

GET INVOLVED IN GOVERNMENT CONTRACTING MENTOR-PROTÉGÉ PROGRAMS

This guide explains how to find and select a good mentor and become a protégé to another business when pursuing government contracting opportunities. It also outlines the qualifications for several federal agency mentor-protégé programs. Learn what you need to become a mentor or protégé and how to apply to the mentoring programs sponsored by various organizations. Sections of this guide include:

- Why Consider Mentor-Protégé Programs?
- Requirements for Becoming a Protégé
- Dos and Don'ts of Finding a Mentor
- Attributes of a Great Protégé
- A Mentoring Success Story
- Mentoring Resources
- Worksheet: Steps to Finding a Mentor and Becoming a Protégé
- Glossary of Key Terms

— WHY CONSIDER MENTOR-PROTÉGÉ PROGRAMS?

Succeeding in government contracting may seem like a daunting task. Excessive paperwork and red tape make working with the government confusing for any firm that's new to it. Mentor-protégé programs are great vehicles for learning the ropes of government contracting.

Numerous mentor programs are available to foster sustainable business development, particularly for disadvantaged or women- or minority-owned businesses. As a protégé, you can gain invaluable guidance and support to make your company stronger.

A mentor can provide financial



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Member Since: 2005*

assistance through loans, investment in the protégé firm or, in some cases, rent-free use of facilities or equipment. In a few instances, mentors are eligible for generous tax credits. For example, the Louisiana Economic Development office provides tax credits of up to \$50,000 per year to participating mentors who provide technical assistance to eligible protégé firms in the state.

For many, the mentoring experience helps prepare protégés to become viable government suppliers. After all, being registered as a contractor isn't enough to win government business. Networking with the right people is integral to securing government contracts, and

a mentor can help you navigate government agencies and influence decisions in this highly bureaucratic process.

Learn from a mentor. A mentor acts as a trusted counselor, providing technical, managerial, financial or other guidance. This could involve teaching you about business planning and management, suggesting ways to improve manufacturing operations, providing counsel in staff management issues or making introductions to the right business contacts.

In turn, a mentor helps shape a business that could serve as a subcontractor in the future. In most instances, no direct compensation is given to the mentor, although the Department of Defense and some other federal agencies offering mentor-protégé programs do provide participating mentors with reimbursement of program expenses or credits toward subcontracting goals.

In some instances, being a mentor may increase the odds of winning a government contract. For example, the Environmental Protection Agency may award points in the technical evaluation criteria of participating mentors' proposals. Likewise, mentors in the Small Business Administration (SBA)'s mentor-protégé program have access to some contracts that they otherwise might not be eligible for.

In addition to the formal mentor-protégé programs sponsored by the SBA and other government agencies, many state and federal agencies also partner with universities in cooperative mentor-protégé programs that can further augment protégés' skills through access to a host of university resources. In most instances, a potential protégé is responsible for finding and selecting its own mentor, but the agencies' mentor-protégé program coordinators may be able to advise you in making the proper choice.

Finding the right fit. Mentors generally look for protégés with the following attributes:

REQUIREMENTS FOR BECOMING A PROTÉGÉ

Here is a sampling of government mentor protégé programs and their respective guidelines. These guidelines are representative of most mentor-protégé programs. All of the programs are designed to help small businesses expand their knowledge and participation in the contracting arena.

Small Business Administration

<http://www.sba.gov/aboutsba/sbaprograms/8abd/mentorprogram/index.html>

Who can participate:

- Small disadvantaged businesses that are part of the 8(a) program (an SBA program designed to help small disadvantaged businesses compete in the American economy and access the federal procurement market)

Additional protégé qualifications:

- Must not have received an 8(a) contract previously
- Must meet certain size restrictions (see the SBA's website for details)
- Must be an 8(a) member in good standing

Mentor qualifications:

- Must possess favorable financial health, including profitability for two years
- Must possess good character
- Must not appear on the federal list of debarred or suspended contractors
- Must be able to impart value to the protégé through practical experience gained through the 8(a) program

- Alignment with the mentor company's business
- Existing good relationship with them or high recommendations from other firms
- Strong commitment to and enthusiasm for being mentored
- Financial and managerial stability
- Record of good performance, particularly in government contracts
- Geographic proximity to the mentor (this is helpful but not required)

Success factors. Participating in a mentor-protégé program is a major commitment of time and resources for the mentor and protégé alike. Here are tips to help ensure a positive working relationship:

Define expectations. Both parties should clearly articulate and document specific goals and resource commitments.

Evaluate resources. Look at what type of assistance the protégé will receive from the mentor. For example, if the mentor company plans to help with financial management, learn who at the firm will provide these resources, how exactly they will do it and when they will do it.

Consult an attorney. Have your attorney review the mentor-protégé agreement to ensure it doesn't contain any conflicts of interest or adverse conditions.

Track milestones. Most government-sponsored mentor-protégé programs require an annual review to verify that the agreement is meeting both parties' expectations. Keep track of resources provided and the resulting outcomes.

Communicate regularly. Establish an open and honest dialogue with your mentor. Share any concerns early on to avoid misunderstandings. Likewise, be open and accepting of constructive criticism from the more seasoned mentor.

REQUIREMENTS FOR BECOMING A PROTÉGÉ (continued)

Department of Defense (DoD)

http://www.acq.osd.mil/osbp/mentor_protege/index.htm

Who can participate:

- Companies that qualify as employing the severely disabled
- Women-owned small businesses
- Service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses
- Businesses in historically underutilized business zones
- Businesses that are owned and controlled by an Indian tribe or a Native Hawaiian organization

Additional protégé qualifications:

- Contact the DoD for any additional requirements.

Mentor qualifications:

- Must be currently performing under at least one active approved subcontracting plan negotiated with the DoD or other federal agency (see the DoD's website for guidelines)

Department of the Treasury

<http://www.treas.gov/offices/management/dcfo/osdbu/mentor-protege/>

Who can participate:

- Any certified small business

Additional protégé qualifications:

- In most cases, a small business will need to have worked with the prospective mentor in the past; contact the U.S. Treasury Office for additional guidelines.

— GETTING STARTED

Visit the web sites of the organizations listed in this guide or search the Internet to find mentor-protégé programs for which your business may qualify and to learn about their existing mentor relationships. Some agencies, such as NASA, list their approved mentors online. If you don't have a mentor in mind, you may want to contact the program coordinator of the selected mentor-protégé program to network with potential firms and gain advice on completing necessary program applications.

It's also a good idea to talk with other protégés and mentors to learn about their experiences. Their advice may help you achieve a fruitful relationship.

— A MENTORING SUCCESS STORY

Theresa Alfaro Daytner was managing a successful general contracting and construction management firm selling to private, institutional and commercial clients when a peer piqued her interest in government contracting.

An astute businesswoman, Daytner was always open to new business ideas. Opportunity that day took the form of an introduction at a Small Business Administration meeting to Olga Martinez, a fellow construction business owner who would become Daytner's mentor. The meeting opened Daytner's eyes to a huge untapped market opportunity in government contracting.

"Olga introduced me all around Washington, DC, and the very next day I was having meetings that helped me to land contracts," Daytner recalls. "It would have been so easy to be lost, but Olga was extremely generous, bringing me into her circle and educating me about working with the federal government."

Learning the ropes. Daytner quickly learned the ropes of federal contracting, with Martinez coaching her on how to network, identify



*Theresa Alfaro Daytner
Daytner Construction Group, Mt. Airy, MD
Member Since: 2004*

REQUIREMENTS FOR BECOMING A PROTÉGÉ (continued)

Mentor qualifications:

- Any firm, large or small, in good standing (i.e., not on the federal list of debarred or suspended contractors) that demonstrates a commitment and capability to assist in the development of a small business

Environmental Protection Agency

<http://www.epa.gov/osbp/pdfs/protege.pdf>

Who can participate:

- Small disadvantaged businesses
- Women-owned businesses

Additional protégé qualifications:

- Contact the EPA for any additional guidelines.

Mentor qualifications:

- Large prime contractors that are performing at least one active EPA contract and are eligible for the award of federal contracts



Marta E. Maxwell
Airparts Company Inc., Fort Lauderdale, FL
Member Since: 1973

good prospects within government agencies and price jobs accurately. Introductions to the right people made all the difference. Martinez introduced Daytner to decision makers and influencers so they could gain familiarity with her work. Martinez also assisted Daytner in understanding the government's complex billing practices.

Over the years, Daytner has benefited from numerous informal mentors and has gained insight from a variety of sources. The Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) has been particularly helpful. By reaching out to the OSDBU within each target agency, she learned how these organizations and their procurement systems worked.

"[OSDBUs] are gatekeepers," she explains. "People within the agencies come to them when they're looking to source various products and services, so they're great resources to learn from and stay in front of."

Sharing goals. Martinez's advice on how to continually expand in government contracting lent momentum to Daytner's government contracting efforts. "Olga encouraged me to let everyone know my goals — especially my best clients," Daytner says.

REQUIREMENTS FOR BECOMING A PROTÉGÉ (continued)

- Companies whose corporate policy is to promote, develop and implement subcontracting opportunities for the socioeconomic sector

Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

http://www.dhs.gov/xopnbiz/smallbusiness/editorial_0716.shtm

Who can participate:

- Small businesses

Additional protégé qualifications:

- Must be independently owned and operated
- Must be eligible for receipt of government contracts
- Must not be dominant in its field
- Must meet federal size standards (See the DHS website for size restrictions)

Mentor qualifications:

- Large business that demonstrates the commitment and capability to assist in the development of a small business protégé
- Must be eligible to receive federal contracts
- Must have core competencies that support the DHS mission

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

<http://mentorprotege.gmu.edu>

Who can participate:

- Small disadvantaged businesses
- Qualified organizations employing the severely disabled
- Service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses
- Small businesses located in historically underutilized business zones

For example, while performing project management for a university, Daytner told a client of her desire to enter government contracting. He introduced her to a friend at the Navy who headed up procurement. Within months, she had won her first federal contract through that contact and quickly capitalized on the positive relationship to earn new business.

Daytner says she has learned that successful mentoring relationships rely on a good fit between mentor and protégé. “You need to trust your mentor, and they need to be comfortable with your company,” she says. “There needs to be transparency in the relationship so that each respects what the other brings to it.” ▣

REQUIREMENTS FOR BECOMING A PROTÉGÉ (continued)

Additional protégé qualifications:

- Contact George Mason University for any additional requirements.

Mentor qualifications:

- Must have at least one active subcontracting plan
- Must be eligible to participate in federal contracts

NASA

<http://osbp.nasa.gov/mentor.html>

Who can participate:

- Small disadvantaged businesses
- Women-owned small businesses
- Historically black colleges or universities
- Minority institutions

Additional protégé qualifications:

- Financial and management stability
- Must not have participated in the NASA mentor-protégé program more than twice in the past
- Must not currently receive development assistance under an active NASA mentor-protégé agreement

Mentor qualifications:

- Must have an active and approved subcontracting plan negotiated with NASA
- Must be eligible for the award of federal contracts
- Must have capabilities that interface with the protégé organization

DO'S AND DON'TS OF FINDING A MENTOR

Protégés should be careful in selecting a mentor. A good one can provide entry to the right business circles, strengthen your business skills and help improve your competitive standing. The wrong one can consume valuable time and resources and impede goals.

Keep the following tips in mind when choosing a mentor:

Do: Identify gaps in your own organization. Query other entrepreneurs and agency contacts to locate potential mentors that have hands-on expertise in the areas in which your company lacks expertise.

Do: Identify a mentor whose business aligns with your strategic goals. A mentor doesn't need to be in the same industry, but a common link should exist.

Do: Share an honest assessment of your business today. Be clear about where your business is today and articulate your goals so your mentor knows your vision of success.

Do: Consider the mentor's time and motivations. Find an individual with a genuine interest in helping others and who is willing to invest the time to help develop your business. Ask how they will help you grow your business — and what they want in return.

Don't: Jump in too quickly. Get to know the potential mentor and their business and make sure the two organizations have synergies. Become familiar with the potential mentor's personality as well as their business and learning style. If they have mentored others before, talk with their previous protégés about the pros and cons of the arrangement.

Don't: Underestimate the time commitment. Learning from a more experienced counterpart can be invaluable, but be sure to understand the time required for the relationship.

Don't: Overstep the bounds of the agreement. It's understandable that a protégé would look to its mentor organization whenever it needs assistance. However, it's best to keep within the outlined mentor-protégé agreement so as not to overextend the mentor.

Don't: Go it alone. Although most agencies ask protégés to find their own mentors, they often offer networking opportunities to gain entry to these businesses. For example, the U.S. Treasury hosts outreach sessions twice a year to give potential protégés an opportunity to meet prime contractors who could become future mentors.

ATTRIBUTES OF A GREAT PROTÉGÉ

Just as protégés should carefully select a mentor, mentors should be prudent in their choice of whom they want to take under their wing. After all, they are sharing invaluable business advice and will want a protégé who will capitalize on these insights to grow its business.

Here are the basic attributes to look for in a potential protégé:

Intelligence. Look for a protégé with the aptitude and eagerness to swiftly obtain and use new knowledge.

Confidence. There's a big difference between mentoring and hand-holding. Choose a protégé with the self-assurance to take your advice and run with it.

Fervent work ethic. Embarking on government contracting will require fortitude. Be sure your protégé has the drive and stamina to persevere amid obstacles.

Open-mindedness. Mentoring can help a business owner realize unforeseen opportunities. Be sure your protégé is open to exploring new avenues.

Thick skin. An important role of a mentor is to provide constructive criticism. Having an open and honest dialogue is key to the success of any mentor-protégé relationship.

Realistic expectations. Protégés shouldn't be looking for a free ride. They should be looking for knowledge, contacts and objective input to help them succeed.

Inquisitive mind. Choose a protégé with a thirst for knowledge. This is the kind of person who will truly benefit from your guidance.

BUSINESS RESOURCES

Mentoring Resources

The following list is a sampling of companies and government agencies that offer mentor-protégé programs:

AT&T Government Solutions Mentor-Protégé Program

http://www.corp.att.com/gov/partner/small_businesses/mentor.html

AT&T Government Solutions participates in the Department of Defense Mentor-Protégé Program, which encourages prime contractors to develop the technical and management capabilities of small disadvantaged businesses in order to enhance their contribution to the nation's economy.

Business Matchmaking

www.businessmatchmaking.com

Business Matchmaking helps connect businesses to major corporations and procurement opportunities on the federal, state and local government levels.

Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC)'s Mentor-Protégé Program

http://www.csc.com/government/ds/11271/12840-mentor_prot%C3%A9g%C3%A9_program

CSC has participated in mentor-protégé programs since 1995, nurturing disadvantaged businesses and increasing supplier diversity initiatives.

City of Columbia, SC, Mentor-Protégé Program

<http://www.columbia.sc.gov/coc/index.cfm/development-gateway/office-of-business-opportunities/business-programs/mentor-protége/>

Columbia's Mentor-Protégé Program links small, minority and women-owned businesses with those that bring in more than \$1 million in revenue. The program is designed to encourage larger businesses and prime contractors to provide mutually beneficial developmental assistance to small minority businesses.

Department of Defense

http://www.acq.osd.mil/osbp/mentor_protége/index.htm

The Department of Defense Mentor-Protégé Program has assisted small disadvantaged businesses since 1991. The program helps protégés successfully compete for prime contract and subcontract awards by partnering with large companies under individual, project-based agreements.

Department of Homeland Security

http://www.dhs.gov/xopnbiz/smallbusiness/editorial_0716.shtm

The Department of Homeland Security's Mentor-Protégé program is designed to motivate large business prime contractor firms to provide mutually beneficial developmental assistance to the following types of small business concerns: veteran-owned, service-disabled veteran-owned, HUBZone, disadvantaged and women-owned.

BUSINESS RESOURCES (continued)

Environmental Protection Agency

<http://www.epa.gov/osbp/pdfs/protege.pdf>

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) established its Mentor-Protégé Program in 1994 to stimulate the number of small disadvantaged and women-owned businesses involved in EPA contracts.

George Mason University

<http://mentorprotege.gmu.edu/>

This program funds major contractors for the purpose of enhancing the capabilities of small disadvantaged businesses, service-disabled veteran-owned businesses, firms in historically underutilized business zones and women-owned/controlled small businesses.

NASA

<http://osbp.nasa.gov/mentor.html>

NASA's Mentor-Protégé Program is designed to encourage NASA prime contractors to help eligible protégés perform NASA contracts and subcontracts.

Small Business Administration

<http://www.sba.gov/aboutsba/sbaprograms/8abd/mentorprogram/index.html>

The Small Business Administration (SBA)'s Mentor-Protégé program enhances the capability of 8(a) participants to compete more successfully for federal government contracts.

- Mentor-protégé agreement template from the SBA

http://www.sba.gov/idc/groups/public/documents/wi_milwaukee/wi_mentor_protege_agreement.pdf

- Mentor-protégé checklist from the SBA

http://www.sba.gov/idc/groups/public/documents/sba_program_office/8abd_mentor_protege_checklist.pdf

University of Texas System Mentor-Protégé Program

<http://www.utsystem.edu/HUB/Mentorprotegeprogram.html>

The University of Texas System Mentor-Protégé Program is designed to advance the growth and development of minority and women-owned/controlled businesses in Texas. It aims to foster long-term relationships between contractors and historically underutilized businesses and to enable protégé companies to succeed in open competition.

BUSINESS RESOURCES (continued)

Informal Mentoring Opportunities

In addition to participating in formal mentoring programs, you can find informal mentors through membership in local and regional business associations. These channels can prove advantageous for meeting and learning from other entrepreneurs. Here are a few business associations that are likely to offer networking events and mentoring programs:

- Your local Chamber of Commerce, <http://www.uschamber.com>
- Latin Business Association, <http://www.lbausa.org>
- National Minority Business Council, <http://www.nmbc.org>
- National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development, <http://www.ncaied.org>
- National Business Association, <http://www.nationalbusiness.org>
- National Small Business Association, <http://www.nsba.biz>
- Counselors to America's Small Business (SCORE), <http://www.score.org>
- Small Business and Entrepreneurship Council, <http://www.sbecouncil.org>
- Women's Business Enterprise National Council, <http://www.wbenc.org>
- Your local economic development office
- Industry-specific business associations, such as the National Association of Women in Construction



WORKSHEET

STEPS TO FINDING A MENTOR AND BECOMING A PROTÉGÉ

This worksheet is designed to help you select the right mentor. Answer the following questions to determine what you are looking for before you start talking to potential mentors. Start a spreadsheet on your computer to keep track of potential mentors.

What are your business goals for the next 12 months?

What are your business goals for the next five years?

What milestones are necessary to achieve these goals?

What business and technology resources do you need to achieve these goals?

What business skills do you struggle with (for example, financial management, organizational management, business development)?



WORKSHEET

STEPS TO FINDING A MENTOR AND BECOMING A PROTÉGÉ

What technical skills does your business need most to improve operations, manufacturing, product development or other core competencies?

What business contacts are you looking to establish to grow your company?

Begin a list of potential mentors:

Name _____
Company name _____
Location _____
Time in business _____
Referred by _____
Desirable trait _____

Name _____
Company name _____
Location _____
Time in business _____
Referred by _____
Desirable traits _____



WORKSHEET

STEPS TO FINDING A MENTOR AND BECOMING A PROTÉGÉ

Name _____
Company name _____
Location _____
Time in business _____
Referred by _____
Desirable traits _____

Name _____
Company name _____
Location _____
Time in business _____
Referred by _____
Desirable trait _____

Think through your expectations for the mentor. What time commitment do you expect from them and how do you envision working together?

What do you hope to get out of the relationship?

Have you checked the potential mentor company references and credit history with a credit reporting agency such as Dun & Bradstreet, Equifax or TransUnion?

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Government terminology can be confusing for the uninitiated. Use this glossary so you may be better able to speak the language.

Basic Ordering Agreement (BOA): Written agreement between a buyer and a seller outlining the terms, specifications and prices of the goods or services to be supplied. A basic ordering agreement is not a contract.

Bid Protest: Challenge by a bidder against the awarding of a government contract.

Blanket Purchase Agreement (BPA): Simplified way to fill anticipated repetitive needs for services and products.

Capability Statement: Document that summarizes a company's background, certifications, experience, capabilities, expertise, past performance and pertinent codes, such as D-U-N-S, CAGE, etc.

Central Contractor Registration (CCR): Primary vendor database for the federal government. All individuals or companies wanting to be awarded government contracts must be registered in the CCR.

Certified 8(a) Firm: Business eligible to receive government contracts under the Small Business Administration's 8(a) Business Development Program because it is owned and operated by socially or economically disadvantaged individuals.

Change: Any action that requires a revision to the original requirements in a contract.

Change Order: Written order directing the contractor to amend a contract.

Commercial And Government Entity (CAGE) Code: Five-character ID number that identifies government contractors.

Commercial Marketing Representative (CMR): Individual who works with prime contractors to locate subcontractors.

Contract: Mutually binding legal agreement that obligates the seller to furnish supplies or services and the buyer to pay for them.

Contracting Officer (CO): Individual who has the authority to enter into, administer and/or terminate contracts and makes related decisions regarding the contract.

Default: Failure by a party to fulfill a contract or to comply with the requirements set in the contract.

D-U-N-S (Data Universal Numbering System) Number: Nine-digit number issued by Dun & Bradstreet that the federal government uses to identify a contractor and list its address, telephone number, employee size and other information.

FedBizOpps: Online entry point for government procurement opportunities over \$25,000. Buyers are allowed to publicize their opportunities directly at the web site (<http://www.fbo.gov>).

Federal Acquisition Regulation Council: Governing body that makes FAR interpretations and rulings.

Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR): Set of rules that government agencies must follow when purchasing goods and services.

Full and Open Competition: Refers to the rule that all appropriate suppliers may compete for a contract.

General Services Administration (GSA): Independent agency that establishes procurement policy and secures the buildings, products, services, technology and other workplace essentials for government agencies.

Invitation For Bid (IFB): Method used to accept a sealed bid and includes a description of the product or service to be acquired, bidding instructions, packaging, delivery, payment, contract clauses and deadline.

Mentor: Individual or business who creates a program to advance strategic relationships with a less experienced business.

Negotiation: Bargaining process that precedes an agreement between two or more parties. A successful negotiation usually results in a contract.

North American Industry Classification System (NAICS): Set of categories developed by the United States, Canada and Mexico to classify businesses in the three countries. This classification replaces the old SIC code.

Prime contractor: Individual or business contracted to perform a specified piece of work.

Procurement Technology Assistance Centers (PTACs): Located across the United States, these centers help small businesses complete the steps to work with the federal government.

Protégé: Individual or developing business who cooperates with another more experienced individual or company to improve its capabilities.

Request for Proposal (RFP): Government document outlining the criteria and requirements to evaluate offers.

Sealed Bidding: Procurement method involving solicitation of bids and awarding of a contract to the individual or company whose bid benefits the government most, considering price and price-related factors.

SCORE, Counselors to America's Small Business: Nonprofit association that provides entrepreneurs with free, confidential face-to-face and email business counseling.

Small Business Administration (SBA): Independent agency chartered to protect the interests of small businesses and maintain free competitive enterprise.

Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) Code: See NAICS.

Subcontractor: Individual, business or corporation hired by a prime contractor to perform a specified piece of work required as part of an overall contract.

Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN): Number assigned to a business by the IRS that is needed to complete CCR registration.

Women-Owned Small Business (WOSB): Small business that is at least 51 percent owned and controlled by a woman.

