
BLACKTECHSTARTUP EDUCATION

Win Federal Tech Work Before the RFP Drops

A practical system for finding government technology demand months early, choosing the right agencies, and building relationships before a solicitation turns into a crowded race.

Federal contracting is often treated like a paperwork contest. That is the wrong mental model. The stronger model is enterprise sales with unusually public buying data. The federal government tells you what agencies expect to buy, what they bought before, which small-business goals they must pursue, and when opportunities may surface. The edge is learning to use that information before everyone piles into the same SAM.gov posting.

Start with forecasts, not bid boards

GSA's Forecast of Contracting Opportunities exists specifically so small businesses can see anticipated federal purchases before solicitations are released. Use it to build a 6–12 month pipeline by agency, NAICS code, estimated value, acquisition office, and expected quarter. Then use SAM.gov to watch the opportunities that move from forecast to market.

Do not start by asking “What can we bid on today?” Start with “Which three agencies repeatedly buy the thing we are already good at?” If you build cybersecurity tools, managed IT, data systems, cloud migration, software development, analytics, or AI services, search historical and forecast demand in those exact capability lanes. A narrow pipeline beats 100 random solicitations.

Build a buyer map before a proposal

For each target agency, identify the program office that owns the problem, the contracting office that buys the solution, and the small-business office that helps companies understand the acquisition path. Your goal is not to lobby for a rigged deal. Your goal is to understand the mission, incumbent

environment, contract vehicle, timing, and evidence a buyer will require.

Create a one-page capability statement that reads like an answer to an agency problem: three capabilities, two proof points, relevant NAICS codes, contract vehicles or teaming status, security posture, and a direct point of contact. Remove the generic “innovative solutions” language. Buyers need to know what you can deliver, for whom, at what scale, and with what risk.

Use the small-business rules as routes, not identities

The federal government has small-business participation goals, and programs such as 8(a) and HUBZone can create access to set-aside opportunities for eligible firms. But certification is not a substitute for capability. Treat a designation as a route to a market where you still must prove technical competence, delivery discipline, pricing, and past performance.

If you are not ready to prime, subcontract. GSA explicitly points small firms toward subcontracting with existing contract holders on vehicles such as 8(a) STARS III. A subcontract can produce the past performance, invoicing discipline, security experience, and agency references that make a later prime bid credible.

The 90-day move

Weeks 1–2: pick three agencies and one narrow capability. Weeks 3–4: study forecasts, SAM notices, prior awards, incumbents, NAICS codes, and likely contract vehicles. Month 2: schedule conversations with agency small-business specialists and potential primes; refine your capability statement from what you learn. Month 3: pursue one subcontracting route and one forecasted prime opportunity that actually matches your evidence.

The rule: never spend 40 hours writing a proposal for work you discovered 72 hours before the deadline unless the fit is exceptional. A mature federal pipeline is built upstream.

The worksheet to keep

Decision / target: Write the exact opportunity, buyer or capital source you are pursuing. Evidence: list the three facts that make you credible now. Gap: list the one missing proof point most likely to stop the deal. Next action: name the person, document or milestone that closes that gap. Deadline: put a date on it.

Track outcomes, not activity. Applications, bids and investor messages are inputs. Qualified conversations, accepted proposals, technical milestones, signed contracts and cash received are outputs. Review the pipeline every Friday and kill low-fit pursuits early.

Build a bid/no-bid score before you burn proposal hours

Create a five-factor scorecard for every forecasted opportunity: mission fit, technical proof, buyer access, contract-path fit and delivery capacity. Score each from zero to five. A company with perfect socioeconomic eligibility but weak technical proof should not chase the work. Neither should a technically excellent firm pursue an opportunity when it cannot meet security, staffing, insurance or schedule requirements. The scorecard forces discipline before sunk cost takes over.

Add a second sheet for the likely acquisition path. Record whether the agency historically buys through a GWAC, schedule, BPA, IDIQ, small-business set-aside, prime contractor or open-market solicitation. Search prior awards and incumbent names. If you cannot access the likely vehicle, your strategy may be teaming rather than priming. That is not a consolation prize: a well-chosen subcontract can create the past performance and agency familiarity needed for the next cycle.

Before a proposal, write a one-paragraph win thesis: why this agency has the problem now, why your team has unusual evidence, why the acquisition path is reachable, and what lowers buyer risk. If the thesis depends mostly on being Black-owned, small, local or “innovative,” it is not strong enough. Certifications can open a door; capability, timing and risk reduction win the work.

Research behind this guide

Use the primary sources below to verify current rules, eligibility and program details before acting. Program terms can change.

GSA — Find opportunities



SAM.gov — Contract Opportunities



SBA — 8(a) Business Development Program



GSA — 8(a) STARS III



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