

# How to Win Government Contracts



- Andrew Smith
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# About GTPAC

- The Georgia Tech Procurement Assistance Center (“GTPAC”) teaches Georgia based companies about all aspects of government contracting – at the federal, state and local level.
- Details at <http://www.gtpac.org>.



- Our assistance comes in the form of teaching, mentoring and coaching clients about the government marketplace. We also provide our clients with a set of electronic tools to research and identify government contracting opportunities.
- In recent years, GTPAC's clients – statewide – have won over \$1 billion annually in federal, state and local government contracts.
- All GTPAC services are offered at no cost.
- Details at <http://www.gtpac.org>



- The Contracting Education Academy at Georgia Tech offers professional education in the field of federal acquisition.
- Defense Acquisition University and Federal Acquisition Institute coursework is taught, along with custom courses.
- Courses range from 2 days to 4 weeks.
- Opportunity for government officials and contractors to learn side-by-side.
- Visit:  
<http://contractingacademy.gatech.edu>

THE  
CONTRACTING  
EDUCATION  
ACADEMY  
AT GEORGIA TECH



# EI2's Programs



**Advanced Technology Development Center (ATDC):** incubator that provides coaching, connections, and a community to foster the development of technology startups in Georgia. [Learn more](#)



**Innovation Corps (I-Corps):** prepares scientists and engineers to extend their focus beyond the laboratory and foster entrepreneurship that will lead to the commercialization of technology. [Learn more](#)



**The Contracting Education Academy:** assists government contracting officials and private industry personnel who are pursuing government contracting opportunities with the appropriate methodology for increasing small business contracting and subcontracting. [Learn more](#)



**Center for Economic Development Research:** fosters local economic development and drives innovation within communities. [Learn more](#)



**Faces of Manufacturing:** was developed by the Georgia Manufacturing Extension Partnership (GaMEP) at Georgia Tech and is supported by Georgia Tech. [Learn more](#)



**Integrated Program for Startups (GT:IPS):** provides training and support to Georgia Tech faculty and students interested in launching companies based on Georgia Tech intellectual property. [Learn more](#)



**Flashpoint:** helps early-stage startups minimize risk and accelerate growth through a process called Startup Engineering. [Learn more](#)



**Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) Business Center:** helps Minority Business Enterprises (MBE) with accessing capital, increasing profitability, creating jobs, and becoming sustainable. [Learn more](#)



**Georgia Manufacturing Extension Partnership (GaMEP):** helps manufacturers increase top-line growth and reduce bottom-line costs through strategic planning, innovation management, process improvement, ISO standards, sustainability, and energy services. [Learn more](#)



**Southeastern Trade Adjustment Assistance Center (SETAAC):** provides federal funding to manufacturing firms that have experienced declines in employment and sales as a result of import competition. [Learn more](#)



**Georgia Tech Procurement Assistance Center (GTPAC):** helps Georgia businesses identify, compete for, and win government contracts in order to sustain and grow their businesses. [Learn more](#)



**Startup Ecosystems:** helps governments, communities, foundations, entrepreneurs, and small businesses foster value creation by applying innovative ideas, technology, and policy to initiatives focused on economic growth. [Learn more](#)



**health@ei2:** transforms the health-delivery system by helping professionals, employers, and consumers achieve higher-quality and lower-cost healthcare solutions. [Learn more](#)



**VentureLab:** transforms the innovations of Georgia Tech faculty, research staff, and students into companies. [Learn more](#)

# #1 Take care of the basics

- SAM registration: <http://www.sam.gov>
- SBA Dynamic Small Business Search (“DSBS”) (part of the SAM registration process):  
[http://dsbs.sba.gov/dsbs/search/dsp\\_quicksearch.cfm](http://dsbs.sba.gov/dsbs/search/dsp_quicksearch.cfm)
- Make sure your SAM registration and DSBS profiles have no spelling or grammar mistakes.
- Know your procurement codes and make sure they are up-to-date.
- NAICS: <https://www.naics.com/search/>
- Federal Supply Codes (“FSC”), Product Service Codes (“PSC”):  
<http://support.outreachsystems.com/resources/tables/pscs/>

# #2 Explore SBA SB Programs

- Congress has instituted certain policies that incentivize the utilization of certain types of small businesses during the federal acquisition process.
- Agencies have “set-aside” and sole source authority for certain types of small businesses under socioeconomic programs:
  - Women-owned small business program
  - Service-disabled Veteran-owned small business program
  - 8(a) business development program
  - HubZone program
- Participating in these programs can incentivize agencies to work with you, so they can meet SBA-mandated requirements and goals.
- It can also incentivize prime contractors to work with you, because they also need to award subcontracts to various small businesses types. (SDBs, WOSB, VOSB, SDVOSB, HubZone, etc.)



# #3 Develop a Marketing Strategy

- Figure out who exactly is buying what you are selling, and then develop a strategy on how to target that specific customer, agency, or command.
- Use a sniper approach, not a “shotgun” approach. Don’t market to everyone, because not everyone in the government is buying what your selling.
- Target your market and understand your prospective customer’s mission, environment, challenges and hot buttons.
- Find a niche. Don’t try to be everything to everyone. Better to do one or two things well then to try and be a jack of all trades. A jack of all trades is a master of none.

# #3 Develop a Marketing Strategy

- Who are your potential customers? Which agencies/activities? What are their needs? Challenges?
- Focus on the end-user's needs or the specific entity within the organization that can drive demand. The contracting office in most cases, simply ensures things are procured fairly and according to the rules. The end-users are the ones driving demand.
- Let the facts and data drive whom to target. Do not target a government entity because of emotion, familiarity, or because you heard a “rumor” it was the best agency to do business with.
- While doing business with a certain agency/command might be right for one business, it might not be right for your business, product or service.

# #3 Develop a Marketing Strategy

- **Some good (and completely free) sources of data for market research:**
- **1. USA Spending** – <http://www.usaspending.gov> – Use to research who within the government is buying the product categories or services you are selling
- **2. Federal Procurement Data System (“FPDS”)** – Authoritative repository of federal procurement award data: <http://www.fpds.gov>
- **3. Acquisition.gov** – Review future acquisition forecasts: <https://www.acquisition.gov/?q=procurement-forecasts>

# #4 Know your competition

- One of the best ways to learn how to be a successful government contractor is to watch the competition.
- Take a broad view of competition – observe your teaming partners, subcontractors, primes, etc. – anyone operating in the same space as you.
- Learn and emulate what they do – and then try to do things better.
- Review their brochures, websites, SAM and DSBS profiles. Try to learn what contracts they have won, when those contracts expire, and position yourself to learn about and exploit their weaknesses.
- Is the agency happy with their performance? Unhappy? Find pricing information (if publicly available).
- Use this strategic knowledge to your advantage.

# #5 Get marketing materials in order

- Have quality marketing materials ready, including: (1) Elevator speech/pitch; (2) Capability Statement; (3) Professional looking website.
- Attention spans today are short. If your marketing materials don't convey the value of your product or service in 10-15 seconds, its not a good marketing document.
- Websites are more important today than ever before. Do not use canned or generic websites that are similar to everyone else's website.
- When responding to RFI's or Source Sought, don't provide a standard, canned response. Research their requirements and understand their challenges. Tailor your response to the specific agency and their needs and requirements. Just as you would tailor a resume when applying for a job, tailor your marketing materials depending on the agency and work you are targeting.
- Emphasize your differentiators – what separates you from other great performers?



# #6 Build relationships and network

- Meet with Small Business Professionals at agency Small Business Offices. They serve as a liaison between private-sector and government agencies.
- Be aware that Small Business Offices do not purchase your products or services, instead they act as “gatekeepers” to screen potential small businesses.
- Do not approach them until you have taken care of the “basics”—and have your marketing materials in place. Make sure you have done the necessary market research so you know what program/opportunity you specifically want to target.
- The best way to market yourself to the government is face-to-face, attend trade shows, industry days, procurement forecasts, and conferences. Network, Network, Network!
- However, be aware that not all conferences are the same, do some due diligence before you pay big \$\$\$.

# #6 Build relationships and network

- The government is risk adverse, they have tight schedules and budgets – the way to win business with them is to **build trust**.
- Relationship building creates trust and can lead to simplified acquisitions, sole-source awards, or to competitive opportunities you might otherwise would have known about.
- Relationship building with other contractors leads to teaming and subcontracting opportunities.
- Be careful not to market during inappropriate times, such as to an agency when an active solicitation you are chasing is under bid as this could trigger procurement integrity issues.
- When you meet with Small Business Professionals, Program Managers and Contracting Officers, focus on discussing the real requirement they want met or solved, do not just reiterate your generic capabilities.
- Marketing by email – not favored. If you do it, be brief, ask for an in-person meeting, and attach your capability statement.

# #7 Consider subcontracting

- If you are a small business new to government contracting, try to subcontract first.
- Difficult to impossible to win a large prime contract as a new federal contractor.
- Make sure you not only market yourself and build relationships with the government, but also work hard to build relationships with other contractors as well.
- You might start out as a sub to a sub.
- Reach out to Small Business Liaison Officers (“SBLOs”) at primes. Understand that these folks are often getting bombarded by requests from small businesses all the time. Be patient but persistent.
- Find ways to differentiate yourself from the competition when marketing to them.

# #7 Consider subcontracting

- Instead of asking them to do your company a favor – tell them what you can do to help them win business or become more competitive. Use a carrot and stick approach.
- This sometimes requires creative thinking – e.g. does your company have special skills or experience with an agency the prime might not have?
- Does your company have special skills, experience, or Intellectual Property that would be particularly beneficial to the prime?
- Try to press the right buttons to get the prime interested in you.
- Figure out ways to complement the prime so they want to work with you. Don't just go to them asking for \$\$\$.
- Help them understand, how helping you, will ultimately help them.

# #8 Past Performance is key

- The federal government puts a heavy premium on past performance. They believe that past performance is indicative of how well you will perform on future contracts.
- Typically Past Performance is a stand-alone evaluation factor in solicitations.
- If you do not have any past performance, make sure to cite to the government when responding to a solicitation any commercial experience you may have that may be similar in nature and scope of the opportunity you are bidding on.
- If you don't have any past performance, do everything you can to gain some. Try to win some small local opportunities or subcontracting jobs to build a past performance record.
- Have an attitude that no job is too small, so you can build up past performance. Nobody starts on the top – start on the bottom and then work your way up.



# #9 Consider Joint Ventures

- Government contracting today is a team sport. Team with other more experienced government contractors or large government contractors to form a Joint Venture to leverage their capabilities and past performance.
- Under the SBA's all small mentor protégé program, Joint Ventures between a mentor and protégé allow the Joint Venture to take on the protégés small business status. This is the carrot you use to get larger government contractors to work with you.
- On a small business set-aside, the mentor (under the all-small program) can do up to 60% of the work, more work than if the mentor was simply a subcontractor on a supply or services contract.
- Often, you are much more likely to win by combining your capabilities with other more experienced government contractors. Contracting Officer is more likely to give you a chance if a larger more experienced government contractor is "backing you."
- Its not unusual today to see JVs with 4 or 5 companies, all working together to strategically win an opportunity. Often, working as a team can be more advantageous than going it alone.

# #10 Market capabilities first, then certs

- When you do get your foot in the door at an agency, or with a prime contractor, make sure to focus first and foremost on your capabilities and how you can solve their problem. This is called focusing on your company's **value proposition** first.
- Explain how your service or product has a positive impact on a project's cost, schedule and performance.
- Only after you lead with your value proposition – should you soft sell your certifications or small business status.
- The government is going to hire you primarily because of your capabilities and how you can help them solve the problem they have. Its not that certifications are unimportant, they are, but focus first on value and then let your certifications seal the deal as a value-add.
- Too many small businesses make the mistake of leading with their certifications when the government purchaser cares first and foremost about capabilities.

# #11 Respond to RFI's, Sources Sought and RFPs

- You can't win if you don't bid. Aggressively pursue opportunities that you have an interest in and can perform.
- Visit FedBizOpps to find contracting opportunities in your industry.
- FedBizOpps is the official website that allows the private sector to electronically access government-wide procurement opportunities: <http://www.fbo.gov/>
- When searching for opportunities on FedBizOpps, respond to appropriate RFI's, Sources Sought, and to opportunities that are a good fit for your business.
- Learn from losing: request a debrief (FAR Part 15 procurements) or brief explanation (FAR Part 8 procurements) promptly every time you receive a notice of unsuccessful offer.
- Learn from winning: request the same when you win to find out what the agency liked about your proposal.

# #12 Don't expect overnight success

- The government market is its own subculture – and if you really want to be successful you need to embrace a long-term strategy of learning the market and the culture.
- Capturing government business takes time and effort – it won't happen overnight. It takes time to build relationships and trust. It may not happen in a year, or three years.
- But if you are persistent and have capabilities that are needed by the government, you will eventually get an opportunity.
- When you get the opportunity, make the most of it. It is difficult to recover from poor past performance.

Thanks for participating...



# QUESTIONS & ANSWERS