



Qualifying as a Small Business for Federal Contracting & Finding Opportunities

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To compete in the federal contracting space, companies must determine whether they qualify as a small business under the Small Business Administration (SBA) size standards. This qualification is based on North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes combined with SBA-defined thresholds for annual receipts or number of employees. Understanding these requirements and registering correctly in SAM.gov is critical for eligibility. This paper also provides other helpful information for small businesses to compete effectively in federal markets.

I. Steps to Determine Small Business Status

- Identify your primary and secondary NAICS codes that align with your business.
- Use the SBA Size Standards Tool to determine if you qualify as small under those NAICS codes.
- Track solicitations: When an RFP is released, check which NAICS code is assigned — your size status is determined by that specific code.

II. SBA Table of Size Standards

The SBA's Table of Size Standards lists size thresholds by NAICS code. These thresholds are typically:

- Number of Employees (e.g., 500 employees)
- Average Annual Receipts (e.g., \$34 million)

The SBA Size Standards Tool allows companies to easily determine requirements to qualify as a small business for their particular NAICS codes.

Helpful links:

- SBA Table of Size Standards (PDF / XLS):
<https://www.sba.gov/document/support-table-size-standards>
- SBA Size Standards Tool: <https://www.sba.gov/federal-contracting/contracting-guide/size-standards/size-standards-tool>

- SBA Size Standards Overview: <https://www.sba.gov/federal-contracting/contracting-guide/size-standards>
- 13 CFR Part 121 – Size Standards Regulation: <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-13/chapter-I/part-121>

III. Registering on SAM.gov

To do business with the U.S. government, companies must register in the System for Award Management (SAM.gov).

Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. Go to <https://sam.gov/>
2. Create a Login.gov account (if you do not already have one).
3. Log into SAM.gov and click “Register Entity”.
4. Follow the prompts to:
 - i. Enter entity information—you will need information such as Company legal name, Taxpayer Identification Number, etc.
 - ii. Select NAICS codes
 - iii. Answer SBA size questions
 - iv. Upload any required documentation
5. Submit your registration. Processing can take several weeks.
6. Once approved, you will appear in the SAM.gov public database, making you eligible for federal contracts.

IV. SBA Certification for Set-Asides

In addition to qualifying as a small business, companies may seek SBA certifications that provide access to separate set-aside contracts:

- 8(a) Small Disadvantaged Business
- Women-Owned Small Business (WOSB/EDWOSB)
- Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB)HUBZone Program

V. Finding Opportunities Set Aside for Small Business

Once registered, companies can locate federal opportunities specifically designated for small businesses through several official platforms:

- SAM.gov Contract Opportunities (<https://sam.gov/content/opportunities>) is the official portal for federal solicitations over \$25,000.

You can filter by Set-Aside type (e.g., Small Business, 8(a), WOSB, HUBZone, SDVOSB), NAICS code, Agency, and Place of Performance.

- Example: Selecting “Total Small Business Set-Aside” shows only opportunities reserved for small firms.

SBA Dynamic Small Business Search (DSBS)

- -DSBS Tool (<https://dsbs.sba.gov/>) is primarily used by contracting officers and prime contractors to find small business partners.
- While not a bidding system, accurate DSBS profiles increase your visibility for set-aside opportunities.

GSA eBuy

- -GSA eBuy (<https://www.ebuy.gsa.gov/ebuy/>) provides access to set-aside RFQs if you hold a GSA Schedule contract.

Agency Small Business Offices

- These offices publish forecasts of contracting opportunities that include planned small business set-asides. Links included in Section 6.

Networking & Outreach

- Attend Industry Days and Small Business Outreach Events hosted by federal agencies.

VI. GSA and Small Business Office Information

Many government activities utilize GSA Multiple Award Schedules (MAS) to purchase supplies/services or buy directly via GSA schedules. Becoming a GSA schedule holder provides a contractual mechanism for all government agencies to purchase from the schedule holder, but it does not guarantee any work.

- <https://www.gsa.gov/buy-through-us/purchasing-programs/multiple-award-schedule/help-with-mas-contracts-to-sell-to-government/roadmap-to-get-a-mas-contract>

The Office of Small Business provides a helpful contracting guide, found at the following link: <https://www.sba.gov/federal-contracting/contracting-guide>

Due to the de-centralized nature of government contracting, it is also useful for small businesses to work through the Offices of Small Business Programs at any agency where they are seeking contracts. These offices do regular outreach and host events to educate and draw more companies into the government small business industrial base. Outreach events are posted to their respective websites. These offices are closer to the contracting buyers & requirements holders and review pending requirements for potential set-aside. The following are links to those OSBPs:

- DoD OSBP: <https://business.defense.gov/>
- DLA: <https://www.dla.mil/Small-Business/>
- GSA OSBP: <https://www.gsa.gov/small-business>
- Army: <https://www.army.mil/osbp>

- Navy/Marines:
https://www.secnav.navy.mil/smallbusiness/Pages/OSBP_Resources.aspx
- Air Force: <https://www.airforcesmallbiz.af.mil/>
- DHS: <https://www.dhs.gov/osdbu>

VII. Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification (CMMC) Framework

The Department of War (DoW) now requires all contractors and subcontractors that handle sensitive government information to comply with the Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification (CMMC) framework. CMMC is a standardized set of cybersecurity requirements designed to protect Controlled Unclassified Information (CUI) and Federal Contract Information (FCI) across the defense industrial base. For small businesses entering the market, this means you must demonstrate that your company has the proper cybersecurity practices and controls in place before you can win or perform most DoW or DoD contracts. The certification levels range from basic cyber hygiene to advanced security practices, depending on the sensitivity of the data your company will access. Preparing for CMMC involves assessing your IT systems, closing any security gaps, and passing an independent third-party audit—an important step to show the government that your business can be trusted with national defense information.

VIII. Conclusion

Qualifying as a small business in federal contracting requires understanding your NAICS codes, verifying eligibility via the SBA Size Standards Tool, and completing registration in SAM.gov. Beyond basic small business status, programs like the 8(a) Business Development Program provide significant advantages through sole-source and set-aside opportunities. Once certified, businesses can leverage resources like SAM.gov, DSBS, GSA, and agency forecasts to identify opportunities. By aligning registrations, certifications, and opportunity searches, you can position your company for long-term growth in the federal marketplace.