

How to Build Your Own Federal Contracting Directory: A Beginner's Guide

FEDERAL CONTRACTING CENTER (FECC)
AN APEX ACCELERATOR

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I. Introduction

In the world of federal contracting, who you know can be just as important as what you know. Building strong relationships with key personnel within government agencies and prime contractors is crucial for accessing opportunities and navigating the often-complex procurement process.

This guide provides a practical, hands-on roadmap for developing an ever-growing, comprehensive federal contracting directory, your key tool for building those essential connections. By following the steps outlined here, you'll gain direct access to decision-makers, streamline communication, facilitate networking, and ultimately increase your chances of securing contracts and subcontracts.

This guide covers how to prepare your business, target specific agencies, and build your contact directory. If you need assistance with any of the topics included in this guide, please contact us at fecc@ddec.pr.gov.

II. Prepare Your Business for Federal Contracting

Before building your contact directory, ensure your business is ready to capitalize on opportunities. This means having a strong foundation in place.

A. Key Preparation Steps:

- **SAM.gov Maintenance:** You're already registered in the System for Award Management (SAM.gov), which is great! Now, it's crucial to maintain your registration. Ensure your SAM.gov profile is always up-to-date with current information. This includes your business address, contact information, NAICS codes, and any other relevant details. An outdated SAM.gov registration can disqualify you from contracting opportunities.
- **Optimizing Your DSBS Profile:** You have a profile in the Dynamic Small Business Search (DSBS) database. Excellent! Now, make sure your DSBS profile truly shines and accurately reflects your business's capabilities. This means using keywords that government buyers might search for, highlighting your past performance, and showcasing your unique value proposition. Think of your DSBS profile as a marketing tool – make it compelling!
- **Capability Statement:** Develop a clear and concise capability statement that highlights your company's expertise and value proposition. This is your business's resume for federal contracting. It should be tailored to specific opportunities whenever possible.
- **Online Presence:** While a professional website and strategic use of social media can significantly enhance your visibility, we understand that not all businesses have

the resources for a dedicated website. In the absence of a website, prioritize your DSBS profile and capability statement. These documents will serve as your primary marketing materials. If possible, consider creating a simple, free online presence using platforms like LinkedIn or a free Google Business Profile. These options can provide a basic online presence without requiring significant investment.

Why is this important? Your directory will be used to market your firm and will help you to develop a strong elevator pitch. Ensuring your marketing materials and online resources are top-notch is essential for converting contacts into contracts. A well-maintained SAM registration and a compelling DSBS profile are the cornerstones of your federal contracting readiness.

III. Determine Your Target Agencies

Targeting the right agencies is crucial for efficient outreach. Instead of trying to contact every agency, focus on a select few that align with your capabilities.

A. Effective Targeting Strategies:

- **Analyze Spending Patterns:** Use resources like FPDS.gov (Federal Procurement Data System) to analyze historical spending and identify potential opportunities.
- **Understand Agency Missions:** Research the missions and priorities of those federal agencies.
- **Review Procurement Forecasts:** Check agency websites for procurement forecasts, which outline their anticipated needs.
- **Assess Competitive Advantages:** Determine what makes your business unique and how it aligns with specific agency needs.
- **Attend Industry Events:** Participate in industry days and conferences hosted by targeted agencies to network and learn about upcoming opportunities.

A targeted approach allows for more personalized outreach, stronger relationships, and a higher chance of securing contracts.

IV. Build Your Directory

This section explains how to build a directory of federal stakeholders.

A. Essential Information for Each Contact:

Simply having a list of names isn't enough. To effectively engage with federal contacts, you need to capture key information that will allow you to personalize your outreach and build meaningful relationships. This section details the essential data points you should collect for each contact in your directory.

- **Agency:**
 - Mission
 - Website
 - Office of Small Business Programs (OSBP) Website
 - Small Business Liaison and Specialists Contact Information
 - Procurement Forecast Website
 - Key Buying Offices or Commands
- **Buyers / Program Managers / Technical Staff / Influencers:**
 - Contact Name
 - Title/Position (e.g., Contracting Officer, Contracting Specialist)
 - Email Address
 - Phone Number
 - Notes (e.g., "Met at industry event," "Followed up on forecast")
 - Date Last Contacted

B. Key Roles in Federal Contracting:

Building a strong network in federal contracting means understanding the different roles and responsibilities within government agencies. This section provides a practical overview of the key personnel you'll interact with, explaining their influence on the contracting process and offering insights into how to best engage with them. By understanding these roles, you can tailor your communication and build stronger, more productive relationships.

- **Contracting Officers (COs):** The primary point of contact for contract execution. They issue solicitations, evaluate proposals, and award contracts.
- **Small Business Specialists/Liaison Officers (SBS/SBLO):** Advocate for small businesses within the agency, providing guidance and connecting them with opportunities.
- **Procurement Center Representatives (PCR):** PCRs review many federal acquisition and procurement strategies, influence opportunities to be set aside for small businesses, conduct market research, provide counseling on the contracting process, and much more.
- **Program Managers (PMs):** Define project requirements and often influence purchasing decisions.
- **Technical Representatives/Subject Matter Experts (SMEs):** Provide technical expertise during the acquisition process.
- **Subcontracting Managers/Small Business Liaison Officers (at Prime Contractors):** Responsible for identifying and working with subcontractors.

C. Where to Find Contact Information:

Finding the right contact information often requires using a combination of resources and strategies. This section explores several effective approaches, from leveraging online databases to utilizing more traditional methods like contacting agency switchboards. **And while it might seem like a simple—even outdated—tactic, never underestimate the power of calling an agency's main switchboard and asking to be directed to the relevant department.** This surprisingly effective, yet often overlooked, strategy can often yield surprisingly quick and direct access to the right people.

- **Agency Websites:** Many agencies list contact information in their contracting or acquisition sections.
- **SAM.gov:** The Contract Opportunities section may provide contact information for contracting officers.
- **FPDS.gov:** You can often find contact information for contracting personnel associated with past contracts.
- **District SBA office:** The district offices maintain a close relationship with local federal agencies and contracting personnel.
- **Agency Procurement Forecasts:** These forecasts often include contact information.
- **Small Business Liaison Offices (SBLO) / Offices of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU):** These offices are designed to help small businesses.
- **Industry Events and Conferences:** Networking events offer opportunities to meet government buyers.
- **Subcontracting Networks:** Connect with prime contractors for potential subcontracting opportunities.
- **LinkedIn:** Search for procurement professionals at targeted agencies.

Remember: Calling the agency's main switchboard and asking to be directed to the relevant department could be surprisingly effective.

V. Maintain and Grow Your Directory

Your directory is a living document that requires ongoing maintenance.

A. Key Maintenance Practices:

- **Regular Updates:** Review and update your directory regularly, as contact information changes.
- **Consistent Outreach:** Actively engage with your contacts through follow-up emails and event attendance.

- **Track Interactions:** Keep detailed notes of all interactions to personalize future communications.
- **Strategic Sharing:** Consider networking and exchanging information with other small businesses.

VI. Example of a Directory

This section provides an example of a single federal agency profile, demonstrating how to build your own comprehensive federal buyer's directory using a spreadsheet program like Microsoft Excel. Spreadsheets offer efficient organization, flexibility, collaboration, and data analysis. The example below highlights key data points to include for each agency profile within your directory. You can customize your complete directory by adding or removing columns to fit your specific business needs.

This example focuses on a janitorial company targeting the federal market in Puerto Rico. Here's how the directory was developed:

1. **Identifying Target Agencies:** A quick search in the Federal Procurement Data System (FPDS) revealed that federal agencies in Puerto Rico awarded \$108,337,995.77 for janitorial services between 2021 and 2024. Over 50% of these purchases were made by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), followed by the General Services Administration's Public Buildings Service (GSA), and U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

Agency	Amount 2021-2024
VETERANS AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF	\$56,058,739.14
PUBLIC BUILDINGS SERVICE	\$22,626,686.33
U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION	\$9,216,873.32
DEPT OF THE ARMY	\$8,365,443.83
U.S. COAST GUARD	\$2,996,121.05
DEPT OF THE NAVY	\$2,091,559.57
DEPT OF THE AIR FORCE	\$1,545,180.84
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION	\$1,407,923.77
ANIMAL AND PLANT HEALTH INSPECTION SERVICE	\$887,080.76
FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION	\$710,043.15
DEFENSE COMMISSARY AGENCY (DECA)	\$599,720.85
FOREST SERVICE	\$436,189.45
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY	\$251,149.60
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE	\$250,104.84
U.S. IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT	\$249,454.78
FARM PRODUCTION AND CONSERVATION BUSINESS CENTER	\$203,547.56
TRANSPORTATION SECURITY ADMINISTRATION	\$191,669.41
NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION	\$175,596.00
DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION	\$50,580.00
DEPT OF DEFENSE EDUCATION ACTIVITY (DODEA)	\$24,331.52
Total	\$108,337,995.77

2. **Determining why the agency should be targeted:** In this example, VA is selected as a targeted agency because:
 - The alignment of the companies' offerings with VA's purchases
 - Past spending: VA awarded over \$56M in contracts
 - Contracting preferences: The company is a certified service-disabled veteran owned business.
3. **Gathering Agency Information:** Starting with VA, the agency website provided valuable information, including mission statements, Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) information (formerly OSBP), guidance on doing business with the agency, contact information for Small Business Liaisons, procurement forecasts, and key buying offices/departments.
4. **Gathering Buyer Information:** Initial buyer contacts were identified through searches of contract opportunities in the System for Award Management (SAM.gov), contacting the APEX Accelerator, and consulting the local Small Business Administration (SBA) office.
5. **Next Steps:** A logical next step would be to contact the Small Business Liaison at each agency to request a capability briefing meeting and seek their assistance in arranging meetings with relevant buyers. You should also contact your [APEX Accelerator](#) to review your strategy.

To further assist you in creating your own directory and navigating the federal contracting landscape, we offer a suite of resources on our website at <https://federalcontracting.ddec.pr.gov/>:

- **Directory Template:** A downloadable template pre-formatted with essential columns.
- **Capability Statement Presentation:** Guidance on crafting a compelling capability statement.
- **Market Research Presentation:** Insights into conducting effective market research.

