



USDA Small Business Toolbox

Becoming a Government Contractor

As part of the USDA Small Business Toolbox, this document details the steps and available links to make it easier for small businesses, and especially small-disadvantaged businesses, to get access to federal contracting dollars.

I. Determine Socio-economic Status

Check to see if your business qualifies for set-asides due to a socio-economic status. The federal government prefers to contract with small businesses whenever possible. Contracting officials can use [set-aside](#) and sole-source contracts to help their agencies meet their small business contracting goals. Both SBA's regulations and the Federal Acquisition Regulation require the consideration of SBA socio-economic programs first for set-aside and sole-source contracts worth \$150,000 or more. Of the \$500 Billion in Federal funding each year, the notation shows the approximate awards to set-aside programs. There is no order of preference among these programs:

- [8\(a\) Business Development program](#) ~ 5% per year
- [HUBZone program](#) (Check the [Map](#)) ~ 3% per year
- [Women-Owned Small Business program](#) (WOSB) ~ 5% per year
- [Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business program](#) (SDVOSB) ~ 3% per year

There is clearly room for growth in the support of small business contracting.

II. Get Help from Professionals

Begin the process of becoming a Certified Government Contractor by getting assistance from organizations that specialize in the process and in supporting small businesses as they work their way through the steps to becoming a certified government contractor. Here are a few **Partnering Agencies**:

- SBA's [Small Business Development Center \(SBDC\)](#)
Provides management assistance to current and prospective small business owners. SBDCs offer one-stop assistance to individuals and small businesses by providing a wide variety of information and guidance in central and easily accessible branch locations. The program has 62 Lead Centers with 900 service locations which bring the private sector, the educational community, and federal, state, and local governments together to enhance economic development by providing small businesses with management and technical assistance. Use your zip code to [find local SBDC assistance](#).

Mentorship and training for getting started and for finding access to capital in your local area.

- [SCORE Association](#)

SCORE has the largest network of free volunteer small business mentors in the nation. No matter what stage your business is at SCORE has a mentor for you. Easily request a mentor to help you start, grow, or transition your business. Get reliable answers to your small business questions through a SCORE mentor and/or you can ask mentors questions through a live chat at any time. Use your zip code to [Find Your Business Mentor](#).

Mentorship and training for getting started and for finding access to capital in your local area.

- [APEX Accelerator](#)

The APEX Accelerators, formally known as the Procurement Technical Assistance Program (PTAP), expand the number of businesses capable of participating in government contracts. The APEX Accelerators program focuses on building a strong, sustainable, and resilient U.S. supply chains by assisting a wide range of businesses that pursue and perform under contracts with the Department of Defense, other federal agencies, state, and local governments and with government prime contractors. APEX Accelerators provide local, in-person counseling and training services for the small business owner. They are designed to provide technical assistance to businesses that want to sell products and services to federal, state, and/or local governments. [Find an APEX Accelerator](#) near you.

APEX Accelerators are specifically for those who already know they want government contracting.

- [Minority Business Development Agency \(MBDA\)](#)

The U.S. Department of Commerce, Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) is the only federal agency solely dedicated to the growth and global competitiveness of minority business enterprises. MBDA programs, services, and initiatives focus on helping MBEs (minority business enterprises) grow today, while preparing them to meet the industry needs of tomorrow. MBDA invests in a national network of MBDA Business Centers, Specialty Centers, and Grantees. The programs offer customized business development and industry-focused services to provide greater access to capital, contracts, and markets. [Find a MBDA Business Center](#) near you.

MBDA, similar to SBDC and SCORE, it is specifically for minority businesses. Mentorship and training for getting started and for finding access to capital in your local area.

- U.S. [Small Business Administration \(SBA\)](#)

Created in 1953, SBA continues to help small business owners and entrepreneurs pursue the American dream. SBA is the only cabinet-level federal agency fully dedicated to small business and provides counseling, capital, and contracting expertise as the nation's only go-to resource and voice for small businesses. SBA offers free business counseling; online courses to start, manage, and grow your business; guidance and counseling on federal government contracting; and SBA-Guaranteed business loans. Use your zip code to [Find Local SBA Assistance](#).

- [United States Department of Agriculture \(USDA\)](#)

USDA Rural Business-Cooperative Service offers program funding opportunities for grants, direct loans, and loan guarantees. Programs designed to support small businesses, with targeted funding for disadvantaged businesses, and familiar with lenders and packaging loans.

III. Review the SBA Website

SBA wrote the book on [Becoming a Federal Contractor](#) so check out their information. In short, for your small business to serve as a prime contractor or subcontractor, you'll need to [legally qualify as a small business](#) and [register as a government contractor](#). Then you can start looking for both prime and subcontracting opportunities with the federal government.

IV. Put your Research in Action

1. Become a Certified Small Business
 - a. Assess the size of your business with the [SBA Table of Size Standards](#) for eligibility.
 - b. Review **Advancing Equity** pages above for additional assistance.

- c. [Get an SBA mentor](#), or any mentor from the above mentioned groups, to help with the process.
2. Register Your Business
 - a. NAICS - Match your products and services to a North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code. NAICS codes classify businesses based on the particular product or service they supply. Find your NAICS code at the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).
 - b. SAM - System for Award Management (SAM) Registration. Business entities must be registered with [SAM.gov](#).
 - c. Unique Entity Identifier. Before you can bid on government proposals, you need to get a [Unique Entity Identifier \(UEI\)](#). A UEI is a unique 12-character, alpha-numeric value. You will receive a UEI when you register with SAM at [SAM.gov](#). Entities doing business with the federal government must use the UEI created by the system. Refer to the [Guide to Getting a UEI](#) if you want to get a UEI for your organization without having to complete a full entity registration.
3. Become an SBA Certified Contractor
 - a. Government agencies reserve contracts for small businesses that are certified in SBA's contracting programs.
 - b. Simply answer a few questions at [Certify.SBA.gov](#) to discover if your company should pursue participation in SBA's contracting programs with the Woman Owned Small Business (WOSB) Program, HUBZone Program, or 8(a) Business Development Program.
4. Compete for Contracts
 - a. Get information on [Contracting with USDA](#).
 - b. Learn how to find and win contracts with [SBA Federal Contracting](#) resources.
 - c. Procurement Opportunities
 - i. [SAM.gov](#) to search Contract Opportunities. Create an optional SAM user account to save searches, follow changes to opportunities, and join interested vendor lists.
 - ii. Contracts over \$25,000 - [FedBizOpps \(FBO\)](#)
 - iii. Subcontracting opportunities – [SBA.gov](#)
5. Maintain Compliance
 - a. Comply with all laws and regulations. The federal government's purchasing process is governed by the [Federal Acquisition Regulation](#). Regulations covering government contracting programs for small businesses are listed in [13 CFR 125](#).
 - b. The Bureau of the Fiscal Service of the U.S. Department of the Treasury manages the [Do Not Pay](#) (DNP) system. USDA Agencies use this secure online interface to check various data sources to verify eligibility of a vendor, grantee, loan recipient, or beneficiary to receive federal payments.

V. Compete for Government Contracts

Review the various links to identify contracts for which your business qualifies:

- GSA's [Forecast of Contracting Opportunities](#) – USDA will join this list soon.
- Government wide Opportunities at the [SAM.gov ~ Data Bank](#)
- USDA Opportunities ~ [USDA ~ Forecast of Business Opportunities](#)

Visit the [USDA Small Business](#) website (www.usda.gov/smallbiz) for more resources.

Contact us at: SmallBizEvent@usda.gov.

