

Puerto Rico takes center stage in the latest national newsletter from the Department of War, APEX Accelerator program. As the federal marketplace becomes increasingly competitive, the Federal Contracting Center (FeCC), an APEX Accelerator of the Department of Economic Development and Commerce, continues to prove that geographic boundaries are no barrier to excellence.

In this sixth installment of the insight series, this feature goes behind the scenes with the Program Managers and Counselors whose strategic guidance is turning local potential into national impact. From breakthrough success stories to expert perspectives on navigating complex regulations. Discover how Puerto Rico is reshaping its economic future through the power of the APEX Accelerator Program.

The Wisdom Within: Conversations with the People Behind the Program



Pedro Acevedo

*Program Manager/State Director
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From the Military to the PM Desk

My journey began in the 17th Combat Engineer Battalion in Texas, where I first learned the weight of supporting the warfighter. As a young officer, I saw firsthand that mission success greatly depends on the reliability of the supply chain. Back then, we were operating with microfiches and manual typewriters, procurement was an obscure, uphill battle. I lived the frustration of facing immense logistical hurdles just to get the critical products our soldiers needed to stay mission ready.

Driven to bridge the gap between the front lines and the supply chain, I joined the 1102 Series Internship Program at the USA Aviation Command in St. Louis, Mo. It was there that the “complex machinery” of federal contracting finally clicked. I realized that supporting the warfighter is a profound responsibility carried by every procurement professional. After completing my 1102 internship, I returned home to Puerto Rico in 1987 to join the PTAC (now

APEX Accelerator) during its infancy and formative years.

Bridging the Gap: My Evolution as a Counselor and Program Manager

While my military and 1102 background gave me a technical edge, it initially created a rigid perspective. I viewed the world through a lens of strict government compliance, sometimes mistaking a small business' struggle for a lack of effort.

The true turning point came when I took a two-year sabbatical to work as a federal contract manager for a manufacturing firm. Stepping into the contractor's shoes was a revelation. For the first time, I felt the weight of regulations from the "other side." I saw how government-driven delays and rigid rules could threaten a company's survival. That "boots-on-the-ground" industry experience taught me that empathy is not a soft skill, it is a strategic requirement. To be an effective PM / counselor, I had to reconcile three distinct realities:

- The urgency of the soldier in the field.
- The constraints of the Contracting Officer governed by strict regulations.
- The economic realities of the vendors.

Can you describe your leadership style and management approach? What personal experiences or values influence your leadership style and approach to managing the APEX Accelerator Program?

My leadership style comes from the heart as much as from experience. It has been shaped over more than 40 years of public service, from the U.S. Army and the U.S. Army Aviation Command to my years supporting entrepreneurs through the Small Business Development Center, the Women's Business Institute, and the Department of Economic Development and Commerce. Each stage of my career taught me something different about people, responsibility and purpose.

The most important thing those four decades gave me is a deep appreciation for service. I learned that leadership is not about titles or authority, it's about showing up for others, listening to their needs, and helping them succeed even when the path is difficult. Working with soldiers, small business owners, and community leaders taught me to lead with humility, patience, and a genuine desire to help people grow.

In the Puerto Rico APEX Accelerator, I try to bring that same spirit every day. I focus on being present for my team and our clients, creating a safe environment to ask questions, and guiding them through challenges with empathy and clarity. My goal is simple: to use everything I've learned over a lifetime of service to lift others, strengthen our island's small businesses, and continue giving back to the community that has given me so much.

Outside of your professional life, what are some of your hobbies or interests? How do you find a work/life balance and inspiration outside of work?

Outside of work, I enjoy spending time with my family and staying connected to the land through

a very small scale agriculture farming. Tending to the soil, growing what I can, and watching things take root is both grounding and inspiring for me. It gives me a sense of balance and reminds me of the importance of patience and steady growth, values that carry into my work as well. These quiet moments outdoors help me recharge so I can continue serving our clients and community with energy and purpose.

What Excites Me Today

What keeps me energized is the opportunity to be a “translator” between these worlds. I am inspired by the growth of our local defense industrial base, and the chance to show small businesses that the government market isn’t an impossible maze; it’s a partnership.

Seeing a local business successfully navigate a complex contract to deliver a high-quality solution is incredibly rewarding. At the end of the day, whether we are in uniform, behind a desk, or on a factory floor, we are all still supporting the warfighter.



THE WISDOM WITHIN

Adriana Acarón Porrata-Doria

*Procurement Counselor
Puerto Rico APEX Accelerator*

My professional background is defined by a diverse range of expertise in design, finance, and government operations. After graduating from Syracuse University with a degree in Environmental Design and a concentration in Interiors, I spent a decade in Puerto Rico as a Designer and Project Manager. This period was foundational, allowing me to master project administration and high-level customer service.

Driven by an interest in the administrative side of business, I transitioned to a local government bank. There, I gained deep insight into the island’s commercial landscape, specifically regarding business operations, loan closings, and the complex permit requirements for new ventures. Later, I joined the Puerto Rico Trade and Export Company, where I expanded my knowledge of human resources and organizational management.

Today, I leverage my bilingual skills and diverse experience at the Federal Contracting Center to support the growth of local businesses.

I have served as a counselor with the Federal Contracting Center for nearly nine years. I initially joined the team as an Outreach Coordinator, brought on for my bilingual skills and customer service background. When the opportunity arose to transition into a counseling role, I embraced it eagerly. Though federal contracting was a new field for me at the time, my passion for professional growth and my drive to master complex systems allowed me to excel. My background aligns perfectly with the mission of the APEX Accelerator; having worked extensively in both the banking sector and local government, I possess a deep understanding of the operational challenges local businesses face, from managing required accounts to navigating the permit process.

What drives my passion for this program is serving our business community and playing an active role in Puerto Rico's economic development. Furthermore, I can educate our local commerce in the federal marketplace as well as the nuances of the defense and local government industrial bases, and their respective procurement processes.

What are some lesser-known facts about the Puerto Rico APEX Accelerators program that you would like people to know?

Beyond our standard counseling, we have served as a linguistic bridge for many entities and agencies. We want our peers to know that our virtual training events, while primarily conducted in Spanish, are open to any Accelerator across the country that has clients who may feel more comfortable learning in their native language. Furthermore, we are uniquely hosted by the Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DDEC), which places us at the very heart of Puerto Rico's overarching economic strategies and industrial efforts. We are part of the island's growth engine.



When the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) arrived in Puerto Rico in August 2025 for Operation Southern Spear, it triggered a significant surge in military activity across the island. With over 4,500 Sailors and Marines arriving aboard the Iwo Jima Amphibious Ready Group, the Department of War (DoW) required immediate, agile infrastructure to support a joint force buildup.

To meet this demand, the Air Expeditionary Wing established operations at Roosevelt Roads in Ceiba, PR. This mission relied on Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations, a model prioritizing rapidly deployable infrastructure over permanent logistics bases. Executing this required a private sector partner capable of extraordinary speed and reliability, particularly as the Roosevelt Roads facilities had been dormant for many years, presenting significant infrastructure and logistical challenges for modern operations.

Building a “City” in Eleven Days

AGMA Security Service, Inc., a Puerto Rico-based 8(a) and HUBZone small business, was selected to manage full-spectrum life-support operations. The scope was immense, requiring the coordination of power generation, potable water delivery hygiene systems, and dining facility support for up to 500 personnel.

The defining challenge was the “Crunch Factor.” Due to shifting mission requirements, AGMA was given only eleven days to transition from planning to full operational capability. In less than two weeks, the company transformed an undeveloped site into a functioning expeditionary support environment, essentially building a temporary city to sustain deployed warfighters.

Local Impact and Mission Readiness

As a local firm, AGMA leveraged its deep community ties to launch a hiring initiative in the Municipality of Ceiba and the surrounding areas. At the height of the mission, over 200 employees and subcontractors were engaged, providing a direct economic boost to the region while supporting national security. During the initial months of the surge, AGMA delivered over \$5 million in critical logistics services.

The APEX Accelerator Advantage

AGMA's ability to execute under such a tight timeline was the result of years of intentional preparation through the APEX Accelerator Program. By working with APEX, AGMA maintained its critical certifications, refined its capability statements to meet DoW standards, and developed the professional readiness required to respond immediately when the opportunity arose.

Success in Action: RCMDO Logistics



Rapid Response and Mission-Critical Support The Mission

A Catalyst for Readiness When the Air Expeditionary Wing and Marine Expeditionary Unit deployed to Puerto Rico, the mission required an immediate, island-wide logistical response. RCMDO Logistics served as a primary local partner, managing a large-scale operation that spanned multiple installations across the Island.

Operational Excellence in Action

RCMDO acted as a "force multiplier" for the DoW, adopting a "no is not an option" philosophy to meet fluid requirements with minimal notice. Key contributions included:

- Full-Spectrum Life Support: Delivering everything from heavy equipment and construction materials to complete living accommodations and equipped office trailers.
- Extreme Agility: On December 23rd, RCMDO received an urgent request from the Marine Expeditionary Unit for transportation; the firm mobilized its network securing and coordinating all logistics within hours for a 24-hour turnaround.
- Scale and Scope: Within the first five months, RCMDO mobilized approximately \$7.62 million in services and materials, often with only one to two days' notice.

Strengthening the Defense Industrial Base

Beyond immediate logistics, RCMDO's performance bolstered the long-term resilience of the local supply chain:

- Local Economic Impact: The firm engaged more than 30 Puerto Rico small and medium businesses across multiple trades to support the mission.
- Workforce Investment Impact: RCMDO initiated an accelerated hiring effort that fostered local professional growth, including bringing on a young professional who returned to the island for this opportunity.

Lessons Learned:

- Preparation is Foundational: Maintaining certifications and staying current on procurement standards allowed for an immediate transition into active operations.
- Vendor Networks are Lifelines: Established relationships with local suppliers were essential to meeting high-priority requirements during holiday closures and tight deadlines.
- Agile Resource Management: The ability to scale the workforce rapidly was critical for sustaining around-the-clock operational support.

The Role of the APEX Accelerator

The Puerto Rico APEX Accelerator was instrumental in RCMDO's readiness, providing strategic guidance since 2016 to maintain HUBZone and 8(a) certifications. Through strategic market research, APEX identified high-priority federal requirements suited for RCMDO's capabilities and assisted in navigating complex federal regulations. Furthermore, specialized counseling empowered the firm to overcome significant technical and logistical barriers. This partnership ensured RCMDO was ready on day one to support the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Marine Corps in their primary mission operations.