

# HOW TO THRIVE IN GOVERNMENT CONTRACTING

This guide is designed to help you develop the skills to survive — and thrive — in the government contracting marketplace. It includes advice on creating an effective marketing vehicle to drive new business. You also will learn how to engage your target audience, leave buyers with the desired impression, win follow-up business and more. Specific sections include:

- Creating Your Government Contract Marketing Machine
- Why Follow-up Is So Important
- Insights From the Inside: Seven Steps to Help You Succeed in Government Contracting
- Avoid Common Sales and Marketing Pitfalls
- Marketing Resources
- Worksheet: Creating a Marketing Strategy
- Glossary of Key Terms

## — CREATING YOUR GOVERNMENT CONTRACT MARKETING MACHINE

Now that you have the hang of government contracting, you might want to put a marketing system in place to help you continually generate new leads and convert these into sales. Consistent execution of major marketing tactics will ensure that you maintain a high profile so you can capture your share of government opportunities.

The following tips will help you build a marketing machine for ongoing government contract marketing.



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**1. Elevate your profile in the community**  
Relationship building is an extremely important element of winning government contracts. Build regular networking outings into your schedule and regard these events as important business meetings not to be missed. Attending social and business networking events can help you become a go-to resource for government contracting information.

Also, make a point of getting to know the small business liaisons at federal agencies. They can provide invaluable guidance in navigating the organizations, uncovering opportunities and identifying key individuals to talk with. They can also set up appointments for you to give briefings to procurement officers.

Fostering business advocates is also important, so introduce yourself and your offerings to people at your local chamber of commerce, SCORE office, Small Business

Administration office or Small Business Development Center. You may also want to build alliances with your local elected representatives, who are always eager to help local business owners succeed.

## 2. Establish partnerships

A good source of ongoing business is prime contractors, who could potentially bring you into contracts on which they need assistance. Large business prime contractors receiving federal contracts valued at more than \$1 million for construction, or \$550,000 for all other work, are required to establish plans for subcontracting with small businesses. For a list of the top 100 government contractors, visit <http://washingtontechnology.com/toplists/top-100-lists/2009.aspx>.

You can also look for incumbent contractors who may no longer qualify as a small business when their current contract comes up for renewal. Once a business grows beyond a certain size, it won't qualify for certain contracts. (For the government's small business size guidelines, see the *Introduction to Government Contracting* guide.)

These organizations are usually happy to partner with a smaller reputable firm so they can retain the contract through a teaming relationship. This benefits both parties: You gain experience by working with someone who knows the terrain, and the incumbent vendor gains by retaining a portion of the contract upon renewal. This arrangement is possible as long as you perform at least 51 percent of the labor, as required by law. Identify existing contractors through individual agency web sites and procurement forecasts.

You can also find partnership opportunities through networking or via the General Services Administration (GSA) Subcontracting Directory at <http://www.gsa.gov/subdirectory>. GSA Schedules are a favored purchasing mechanism for many federal buyers. Partnering with a prime contractor that is already on a GSA Schedule is a great way to increase

## WHY FOLLOW-UP IS SO IMPORTANT

From the moment you initiate a conversation with a potential client through the project wrap-up, following up promptly is critical. As with many customers, your previous interactions drive your future business, and this is particularly true when working with the government. In other words, the better an impression you make during the sales and delivery process, the better your chances are of winning follow-on business.

At each stage of the process, keep the lines of communication open to ensure you exceed your client's expectations.

- After every introductory meeting, send a note to thank your contact for taking the time to speak with you. Do the same for friends or colleagues who have made introductions to government contacts.
- During sales calls, you will be doing a good deal of listening to hear about the prospect's current and emerging needs. This presents opportunities to follow up afterward with bits of information that may be useful to them. Make a call shortly afterward to share this information and, of course, to promptly answer any outstanding questions or provide additional details they requested during the meeting.
- If you have been asked to provide information about your offerings to an agency, pay close attention to response deadlines and craft your response in the format and sequence the agency desires. This

access to lucrative opportunities with minimal risk. To identify contractors on a GSA Schedule, visit <http://www.gsaelibrary.gsa.gov>. For more information on subcontracting, read the *Team to Help Win Government Contracts* guide.

**3. Set yourself apart from the competition**

Keep track of your competitors' offerings and market positioning, and look for ways to stand out from the crowd. Offering a distinctive product or service and developing a memorable brand identity are two ways to make your mark. You can get advice and real-world examples of business differentiation in the *Become an Accomplished Government Contractor* guide.

**4. Maximize your company's web presence**

Create content for your web site that speaks directly to procurement officers and end users at government agencies. Use clear and concise language to articulate how they will benefit from working with you. Then, make sure your web address is included prominently on your contract price list and all leave-behind materials.

If you are on a GSA Schedule, direct prospective clients to your GSA contract information and be sure to post your company information and web link to GSA Advantage at <http://www.gsaadvantage.gov>.

**5. Highlight past performance**

Knowing that you have successfully completed contracts for other agencies instills confidence in procurement managers about working with you. Nurture a strong database of references. Happy customers can be your greatest advocates. Having these spokespeople available to share their experiences with your prospective clients can have a greater impact than any marketing promotion. Be sure to include letters of recommendation from customers in your RFPs.

**WHY FOLLOW-UP IS SO IMPORTANT** (continued)

will make it easier for the agency to review your response and ensure you have provided all the requested information.

- Once you win a contract, make note of all project milestones. Keep in touch with your client as you approach each milestone to ensure you have fulfilled all expectations in a timely manner.
- When the project nears completion, speak with your contacts again. Ask for their feedback on how things went. Specifically inquire about areas where there is room for improvement. Of course, no one wants to hear negative feedback, but this is a great opportunity to help improve your business and demonstrate to your clients that you are always looking for ways to better serve their needs. If the feedback is positive, ask if they would be willing to be a reference.



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**6. Create concise, engaging marketing materials**

When putting together your marketing collateral, remember to keep it brief. Highlight your accomplishments and what differentiates you from your competitors. If you can't pare this down to two pages, ask someone to edit your materials. Going any longer than two pages risks losing your reader's attention. Above all, the language should be about the prospective client, not about you. Underscore what the agency will gain from working with you.

You also should include all pertinent information about your company, such as your NAICS codes, business certifications and GSA Schedule number, if you have one. Don't waste space, either. Use both sides of your business cards — with your contact information and company logo on the front and major products or services on the back.

**7. Develop case studies**

Successful past performance is one of the most important factors for winning ongoing government business. Ask satisfied customers if they would participate in a client success story outlining the work you performed and what benefits they gained. These real-world examples could be powerful resources to share with prospective clients via your web site, perhaps as an online video testimonial, or through print collateral.

Note: Some agencies may have restrictions on participating in promotional activities. Be sure to check contract rules and regulations or speak with the agency's communications officer before initiating a case study.

**8. Empower your employees**

Encourage employees to continually look for new opportunities and to be prepared to leverage them to generate new business. From customer service representatives to contractors, your employees have untold opportunities to interface with clients, demonstrate a positive

attitude and share a consistent message about your business.

Invest time in educating the entire staff on your value proposition and how you stand out in the market. Give them opportunities to ask questions so they're well prepared to tackle common customer objections with ease. Be sure employees know what signals to watch for in identifying opportunities and that they're passionate about promoting your offerings. This consistency is important for conveying stability and reliability — and helps to ensure your brand identity rings true to who you are.

**9. Establish a system to identify new opportunities**

New opportunities arise on a regular basis. Develop a system to check for them regularly. Register on sites like FedBizOpps.gov to receive alerts when appropriate opportunities arise for you to bid on. You can also use the Federal Procurement Data System at <https://www.fpds.gov> to learn about contracts that are nearing their expiration date, and contact the procurement officer to find out if the contracts will be renewed and open for bid.

Contact information is often limited in the Federal Procurement Data System, but you may be able to find the name of the agency and appropriate procurement officer at FedBizOpps.gov, USA.gov or the Federal Acquisition Jumpstation at <http://prod.nais.nasa.gov/pub/fedproc/home.html>. There are also businesses that sell agency contact lists and market intelligence.

In addition, many state and local agencies maintain their own vendor lists to meet their buying needs. Complete vendor applications for the government agencies you are interested in pursuing work with, and create a statement of qualifications about your firm. This document should contain contact information, firm background, capabilities, key personnel, previous project descriptions and up-to-date references.



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#### 10. Identify GSA opportunities (if appropriate)

If you are on a GSA Schedule, you will want to visit <http://www.ebuy.gsa.gov> to respond to RFQs and <http://www.gsa.gov/Portal/gsa/ep/portletView.do?pageTypeId=17114&channelPage=%252Fep%252Fchannel%252FgsaOverview.jsp&channelId=-25268> to learn about the GSA's expected contracts for the current and upcoming fiscal year. You can contact the offices that posted the opportunities and make them aware of how your company can fulfill their needs.

#### 11. Market your GSA status

If your business is on a GSA Schedule, you may want to participate in the Cooperative Purchasing Program, which allows state and local agencies to purchase from contracts awarded under the GSA Schedule 70. Visit <http://www.gsa.gov> for more information about Cooperative Purchasing. Other ways to market your GSA status include:

- Prominently display the GSA logo on your web site and marketing materials.
- Send letters to potential customers letting them know about your offerings and that you're a new GSA Schedule 70 holder.

- Participate in expos and other promotional events through <http://www.gsa.gov/marketingpartnership>.
- Explain the benefits of using GSA Schedules when you call on an agency. You can also ask a GSA representative to call them and walk them through the advantages of the GSA program.

You can also gain a wealth of advice from GSA customer service directors, who can provide information about the government marketplace as well as points of contact. To find a customer service director in your area, visit <http://www.gsa.gov/csd>.

#### — INSIGHTS FROM THE INSIDE: SEVEN STEPS TO HELP YOU SUCCEED IN GOVERNMENT CONTRACTING

Despite countless competitors, Maryland-based Quality Support, Inc. has managed to set itself apart by focusing on its customers and respecting others. Those habits are really paying off: The company's revenue has grown 250 percent in the past three years.

A service-disabled veteran and minority-owned small business, Quality Support provides management, administrative, fulfillment and technical support services. President and CEO Wayne M. Gatewood, Jr., USMC (Ret), reveals seven tips for prospering in the public sector.

**Talk the language.** Government contractors want to do business with people who appreciate what they do, know their lingo and do business their way. "All the people I have working on Department of Defense contracts are former military people," Gatewood says. "If, for example, I want to win a contract with NASA, I show them I have staff familiar with their agency and who have worked with every NASA platform there is. And I bring these folks with me to meet with the agency."

**Do your homework.** Be prepared before reaching to out potential customers. “You don’t just march out there,” Gatewood said. “You need to know what terrain you’re dealing with, who the players are and what you’re getting into. Fully research the agency beforehand so you’re well versed in their mission and how you can help support it.”

Gatewood did just that when he left the military for civilian life. A voracious reader, he taught himself about the federal government and its regulations. Before pitching an agency, he reads everything he can to gain an in-depth understanding of its organizational climate and needs.

**Seize opportunity.** “Many small businesses won’t take contracts if they’re under a certain dollar value,” Gatewood says. “I’ll sweep the streets if that’s what it takes to get my foot in the door and become known. If your end result is superior, people will notice and will want to do business with you.”

**Carefully vet partners.** Be sure any alliance you enter enhances your credibility. Look for opportunities to team with larger organizations to expand your capabilities — but be absolutely sure the company has a good reputation. “Before signing any agreement, make sure your potential partner has never defaulted on a contract or received a notice that they’re deficient in a contract,” Gatewood cautions. “Ask for the contract numbers they’ve worked on and speak with the contracting officer’s technical representative, who monitors vendor work performance.”

**Give back to the community.** A 21-year veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps and a self-made entrepreneur, Gatewood mentors returning veterans on starting their own businesses. Through these talks he also receives introductions to new business opportunities. “People love doing business with people they know,” he says.

**Be accessible to customers.** Agencies want to know who you are and what you believe in, Gatewood says. “Any small business owner would be remiss if they didn’t personally meet with prospective and current clients. Let them know you care. Many of my customers know they can call my cell phone 24/7. That gives them an added level of assurance.”

**Walk the talk.** Be honest with your customers and set an example. Take care of your people and show respect for your clients. “It’s about creating a bond and a mutual trust with your customers,” Gatewood says. “There are hundreds of companies in the area that offer similar services to ours, but people know if they work with me they get a sense of integrity and a great price and delivery.” ▣

## AVOID COMMON SALES AND MARKETING PITFALLS

It's easy to hit roadblocks when marketing your business, particularly in the complex world of government contracting. Here are seven common missteps to avoid when promoting your services to the public sector.

**Do:** Your homework to find out about each agency's mission and challenges before you pick up the phone to call. Attending community meetings and networking events, reading government publications and newspapers, and perusing agency web sites are good ways of gathering pertinent data about target agencies.

**Don't:** Underprice yourself. Being the least expensive provider won't necessarily win you any business, and it may make some question the quality of your products or services.

**Don't:** Rely on slides during meetings.

**Don't:** Give a sales presentation or talk "at" your prospects with slideshows. Take the opportunity to sit down and hear what challenges they're facing so you can fine-tune your offer to their needs.

**Don't:** Waste money on print mailers. After the anthrax scare, it became difficult to get unsolicited mail through to federal agencies. However, you can often reach contracting officers via email.

**Don't:** Exaggerate. Be careful not to overpromise on what your products or services can achieve. Make sure you can back up your claims and deliver on agreements, and you'll be more likely to gain a positive reputation among government buyers.

**Don't:** Spread yourself too thin. It's tempting to respond to every opportunity that crosses your path, but that's an inefficient approach when marketing to the government. Intensely focus your sales efforts on a few select agencies so you can gain an in-depth understanding of their people, processes and needs.

**Don't:** Wait to hear about RFPs. Well before an RFP is issued, you should make yourself known to the right contacts at target agencies and have a keen understanding of what they're looking for. The most trusted vendors are sometimes even asked to help formulate RFP guidelines, which gives them a significant advantage.

**Don't:** Make assumptions about evaluation criteria. If you're not sure how an agency is making its decision, ask the agency to clarify its evaluation criteria, and cater your proposal around it.

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## MARKETING RESOURCES

Use these resources to identify promotional opportunities and networking events and learn about issues impacting your target market.

### **Acquisition Central**

<http://www.arnet.gov>

A clearinghouse of information related to federal procurement.

### **Armed Forces Journal**

<http://www.armedforcesjournal.com>

Review and analysis of key defense issues of interest to the U.S. military community.

### **The Coalition for Government Procurement**

<http://www.thecgp.org>

Nonprofit association of companies that sell commercial services and products to the federal government.

### **Federal Business Council**

<http://www.fbcinc.com>

Produces conferences and trade show events at and for federal government locations throughout the United States.

### **Federal Computer Week**

<http://www.fcw.com>

Provider of integrated information and media for the government information technology market.

### **Federal Times**

<http://www.federaltimes.com>

Online source for news and information for government managers on managing staffs, the latest technology and financial and career decisions.

### **Government Computer News**

<http://www.gcn.com>

News and information about the federal government's information technology space.

### **Government Executive**

<http://www.govexec.com>

Online news daily covering the business of the federal government and its departments and agencies.

**GSA Vendor Support Center**

<http://www.gsa.gov/vendorsupportcenter>

Provides GSA Schedule and GWAC contractors with online contract administration information.

**National Association of State Procurement Officials**

<http://www.naspo.org>

Nonprofit association dedicated to strengthening the procurement community through education, research and communication.

**National Conference Services, Inc.**

<http://www.ncsi.com>

Event planning, production and support service company under contract to multiple federal agencies, primarily within the Department of Defense and intelligence community.

**National Contract Management Association**

<http://www.ncmahq.org>

Gives vendors an opportunity to improve buyer/seller relationships and increase individual and organizational competency.

**Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics**

<http://www.acq.osd.mil>

Provides information about acquisition law, policy, regulations and procedures pertaining to the Department of Defense, which is the largest purchaser in the U.S. government.

**Professional Services Council**

<http://www.pscouncil.org>

Nonprofit trade association representing for-profit technology and professional services firms that do business with the federal government.

**U.S. Air Force Small Business**

<http://www.airforcesmallbiz.org>

Helps small businesses to work in support of the Air Force's mission and goals.

**Wifcon.com**

<http://www.wifcon.com>

Serves the federal acquisition community by providing quick access to information, such as contracting laws and pending legislation, current and proposed regulations, courts and boards of contract appeals and bid protest decisions.



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# WORKSHEET

## CREATING A MARKETING STRATEGY

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**Some small businesses don't have formal marketing programs that articulate how they stand out in the market. Without this, it's difficult to know exactly which marketing efforts have generated new business. Use this worksheet to map out a marketing strategy and to begin measuring the results of various promotional efforts.**

**Note: Before completing the worksheet, you may want to read the *Become an Accomplished Government Contractor* guide to learn about creating a compelling value proposition.**

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### **Print Materials**

What print collateral do you have currently? How well do these materials articulate your company's key differentiators?

Brochures

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Case studies

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White papers

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# WORKSHEET

## CREATING A MARKETING STRATEGY

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### Web Content

How easy is it for government buyers to navigate your web site? Look at your site from their perspective in terms of what they would expect to see. What new content is needed to explain your company's top benefits to this audience? Identify subject matter experts to provide raw data, as well as a writer to fine-tune this information for the web.

New content needed

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Topic	Subject matter expert	Writer
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

### PR Activities/Speaking Engagements

Is your organization participating in any upcoming speaking opportunities? Who are your company's best spokespersons and what are their areas of expertise? The best ones might be individuals within the organization and/or advocates, such as customers or industry analysts. Who will be responsible for drafting the presentation abstract?

Topic	Subject matter expert
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



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# WORKSHEET

## CREATING A MARKETING STRATEGY

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### PR Activities/Byline Articles and Blog Posts

Become familiar with publications and blogs read by your target audience. Make note of emerging issues that you or your company spokespeople are experienced in. These might present opportunities to submit byline articles or blog posts.

Publication blog	Issues of note
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Key writer/editor contacts	Contact information
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Could you repurpose an existing white paper into a byline article?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Customer name	Job title	Contact information
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

- How will they participate?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Quote in marketing collateral
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Speak with the press
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Be a customer reference
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Participate in customer success story
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Participate in event/speaking engagement



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### Networking Opportunities: Make Note of Upcoming Events

Visit <http://www.openforum.com/events> or <http://www.businessmatchmaking.com> for upcoming opportunities.

Event name	Location	Cost to attend
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

### Target agencies

Identify agencies you would like to do business with. Make note of the contacts you have made and what you have learned about each organization.

Agency name	Contact name	Contact information
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Notes about the agency's needs

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### Measure marketing activities

Train your staff to identify the source of new business deals. You may want to enter this information into your contact database. Periodically review lead sources to determine which marketing investments are paying off.

Customer name	Lead source
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

## 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.

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## GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS (continued)

**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.

## GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS (continued)

**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.

**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.

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