



12 STEPS TO WINNING GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

“Stop Wishing, Start Winning!”

By Abraham Xiong

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Do you Speak Governese?

Uncle Sam speaks *Governese*, but do you? Like Venus and Mars, the private and public sectors are different planets. Uncle Sam, for instance, comes from a different culture –one in which he speaks a bizarre language full of strange words, acronyms, rules, regulations and red tape. I call this language “*Governese*.”

Here’s a linguistic test for you. Read the section below and see how much you understand. It’s written in *Governese*, or “govspeak,” with instructions on what you should do to be successful in the government market...

For your business to be successful, you should start by researching federal procurement regulations. Read the FAR, DFARS, UCC, CFR and Federal Register. Next, attend a PTAC and SBA training session. As a small business, check out MBDA, SBDC, NDIA and NCMA for help. If you’re a Native American, go to NCAIED. Next, use FPDS, FFATA and USASpending to do research on past performances and contract awards. Find the incumbents and benchmark after them.

After you’ve learned the basics, you will need to register your company. First, identify your SIC, PSC, NIGP and NAICS codes; then obtain a DUNS number through D&B. Next, register in the CCR, which, by the way, is now called SAM. If you’re in the CCR, you will need to migrate your information into SAM. Make sure you have your primary and secondary POCs’ and corporate info, including your TIN.

To keep a competitive edge, learn what certifications you’re qualified for. Check out HUBzone, 8a, ED/WOSB, SDVOSB, VOSB, Section 3, MP and various other programs. If you’re seeking local and state projects, consider DBE, SWUC, HUB, LSBE, FBE, APABE, HABE and MP. If you prefer a large commercial project, check out the MBE, AABE, WBE and LGBTBE certification programs.

Based on your business size standard, consider using a JV or teaming strategy, when pursuing a solicitation. Sometimes, the opportunity may come out as a pre-sol, sources sought, rfp, rfi, rfq, ifb, or other contracting methods. One strategy is to start as a subcontractor so you don’t have to take on the responsibilities of being a prime. Another idea is to form a MP relationship with a prime. The prime is required to have a small business plan, which can be an advantage to your company.

To find solicitations to bid on, use FBO, iSearch, eBuy, eMall and Fedbid. Also, use these contracting vehicles to help: IDIQ, MATOC, GWAC, BPA, STARS II, SATOC, GSA Schedules, ITES II, FSSI, Micro Purchases and SAP. Start promoting your company by meeting with the OSDBU, SADBUS, SBS, SBLO, and SBA BOS. By now, your Capability Statements should be complete, so send them to a few agencies. Make sure you send the short version.

Oh, and make sure you’re DCAA compliant because GAO and OMB have stricter compliance measures now. If you want to get paid, make sure you’re not listed on EPLS. And finally, register with e-verify, WAWF and ESRS as needed.

If you understood 70% of what you just read, congratulations –you’re fluent in Governese! But if you couldn’t grasp the Governese above and had to Google the acronyms for meaning, then doing business with Uncle Sam will be difficult. It would be equivalent to you trying to do business in Japan, but without Japanese fluency or a translator. If you don’t speak Governese, or you’re struggling to understand it, you should source out help. You need an interpreter.

Success Formula: P+P+P+P = P

Have no fear: I, the Gov Genie, am here to help! I will simply rub my magic lamp and grant you a contract out of thin air....

Ah, but what’s the use of that if you don’t learn the skills you need to land contracts further down the road? With the following concise and easy to follow instructions, I will help your company land a contract *AND* teach you how to successfully enter and remain in the market for years to come.

I’ve come up with a little formula to help you be successful in the government market: P+P+P+P = P. The first P stands for Preparation. During this phase you will assess your company, create a strategy, educate yourself, and register/apply for certifications. The second P stands for Promotion. In this phase you will brand your business, market your company, and learn how to build relationships. The third P stands for Proposal. The Proposal Phase involves learning how to seek opportunities and writing proposals. The fourth P stands for Performance. This phase marks the time when you will carry out the project, comply to legal obligations, and close out the project. The final P stands for profit. Your goal is not only to win a contract, but to be a profitable organization in the government market.

So what are you waiting for? Turn the page and follow me through the 12 Steps to Winning Government Contracts that will transform you from a wisher to a winner! I will serve as your own personal Governese interpreter.

Contracting Benefits

You may be thinking: well why should I get involved in the Government Contracting Market in the first place? There are numerous reasons to enter the market, many of which stem from the reality that the government is the largest and most reliable consumer in the world. While you may have your own motivations, here’s my **Top Ten Reasons** for entering the government market. Now if I could just get that list to come out of this stinking lamp....rub, rub, rub....Aha! Here it comes from the genie bottle.

1. The federal government’s annual budget is about **\$3.8 trillion**, representing the largest consumer in the world.
2. The federal government awards over **\$500 billion** in contracts annually. Who wouldn’t want to get in on that cash?!
3. Currently, less than **1%** of all U.S. companies are winning federal contracts despite the federal government’s stance as the largest consumer in the world.

4. Of all federal contracts, **23%** are set aside specifically for small businesses. However, agencies have not met this goal for several years straight. More companies such as your own entering the market could help change that.
5. Large corporations that win over **\$650,000** from federal contracts *must* sub-contract **35%** of the share to small businesses. This gives the underdogs more of a chance to enter the contracting market.
6. **\$47 billion** was awarded under this category: “*Everyone could compete, but only **ONE** bid or offer was even submitted.*” More competition is needed!
7. The average federal contract is worth **\$160,000**.
8. Every **1 minute**, 114 federal contracts are awarded. That’s over **6800 a day!**
9. Federal credit card purchases **under \$3,000** go through a very simple buying process.
10. The federal government consistently awarded:
 - **\$1.2 billion** every day
 - **\$52 million** every hour
 - **\$860,000** every minute
 - **\$14,000** every second

How much of these opportunities are passing you by? Shouldn’t you get a piece of the pie? Read further and let me help you prepare for the government market and start winning contracts.

PREPARATION PHASE

- **Assess Your Situation**
- **Strategic Planning**
- **Educate Yourself**
- **Register & Certify**

Step One: Assess Your Situation

Begin with the end in mind.

Now you've seen the top ten reasons why you should enter the government market. As the Gov Genie, my first piece of advice is to start your contracting journey by *assessing your situation*. This process considers two major factors:

- (1) Where your company stands currently, and
- (2) What you want to ultimately achieve from entering the contracting market

Is your company properly prepared to offer its services to government agencies? What exactly are you trying to get out of government contracting? By figuring these things out, you will better prepare yourself for the success that you seek.

Let's dive a little deeper into our assessment process. Firstly, it's important to know what's expected of you. What exactly is the government looking for in a company? This may seem like a loaded question, but it's not as complex as you may think. Among other things, the government wants a company that has:

- Proper **registration**
- The **capability, resources, and finances** to get the job done
- An effective **marketing strategy**
- A good **relationship** with them
- **Knowledge** about what they need and how they need it

Not too bad, eh? By following my advice, your company will be able to fulfill these expectations in a cinch.

Now let's look at some major areas and make sure you've got everything ready to enter the government market...

This **Corporation Assessment Checklist** is a useful tool for new or start-up companies (and also for making sure existing businesses are all set):

- *Write a business plan.* This may differ depending on the specifics of your organization (new/existing, non-profit/profit). Use this link to view great business plan templates: www.tinyurl.com/bizplantoday
- *Choose a business name* (if you don't have one already) *and register a website domain name.* Your name and website are the first things people will see about your business, so make them good.
- *Choose a business entity.* In other words, determine what industry your company falls under. Go to www.tinyurl.com/mybusinessentity for more guidance.

- Register an “INC” or “LLC” with the Secretary of State. Go to www.tinyurl.com/incorporateyourbusiness for more information.
- Get a Federal Tax ID Number (EIN) and fill out the Sub-chapter S Election Form 2553 if it applies to your organization. Go to www.tinyurl.com/myeintoday for these.
- Open a business bank account. Do this as soon as possible after applying for an EIN.
- Order a corporate kit that will include by-laws, articles and a seal (Inc. or LLC). www.corporatekit.com is good for this.
- Create an organizational chart. You’ll really need this later.
- Get all of your business licenses and permits in order.
- Get a State Taxpayer ID number. This is used for state income tax.
- Register a Trade Name (D.B.A.) if other than corporate name.
- File for an Initial Annual Registration to the Secretary of State. Make sure to do this 90 days after incorporating.
- If you plan on doing business out of state, register as a Foreign Corporation in those states. www.sba.gov/content/incorporating-your-business can help with this as well.
- Register all Trademarks, Service Marks, and patents at www.uspto.gov.

I know how much people just *love* talking about tax and insurance matters! Or...maybe not so much. But if I’m going to help you land contracts, we might as well go over some helpful hints for these areas. In addition to the steps above, it’s important to square away all your **employee, tax and insurance** matters.

- Create an *Employee Handbook* to establish a communication tool between you and your employees.
- Enroll in E-Verify (for all government contractors) at www.uscis.gov/everify
- Consult with a CPA or tax advisor for tax-related concerns.
- Set-up a bookkeeping system through QuickBooks or another government compliant software.
- In terms of insurance, be sure to *obtain general and professional liability* (among other things).

Alright, so we’ve gone over what’s expected of you, where you want to go, and how your company needs to look. Now it’s time to establish a **Government Contracting Team** that will place you on that winner’s path in the government market. The following are the skills you need to create a magic-making team:

1. A **Proposal Writer** with skillful and professional writing ability. Writing great proposals is key to winning government contracts.
2. A **CPA** experienced in the government market, DCAA Audits, cost accounting, FAR and regulations.
3. A **Capture, Business and Relationship Manager** to open doors and build key relationships.
4. A **Research Team** to help find opportunities, file FOIA requests, link with teaming partners, and build competition/historical data.
5. A **Cost Estimator** that helps with bids and quotes to determine the best value or lowest price estimator.
6. A **Contracting and Administrative Specialist** to carry out contract and administrative work.
7. A **Compliance and QA Officer** to ensure you’re meeting all compliance requirements.

You’re probably thinking -wow, that’s a lot of people! But to get started, I’ll teach you how you can wear most of these hats.

You might want to consider other business matters during the assessment phase as well. This could include: creating a board of advisors and directors, establishing lines of credit, obtaining business loans, or relocating to a Hubzone. All of these suggestions paired with the checklists above will create a recipe for success in landing government contracts.

Step Two: Strategic Planning

What's the game plan?

My next Gov Genie advice is to *create a strategy* for your company. Your strategic approach is defined by what you want to get out of entering the government market. Are you looking for a quick path to money? If that's the case, establishing a **short-term government contracting plan** might be your best bet. A short-term plan looks something like this:

- *Identify a similar-sized company like your own to benchmark after.* Don't reinvent the wheel! Studying and modeling a successful business will give you a better idea of what will and won't work for your own company. To find benchmark companies, check out this link: www.usaspending.gov. Once you've gotten to the site, enter a keyword related to your industry and click search. Your results will list all the companies that have won contracts in the past. Easy-peasy!
- *Understand the importance of working with prime contractors.* Large companies that win over \$650,000 MUST sub-contract **35%** of the share. Working with prime contractors could be your key to success in the government market.
- *Identify potential companies to work with.* You know what they always say...the more the merrier! Understand how to use teams, joint ventures, and mentor protégé partnerships to your best benefit.

I know that a short-term plan isn't for everyone. Some of you are in it for the long haul. Follow this list to create a successful **long-term government contracting plan**:

- *Identify a large company to benchmark after.* Find a successful company within your industry and study them. They will be the model for what you want to become down the road.
- *Work to establish ties directly with government agencies.* Eat from the dinner table, not from the scraps that fall on the ground. Priming directly with government agencies will set the bar for long-term contracting relationships.
- *Build alliances with key companies.* Establish relationships with solid companies to work with in the long-term.
- If you're a bigger company, *establish a Small Business Program (SBP)*. This is important for a large company's success in the government market.
- If you're a smaller business, *create a succession plan*. This is important if you end up growing out of an 8a, Hubzone, or certified small business status.

I've worked my magic and come up with a resource to help you develop and review your strategy: Government Contractors Association. If you need help developing your company strategy, don't hesitate to call my friends at the association (**404-955-8080**).

Whether you choose to create a short or long term contracting plan, it's important to map out your finances during this step as well. Make sure you:

- *Set aside money from your savings or reserve.* Before you get paid for your services, you'll need mobilization cash to carry out projects after landing a contract.
- *Seek out alternative capital resources.* Raise additional capital through factoring, AR financing, small business loans, etc. Go to www.recx.com to check out some great resources for raising mobilization capital.
- *Look into micro loan programs.* These might be beneficial if you don't have the capital at first to carry out contracting projects. Look into www.tinyurl.com/mymicroloans for further information.

Here are few other factors I recommend you consider...

- *Getting your bonds, credit, Quality Assurance Program, and professional certifications in order.* Depending on your industry and desired contract, these might be important components to look into.
- *Utilize "co-opetition".* This refers to situations where you cooperate with your competitors. In the government market, most contracts are large in scope and require more than one company to successfully complete them.

Step Three: Educate Yourself

Knowledge is Power.

I'm called the Gov Genie for a reason! I fully know and comprehend all the complexities that make up the government world. It's like a foreign country to most business owners, so I highly recommend you get familiar with the government contracting market by **taking online courses and/or seeking professional help**. Government Contractors Association has a great step-by-step coaching program at www.GovCoach.com. Here are some other useful tips for learning "Governese" -the language of the government market:

- *Consider joining multiple government contracting associations.* These will teach you all you need to know about the government market, and will also be great networking tools down the road. www.GovAssociation.org/membership
- *Attend webinars and seminars on government contracting.* Countless webinars on the government market are available, and finding local seminars should never be too difficult. An ongoing education is vital.
- *Attend a PTAC training in your area.* PTAC stands for "Procurement Technical Assistance Center". These organizations are extremely helpful and hold a wealth of contracting knowledge. Find a PTAC near you at www.aptac-us.org.

- *Read government contracting news articles, websites, publications, etc.* Like any new language, the more you immerse yourself, the faster you'll learn. So read up!
- *Get familiar with contracting regulations and laws.* There's a lot of red-tape to avoid with matters involving the government, so make sure you know your stuff. Reading up on laws and regulations such as the F.A.R, D.F.A.R.S., and U.C.C. is a good start. www.regulations.gov is a valuable resource for this.

While you may be well versed in the culture of the private sector, the government market is a whole new ball game. So before you try to land contracts, it's very important to educate yourself.

Step Four: Register & Certify

Sign me up!

We've now gone over the first three steps in my contract-landing process. You're probably thinking, what's next Gov Genie? My answer is to *get your company registered and certified*. Without having the proper registration and certification, government agencies won't give you a second glance. Therefore, it is absolutely vital that you get these in order.

Formerly called the Central Contractor Registration (CCR), the **System for Award Management (or SAM)** is the first entity you must register for prior to entering the government market. SAM is the official U.S. Government system that consolidated the capabilities of CCR/FedReg, ORCA, and EPLS. To prepare for SAM registration, do the following:

- *Obtain SIC codes* at www.tinyurl.com/SICcodes
- *Get your DUNS number* at www.tinyurl.com/createDUNSnumber
- *Determine your NAICS codes* (5-7 codes are ideal) at www.census.gov/naics
- *Determine your business size standard* with the table found at www.tinyurl.com/naicstable.
- *Determine your PSC codes* at www.tinyurl.com/createPSCcodes
- *Have your EIN or TIN number ready.* These refer to your Federal/IRS tax number. Make sure you don't use dashes.
- *Have your bank account information ready.* The government uses EFT for payments.
- *Determine who your 1st and 2nd point of contact (POC) will be.* Have their email and phone number ready to enter.
- *Now you're ready to get registered* at www.SAM.gov

*Other registrations such as **DSBS** (Dynamic Small Business search) and **ORCA** have been merged into SAM.

In addition to SAM, there are many **valuable registration opportunities** that will open doors for you in the government market. Consider looking into these ventures to better prepare your company for landing a government contract:

- *Research government spending trends for your NAICS and PSC codes* at <https://fpds.gov>
- *Register for Federal government opportunities* at www.FBO.gov. You'll need to be registered for SAM.gov prior to this.
- *Register for bid and grant opportunities* at www.FedBid.com.

- Look into DoD eMall at www.tinyurl.com/DODemallsearch. This is for off the shelf products and services from the commercial sector.
- Look into the DLA DIBBS (Defense Logistic Agency Internet Bid Board System). Learn how to do business with the DLA at www.dla.mil.
- Look into the GSA (General Service Administration) Advantage. Learn how to do business with the GSA at www.gsaadvantage.gov.
- Register for commercialization research grants (SBIR/STTR) at www.SBIR.gov.
- Register for state & local government opportunities at www.outreachsystems.com/usabid/.
- Identify the top five federal agencies who are buying your product/service at www.USAspending.gov.
- Register with the federal agencies you wish to do business with at www.acquisition.gov.
- Identify the top ten primes who are winning contracts in your industry at www.USAspending.gov.
- Register with prime contractors you want to subcontract with at www.tinyurl.com/primesubcontract.
- Register for subcontracting work in construction at www.elitepro.net (this is a paid service, but it's worth it).

Getting qualified for **key certifications** is also a great way to maximize your chances of winning government contracts. Agencies look at these as further evidence of the excellent service quality your company has to offer. Here's some certifications to consider:

Federal Certifications Programs

- 8A Business Development Program (minority owned)
- Hubzone
- ED/WOSB
- SDVOSB & VOSB
- GSA (General Service Administration) Schedules

State Certification Programs

- DBE
- MBE
- WBE
- HUB (for North Carolina businesses)
- SWUC (for Texas businesses)

Local Certification Programs

- MBE
- FBE
- SBE
- LSBE
- M/FBE
- Many others depending on where your business is located

Commercial Certification Programs

- MBE
- WBE
- LGBTBE

You're probably getting a little confused with all the acronyms I just listed, and rightfully so. I've arranged for our friends at the Government Contractors Association to give you a FREE 30-minute lesson on the differences of these certifications and which ones are best for your company. Contact them at **404-955-8080**. Make sure you tell them the Gov Genie recommended you for a "FREE 30-minute session"!

PROMOTION PHASE

- **Image is Everything**
- **Market Your Company**
- **Relationship Building**

Step Five: Image is Everything

Professionalize & Advertise

Ever heard the phrase "image is everything"? This philosophy applies to the government market just as much as it within the private sector. Often, you only have one chance to make the right impression. So to be a successful business, you've got to make yourself known. Branding your company creates effective marketing collateral in the government market.

The first step to branding is writing a **capability statement**. A capability statement is basically your brochure (or business resume) for government contracting. Government agencies will look at this when determining who to sign a contract with. There are two different types of capability statements: short and long. Short statements (which are more common and ideal) are generally 1-2 pages. These are used for emailing and print-out (front/back) purposes. Long statements (which are rare) are generally 3-6 pages. These may be used for meetings, capability briefs, etc. It's important you create specialized capability statements for each government agency you target. Follow my "6-C's" and you'll have a spectacular capability statement in no time!

1. **Codes.** This includes NAICS codes, PSC codes, and SIC codes. It also includes your CAGE code, DUNS number, and 8a, SDVOSB, ED/WOSB, HUBzone, VOSB, SDB, WBE, DBE, MBE, SWUC certifications. It may include Contract Vehicles (8a Stars, GSA Schedules, MATOC, IDIQ, etc) as well.
2. **Core Competencies.** This refers to the services or products you offer. Use bullet points and short sentence fragments when writing this portion –it's not intended to be a long narrative. Make sure to include only the key offerings you think the agency will be interested in.
3. **Company Data.** This includes a brief pertinent history of your company, as well as factors such as: size of firm, revenue, number of employees, office/warehouse locations, technologies & techniques, Quality Assurance Programs, and state of the art programs or approaches.
4. **Corporate Expertise and Differentiators.** This includes a summary of your company's expertise, key individuals, education, special knowledge or abilities, skills or technical expertise, and years in business.
5. **Clients and Customers (Past Performance).** This includes an overview of your past performances and the clients/customers you've worked with. Be sure to select from government customers (if you've had any) first, then your largest clients next. Choose customers most similar to the agency

you are marketing towards. Include a reference name and contact information. If you're meeting with a contracting officer or decision maker in person, include the size of the project.

6. **Contact Information.** This includes your company name and logo, point of contact, address, phone number, fax number, website, and email address.

I've rubbed my beloved lamp and made available to you some examples that you can use as a template to get started writing your own Capability Statement. To receive these samples, send an email to info@govcontractors.org with the subject line "Capability Statement Examples".

Another important branding tool to have is a **business card**. A proper business card for the government market should be arranged as follows:

Front

- Logo
- Company
- Name & Title
- Company Address
- Phone #, fax & cell, website url
- Email address (use a first name basis where possible, especially for those doing marketing and business divisions)
- Key certification (SDVOSB, 8a, etc –where applicable)
- DUNS #

Back

- Key NAICS codes
- Certifications (SDVOSB, MBE, DBE, etc)
- Key contract vehicles: GSA Schedule #, 8a STARS, etc

Finally, a company **website** is also a great branding tool for landing contracts. Your website is part of the first impression you give to government buyers. Here's some tips for making your site the best it can be:

- *Register a professional domain name* that makes a good first impression.
- Make your website "government friendly" by *modeling it after other businesses sites* who have had experience in the government market. This will set you apart from your competitors. Here are some examples:
 - www.Xiverti.com
 - www.Kompsys.com
- It's a good idea to *create a "Government Tab"* that includes NAICS codes, CAGE #, DUNS #, certifications, GSA schedule #, your capability statement, and past performance.

My friends at the Government Contractors Association have helped many companies revamp or build from scratch their website. If you don't have a website, or if you want a free assessment to see if your current site is government ready, give them a call: **404-955-8080**.

Step Six: Market Your Company

Make yourself stand out.

Whew, I need some water after all this advice giving! Gimme a minute...Ah, there we go.

Ok, so now that you've got your marketing collateral, it's time to put yourself out there. Keep in mind exactly what your most relevant and useful services are, and which government agencies you'll be marketing towards. This will determine your marketing content and strategy. I highly recommend that for this step and the previous one, you consider seeking professional help. There's a ton of resources out there that are extremely useful tools for helping you with your marketing strategy. Here's some good ones to look into:

- Government Contractor's Association Coaching Services www.govcoach.com
- Fed Biz Access www.fedbizaccess.com/products/package/map
- The Castle Group www.thecastlegroupinc.com/
- M3 Federal www.m3federal.com/
- Nitor Partners www.nitorpartners.com/
- GSA Proposals Services www.gsaproposal.com/
- Sell 2 Gov www.sell2gov.com/

My first piece of marketing advice involves one of the most heavily used forms of professional communication: email. Don't you just love email? One click of a button and woosh –it's off! Almost like magic (but not quite). **Email campaigns** are a fantastic way to market towards government buyers. Start by identifying the top five agencies you want to establish a relationship with. If you're not sure how to identify your top five agencies, you should know the number by now...give my friends at the Government Contractors Association a call and they'll help you out (**404-955-8080**). Begin by emailing the agencies you're targeting on a consistent basis, but keep in mind my philosophy of being "appropriately aggressive". The following are a few pointers on how to setup your email campaigns:

- *Keep it short.* No one's going to want to read pages and pages about your services. It's too daunting
- *Be personable.*
- *Be professional.*
- *Follow up, follow up, follow up.* The average sale doesn't happen until the **seventh** try!
- *Include your contact information.* Make it easy for them to know how to contact you if they're interested.
- *Attach your Capability Statement.*
- *Seek to understand the agency's needs.* It's not just about what your company has to offer, but how your company can benefit them.

- *Be solutions oriented.* Don't just pitch your services –show them you can *give them what they need.*
- *Use bullets points* so they can quickly glance at your capabilities.
- *Send your campaign from a professional email address*, such as john@abccompany.com and NOT your personal email, like “hotdaddy@yahoo.com”!

My Gov Genie senses are tingling –I think you're finally getting the hang of it! What comes next? It's all about the mingling my friends: networking. **Networking Events** are some of the greatest avenues to market your company. Be sure to thoroughly research an agency before attending their event. It's also a good idea to come up with a list of appropriate questions to take with you to the event. This shows that you are really committed to establishing a relationship with the agency. You can sign up for notifications on upcoming events through sites such as www.GovEvents.com. Some specific events you might want to look into include:

- The Minority Supplier Development Council Event (www.nmsdc.org/)
- The Minority Business Development Agency Event (www.mbda.gov/)
- A local SBA event (events.sba.gov/)
- A local PTAC Training (www.tinyurl.com/PTACevents)
- Alliance events (www.allianceforbiz.com/events/)
- The OSDBU annual Conference (www.osdbu.gov/outreach_calendar.html)

So good so far? Stay with me for just a little bit longer. On top of networking events, I suggest you look into **Government Associations**. These are great avenues to get involved with in the government market. It would be wise to consider attending some meetings hosted by associations that relate to your industry. Below, I've listed some associations that might be useful.

- [Government Contractors Association](#)
- [Black Contractors Association](#)
- [Florida Federal Contractors Association](#)
- [National 8a Association](#)
- [National Association of Gov't Contractors \(NAGC\)](#)
- [National Association of Minority Gov't Contractors](#)
- [National Association of Small Business Contractors](#)
- [National Association of Women Owned Small Businesses](#)
- [NIGP \(National Institute of Governmental Purchasing\)](#)

Step Seven: Relationship Building

It's not what you know or who you know, but who knows you back

As Gov Genie, I've come to make quite a few friends. In fact, my contact list is so long, I couldn't even fit it in my lamp! All modesty aside (chuckle) let's talk about establishing good connections with people.

Building relationships is key to your success in the government market. The handy little acronym I like to use when talking about relationships is "**KLT**": **Know, Like, and Trust**. You can memorize every last individual within an agency, but simply knowing who they are won't get you very far. Until they know, like and trust you, there will be very little room for creating effective relationships and business opportunities. Modify the traditional saying of "it's not what you know, it's who you know," to "*it's not what you know or who you know, but who knows you back.*"

There are many different officials you'll end up meeting throughout your journey in the government market, but one of the most important positions you'll encounter is that of the **Contracting Officer** (or **KO**). Think of this person as the "director" of an agency's contracts. Contracting Officers call all the shots and have a ton of authority when it comes to the final decision-making process. A great way to get to know a KO is by attending the pre-bidders conference for a contract you might be interested in. In the event that you don't end up landing a contract, request a Debrief and use it as a way to get to know the KO better. Shake hands and make nice; set the stage for a friendly, trusting and professional relationship that will benefit you down the road. I'm hoping by now you've guessed that the KO is someone you want to get to know, and know well. Use the knowledge I've given you and work your magic with this person to build a KLT relationship!

Don't move on just yet! I've got a little more to say when it comes to building relationships. Besides getting to know people within government agencies, it's also important to build relationships with **other companies in your industry**. In doing so, you'll ensure that you have reliable partners to turn to if you're ever interested in **subcontracting, teaming, or forming a joint venture** –all of which involve multiple companies coming together to fulfill a government project. Search for good, certified companies in each category to work with, such as Hubzone, 8a, SDVOSB, and WOSB companies. A good start would be to *set up meetings* with large and small companies to form strategic relationships.

PROPOSAL PHASE

- **Seek Opportunities**
- **Write the Proposal**

Step Eight: Opportunity Sourcing

Show me the money!

You've made it through the preparation and promotion phases! Good for you. Not too terrible so far I hope. Now it's time for the fun stuff, and my personal favorite step: figuring out which contracts you want to put in the running. Let's first go over the types of opportunities (or potential projects available for bidding) out there...

- **Government Commercial Purchase Card (GCPC) / Smart Card P-card:** purchases made through government credit cards
- **Micro Purchases:** contracts lower than \$3,000
- **Simplified Acquisition Procedures (SAP):** contracts less than \$150,000 (under some regulations, the maximum SAP threshold is up to \$5 million)

In general, a **contracting vehicle** is a pre-negotiated agreement between the government and a vendor for a standardized process and price. Depending on which agencies you want to work with, you'll need to find out which type of contracting vehicles they use. Here are some examples of different contracting vehicles:

- IDIQ
- MATOC
- GWAC
- BPA
- STARS II
- SATOC
- GSA Schedules
- ITES II
- FSSI
- Micro Purchases
- SAP
- Spawar

You may be thinking, "Gov Genie, you haven't told us *anything* about the other side. What exactly is the process agencies go through?" Hold onto your horses people –I'm getting there! The government operates on a fiscal year beginning October 1st and ending September 30th. To land a contract, it's important to understand the timeline bid opportunities run on. I'll summarize the **Federal Procurement Process** with the following ten simple steps:

1. *Need Phase:* Agencies establish a need for a product or service.
2. *Budget Phase:* Money is appropriated by regulators, Congress, or an agency head.
3. *Forecast Phase:* Acquisition plan is established with an expected date of purchase.
4. *Market Research Phase:* Before any project is awarded, the government must publicly publish their intention to buy. The market research phase is the best time to win Sole Source opportunities.
*NOTE: If you wait until a project shows up on FBO.gov, it is probably too late to win a sole source. Make sure to hop on the bandwagon as early as you can (I will explain how to find contract opportunities in just a moment).
5. *Solicitation Phase:* Bid opportunities are released (IFB, RFQ, RFP, register for FedBid.com, DoD eMall, GSA eBuy, FBO.gov).
6. *Proposal Phase:* Potential contractors write and submit proposals during this phase. Agencies expect well written and thorough proposals that address all of their requirements and expectations.
7. *Award Phase:* Proposals are received and go through a review and scoring process. A candidate is then chosen and awarded the contract.
8. *Performance Phase:* During this phase, agencies expect companies to begin fulfillment and delivery of the work laid out in their contract. Companies must fulfill the required project scope. Keep in mind that this is a great time to strengthen relationships for future opportunities.
9. *Compliance Phase:* This is the step where you have to cross your T's and dot your I's. There are many regulations (such as the FAR) that you have to reference, as well as managing the project itself and conducting necessary reports.
10. *Closure Phase:* If you want to get paid, be sure to close out the project appropriately. This means the KO must sign off on completed work. Your company can then invoice and receive payment.

Alright, I think you get the gist of it. Landing a contract takes a lot of preparation. Now how do you get the dart on the bullseye? Patience is a virtue, my friend. I bet you're hoping that now that I've made my speech, I'll just grant you that contract out of thin air. But remember, I'm trying to *teach* you how to fish, and not just give you a fish. To find contract opportunities, you must understand these three research techniques: past, present, and future. Let me dig a little deeper for you:

- **Past opportunities** involve researching historical data. This will help you see what types of contracts might have been available in the past, and will give you a benchmark for searching for ones you want to go after. This is also a great way to find out what the previous award amounts for projects were so you can price your new project accordingly.
- **Present opportunities** involve searching for current contracts available. Now that you're well versed in the government market, you should have a better idea of what you're looking for.
- **Future opportunities** involve researching forecasts and agency budgets. By doing this, you'll be able to estimate what opportunities might be available in the future, and where the government will have the most resources. If you don't end up landing a contract now, this information could be really helpful down the road. It's just another way to stay ahead of the game!

There are countless opportunities out there, so go and get 'em! For opportunity resources and registrations, reference the links listed in Step Four.

Step Nine: Write the Proposal

Draft it up!

You've finally gotten to the proposal phase...so have at it! Just kidding. I would never push you off into uncharted waters without a little advice. The proposal writing process is probably one of the most challenging and daunting activities for business owners. If you're not so skilled in the writing department, you may want to consider hiring a professional technical writer. I highly recommend that you fully understand what is required in the agency's solicitation before writing your proposal. **Draft your proposal to meet those requirements.**

An agency solicitation is asking for the **what**. Your proposal response tells the agency you will give them the **what** that they want, and in addition, it also includes **how** you're going to give them the what, and **why** you're going to do it that way. Here's some tips for getting started:

Preliminary preparation for writing your proposal or bid

- **Obtain and review the bid package for missing pages or sections.** Gotta make sure everything's there!
- **Understand all the requirements of the bid package.** Do you understand all the requirements of the bid package? If not, make sure to request clarification from the KO.
- **Set-up a kickoff meeting with your magic making team.** Set-up a kickoff meeting with all the personnel involved in writing and carrying out the contracting project. Make sure everyone is on the same page and knows the ins and outs of the bid you're applying for.
- **Prepare your staffing strategies to address personnel needs.** Get the bios of all key personnel with their past performances and references on file.
- **Gather information on corporate past performances.** Get all of your company's previous jobs, projects and references together. Typically three references similar to the project you're pursuing will be needed.

Have everything in order? Alright, now you're ready to write the actual proposal. Below I've given you a general guideline of what is typically included in a proposal response; however, be sure to follow your specific bid instructions.

- **Executive Summary:** This is a summary of the entire proposal. Make it about 1 page in length (or as required by the specifications in the bid).
- **Project Description:** This is the nuts and bolts of how your company will complete the project.
- **Statement of Work (SOW)/Statement of Objectives (SOO):** This section describes how your company will comply with the requirements of the SOW/SOO. Make sure you address every requirement the agency puts forth.
- **Cost and Pricing Data:** This is the breakdown of the costs that will be incurred by your company, including overhead if required.
- **Organization Information:** This is the history and background of your company, including your past performance history, products and services offered. If it's required, include biographies and resumes here too.

- **Conclusion:** This is a summary of the proposal's main points. Have it be about two paragraphs in length.

Now if there's one thing I want you to learn from this step, it's this: **submit your proposal ahead of schedule!** There's nothing more frustrating than spending a large amount of time and energy on something for nothing. By preparing yourself and submitting your proposal well in advance, you'll be sure to avoid any issues involving the deadline. So *check and recheck your delivery contingency plans*. If you're submitting it electronically, have a tech-savvy person handy in case any glitches occur. If you're delivering a physical copy, request a delivery receipt with a time stamp. Whatever you do, make sure it's on time and reaches the right hands.

PERFORMANCE PHASE

- **Perform on the Project**
- **Comply to Legal Obligations**
- **Closeout the Project**

Step Ten: Perform on the Project

Time to get down and dirty.

So you've turned in your proposal, patiently waited for a response (tick-tock-tick-tock)...and WALA –you landed the contract! Congratulations, I knew you could do it! All you needed was a little advice from the Gov Genie.

Now what? It's time to get that project going! I've done my part to help you get your foot in the door of the government market. Now it's your turn to perform and deliver your services and product. You should already have a pretty clear idea of what your plan is from submitting the proposal. Get your project team together and start mapping out more of the specifics of your agenda. Setup general road marks and a rough schedule for project completion. Your contract management team will make or break your project's success. If you need a Contract Manager, please visit www.ncmahq.org.

If you have cash flow concerns, such as trouble with funds for mobilization, there are multiple resources to help you keep your project afloat. Look into options such as: accounts receivable funding, factoring, SBA guaranteed loans, and bridge funding. Reach out to my friends at Government Contractors Association for further assistance.

My one major piece of advice during this step is: **keep a good relationship with the ACO (Administrative Contracting Officer) or the COTR (Contracting Officer's Technical Representative)**. They're the ones who will be reporting back to the agency on your performance. You want them to be fully satisfied with the quality of your work so that you maintain a good reputation within the government market. Don't let your buyer down!

Step Eleven: Comply to Legal Obligations

Follow the Rules!

You're probably thinking, "sheesh, what more could you have to say?!" Not much, but I do want to make sure you cover all your bases. My advice during this step involves compliance. There's a few things you have to look out for when carrying out a contracting project. Here's some good tips to get you on the right track:

- **Read the FAR**, especially Part 3
- **View the agency's website for supplements to the FAR**
- **Report to and communicate with the ACO, COTR and Program Manager.** Generally, the agency will require you update them on the project's advancement on a consistent basis. Make sure you do this in a timely and professional fashion.
- **Engage a qualified CPA firm.** Depending on the size of your contract, the GAO, OMB, and DCAA will have compliance requirements. *WARNING: Some companies lose their contracts because they're not DCAA compliant. Don't have this be you! Get help by reaching out to my friends at GCA (404-955-8080). They can connect you with a CPA firm that understands the government market.
- **Seek Legal Counsel** if you have any questions or issues throughout the contracting process. For example, if there are compliance issues, teaming agreement arrangements, or if you need to file a protest, seeking legal counsel is in your best interest. It's always better to ask someone who knows their stuff than to wing it and have things turn out badly down the road.
- **Create an Ethics Program for your Company.** Make sure all rules and expectations are crystal clear so that there isn't any confusion. It's also important that employees know who to contact if there is an ethical question.

That should about do it as far as compliance goes. Don't be afraid to ask for help and make sure you follow the rules!

Step Twelve: Closeout the Project

Get paid and wrap it up.

We started this journey with you asking me to grant you a contract wish. In other words, you wanted that cash! But I gave you more than that. I taught you how to go out there and win your own contracts in the government market. If you've made it this far, then it's time for me to talk about one of the most important things (and probably what you've been waiting for since the beginning): getting paid.

As you go through the performance process, you will be required to get signatures from various officials. These engagements are what you'll need to get paid. Before you invoice, make sure your accounting system is in place. In addition, make sure you're registered for the correct payment portals. These include:

being registered on SAM.gov and Wide Area Workflow (<https://wawf.eb.mil>). There may be other invoicing portals that you're required to be registered for depending on which agency your contract is with.

Alright, so you've finished carrying out the project and settling all payment arrangements. Time to wrap it up! First, you'll need to do a final walk through with the appropriate agency representatives. Then, get all completion documents signed off. Finally, make sure you are properly paid. During this final phase, your ultimate goal is to make sure the agency is happy with your performance. Why? Because you want them to give you a satisfactory rating for past performance purposes, give you a direct award without bidding (continuation of project), and most critically, **you don't want to get blacklisted on the Excluded Party Listing System (EPLS)**.

Conclusion

Well there you have it! Your journey has finally come to an end. I hope that you have found my advice helpful and rewarding, and that you see my advice-giving as much more beneficial than me simply granting your contract wish.

Time for me to go back into my lamp for some relaxation. You have worn me out! But you're not on your own. I'm leaving you with a valuable guide and some great friends from the Government Contractors Association. Utilize them for any future assistance you may need in the government market. Here's their full contact information one last time:

Government Contractors Association, Inc.
3300 Buckeye Rd.
Suite 510
Atlanta, GA 30341

404-955-8080

www.GovContractors.org
www.GovAssociation.org

info@govcontractors.org

If you ever need me again, you know what to do –rub that lamp. I guess this is goodbye! Good luck in all your government contracting endeavors. Goodbye for now... - Gov Genie™