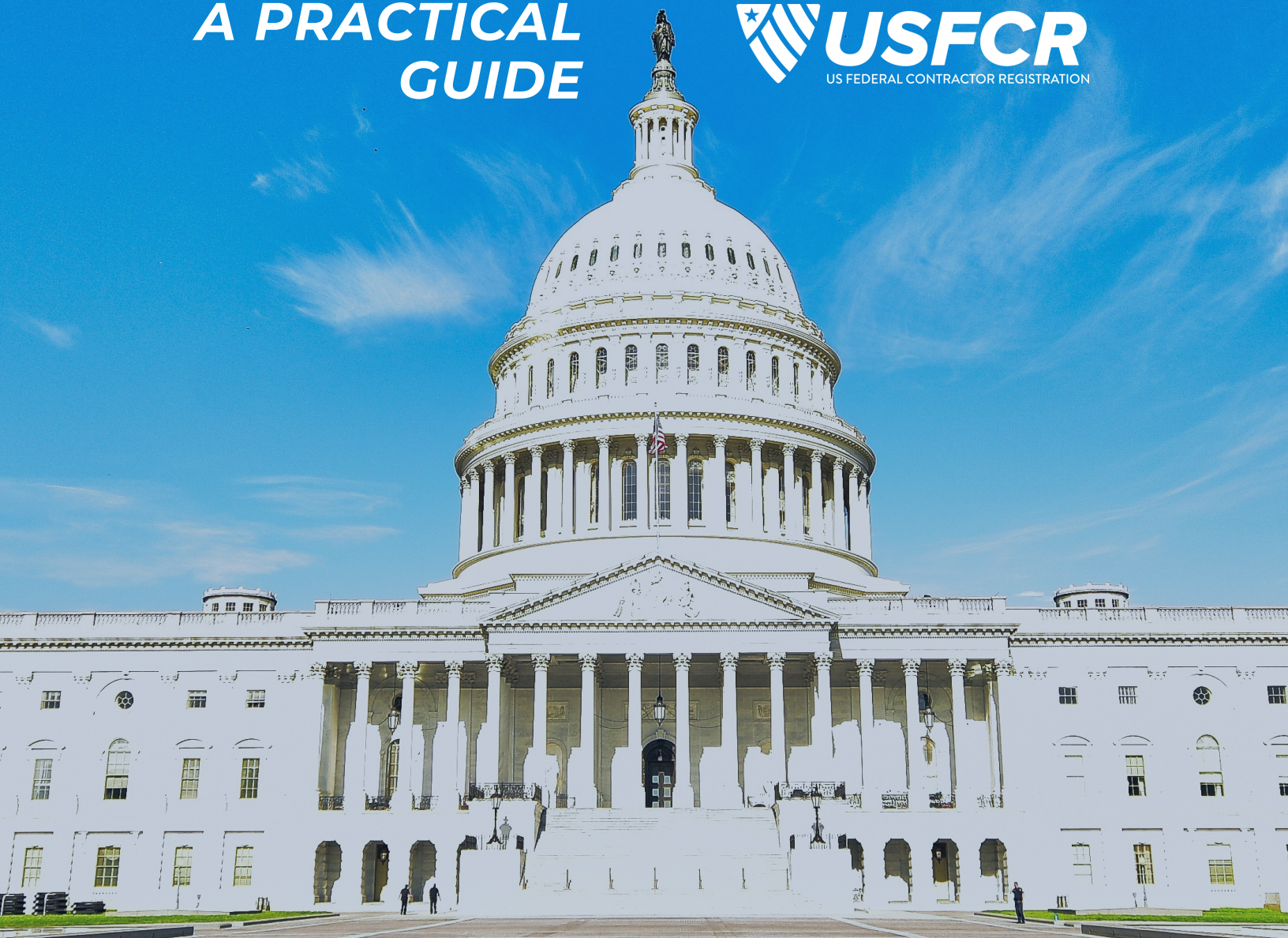


# GETTING STARTED IN GOVERNMENT CONTRACTING

*A PRACTICAL  
GUIDE*





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Register in SAM	4
Qualify for Set-Asides	5
Learn the Essentials	6
Optimization	7
Finding Opportunities	8
Writing & Submitting Your Bid	9
Debriefing	10
Your First Government Contract	11
Resources	12



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# INTRODUCTION

Working with the federal government is a proven method for building your business. For many, it's a consistent stream of revenue. Some business owners will even start entities just for working on government contracts. Either way, the biggest undertaking is winning that first contract. Once your first contract is awarded and fulfilled, past performance is established, which keeps the opportunities flowing.

What you will find in this guide are the steps for getting started and winning government contracts. It's more than just doing the paperwork and submitting bids. It's about setting up your business to thrive in the federal marketplace and establishing the foundations to build a solid stream of revenue.

This guide was developed by US Federal Contractor Registration (USFCR). We're the world's largest and most trusted third-party government registration firm. For over 10 years, we've been helping businesses both large and small get established as government contractors. We hope this guide serves you well and we're always available if you need more assistance.

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# REGISTER IN SAM

## THE SYSTEM FOR AWARD MANAGEMENT



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- Every government contractor is required to be registered in the System for Award Management (SAM).
- Since 2018, a SAM registration requires a notarized letter and a login.gov account.
- Consider a third-party to complete your SAM registration in order to guarantee compliance and timeliness.

Everyone who works with the government, from Boeing to the local landscaper is registered in SAM. Once your SAM registration is completed and processed, it will remain valid for a period of 12 months. To complete a registration you will also need a login.gov account and a notarized letter sent to the Federal Service Desk.

If you have the patience and time, you can do your own SAM registration. The risks of doing it yourself include errors and potential fines for incorrect information. Perhaps the largest risk is that you will not be told by the government that your registration is incorrect or incomplete, you just won't win any contracts.

Third-party registration firms, such as USFCR, provide guaranteed compliant SAM registrations along with additional services to give you the best chance at winning your first contract.



# QUALIFY FOR SET-ASIDES

## FOR MORE FEDERAL OPPORTUNITIES

- The federal government reserves 23% of its annual contract spending for small businesses.
- There are several opportunities reserved for specific types of small businesses, including women - owned, veteran - owned, economically and socially disadvantaged owners, and areas of the country known as HUBZones.
- Beyond a SAM registration, qualifying for set-asides can significantly enhance your chances of getting government contracts.



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If you're a small business, then you need to understand set-asides. By law, the federal government allocates (or sets aside) 23% of its annual contracting budget to small businesses. Some contracts are exclusively for small businesses while others are for specific types of small businesses. You just need to be officially certified for these opportunities. Each type of small business designation has a unique set of qualifications.

To know if your business qualifies for set-asides, you must go by the SBA size standards, which can be found on their site. Simply identify your primary NAICS code (industry) and compare it to the size standard to determine if you qualify. Each set-aside has its own qualifications and certification process. At USFCR, we help our SAM registration clients determine if they qualify for set-asides and help them get certified.



# LEARN THE ESSENTIALS

## THE INS & OUTS

- Government contracting is the most heavily regulated sector in the economy.
- Before you begin searching and submitting bids, it is best to learn the most essential elements and language of government contracting.
- The Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) provides the rules and regulations for contractors.



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Although it may sound cliché, knowledge is power. This is especially true in government contracting, which is the most heavily regulated sector of the economy. The federal government is not just another customer who always has money to spend, but one that conducts business in a unique and complex manner. To start working with the government effectively, you need to have read the FAR and understand key terminology.

You can read the 2,000+ page FAR document and master the rules yourself. However, that is unrealistic for most business owners, as most are not familiar with the government and legal jargon. You'll also want to stay competitive in the federal contracting marketplace by learning as much as possible. For this, there are learning resources and training available via third party firms and the SBA. An alternative to managing your government contracting business yourself is to use a full-service government contracting services firm. USFCR acts as the government contracting consultants department for our clients.



# OPTIMIZATION

## TO PLAN FOR WHAT'S NEXT

- Narrow your focus. What is the main product or service that you want to sell to the government? Which agency are you looking to sell to?
- Assign a single point of contact for your business, create a workflow, and keep records of everything to keep them accountable.
- Develop a long-term plan for your business. Where do you want government contracting to take you in 5, 10, or even 20 years?



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You're registered in SAM, have your set-aside certifications, and you're fairly knowledgeable about government contracting. Immediately, you're going to want to take the plunge and start finding opportunities. However, before you do so, you're going to want to ensure your business is a fine-tuned opportunity hunting and bidding machine.

First, you're going to narrow your focus. Too often, contractors try to stretch themselves thin. When you're working with the government, a "jack of all trades" is the last thing you want to be. It's best to be known as a supplier of one service or product. Then, you will need to calculate the capacity of your operations. For the sake of your past performance record, you don't want to bite off more of a contract than you can handle.

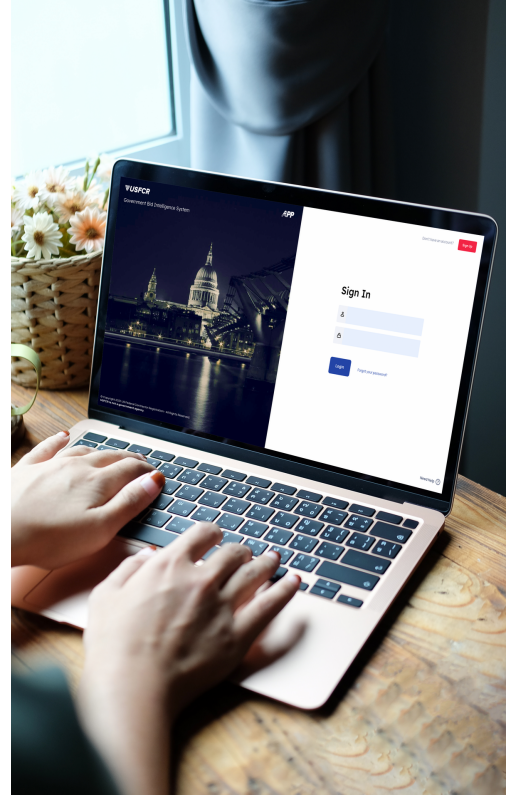
You need to implement a process for pursuing contracts. How often will you search? Who will be writing the proposals? Be sure to establish just one point of contact when working with the government. Finally, you're going to want to take a look ahead. What are your goals for government contracting? Where do you want it to take your business?



# FINDING OPPORTUNITIES

## THE RESOURCES AVAILABLE

- Locate contract opportunities via online research tools, such as SAM.gov or APP.usfcr.com.
- Take active measures to market yourself for simplified acquisition opportunities.
- Determine your competitors and research them thoroughly.



Just because you're registered in SAM doesn't mean the government will give you contracts. As a newcomer, you have to take the initiative to find contract opportunities. One of the most common places to find opportunities is through SAM.gov, by going to the Contract Opportunities section of the website.

An alternative is the Advanced Procurement Portal (APP), which has search capabilities and other advanced features not available at SAM.gov. APP is a web-based contracting search and management platform that simplifies researching and bidding on government contracting opportunities.

For smaller opportunities, you need to actively market yourself to federal agencies. Before you contact anyone at an agency, have a capabilities statement and a DSBS profile set up. During this phase, you should also research your competitors. Learning what others have bid on and how much they were awarded is valuable information to new contractors.



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# WRITING & SUBMITTING YOUR BID

## TO SECURE A CONTRACT



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- When you find the solicitation, read the instructions to offerors carefully.
- If you have any questions about the opportunity, submit them to the designated Contracting Officer.
- Some third-party contracting registration firms offer bid training and proposal writing services for your business.

You've found a great opportunity for your business and now you're ready to bid. Before you start writing that proposal, read the solicitation thoroughly. The last thing you want is to miss out on a contract because you simply didn't follow directions. If you have questions about the opportunity, you can ask the contracting officer. Part of their job is to answer questions that offerors have about an opportunity. Plus, it helps build familiarity with your business and what you offer.

If you're not confident with the proposal writing process, you can get help from a third-party government contracting firm. USFCR provides services and training to help you win your first contract.



# DEBRIEFING

## TO REFINE YOUR APPROACH

- A debriefing tells you why you did, or did not, win a government contract.
- Contracting officers are obligated to give you a debriefing upon request.
- Refine your contracting processes. Find your weaknesses and work on them.
- Develop a system to measure your progress.

You'll likely get your first debriefing before you get your first award notice. Requesting a debriefing is one of the most important things you can do as a government contractor. If you won the contract, or if you didn't, you need to understand why so you can enhance your performance.

In the long run, there's nothing more valuable than having a refined process for pursuing contracts. The only way you can work on your weaknesses is by having them laid out in front of you. Contracting officers are obligated to give you a debriefing when you ask for one. Use this requirement to refine how you approach contracting opportunities.

With the information, you get from a debriefing, develop a way to measure your progress. Keep detailed records of the opportunities you've approached. Track the relationships you've been building with federal agencies and procurement officers. Winning a contract is the ultimate goal, but pay attention to the steps you took to get there.



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# YOUR FIRST GOVERNMENT CONTRACT

## FOR MORE FEDERAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Make sure that you know your businesses' capacity to perform the contract before signing the award notice.
- Review your operations for financing if needed.
- Maintain regular communication with the agency and procurement officer you're working with.



Congratulations! You're now officially a government contractor. Before you sign the award notice, make sure that you are capable of executing this contract. You can decline an award without penalty. If you take the contract and fail to deliver, it will hurt you in the long run.



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Be sure to go over your sources for financing if you need it. The Small Business Administration (SBA) can help you get connected with a lending partner for loans. You will also want to maintain regular communication with the federal agency and procurement officers. This isn't just for clarity, it's because you're going to continue to build those working relationships.

In government contracting, success breeds more success. Winning your first contract takes a lot of work, but with constant refinement, it will get easier and more profitable.



# RESOURCES

## FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

### **SAM.gov - System for Award Management**

The home for all things government contracting.

### **FPDS.gov - Federal Procurement Data System**

The Federal Procurement Data System (FPDS) is a single source for US government-wide procurement data.

### **USASpending.gov - USA Spending**

USA Spending tracks federal spending to ensure taxpayers can see how their money is being used in communities across America.

### **USFCR.com - US Federal Contractor Registration**

The largest third-party SAM registration and contracting services and training provider.

### **APP.usfcr.com - Advanced Procurement Portal (APP)**

A government contracting Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) portal for finding new opportunities, researching vendors, and exploring previously awarded contracts.



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