

Public Libraries Briefcase

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Fun with Federal Procurement

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The prospect of assisting a patron through the Federal Contracting maze can be a little intimidating. However, there are many resources that will assist patrons in establishing a relationship with Uncle Sam. This article outlines the beginning steps to getting your patrons in business.

Benefits

Business patrons are interested in becoming contractors or suppliers to the federal government for good reason. There are many advantages to working with the government, and some drawbacks.

Good:

- Government pays its bills.
- Government is a huge client.
- Government wants to work with small businesses and is required to by law.
- Most government resources are now online for free, including many that were available only for pay before.
- The Federal Government operates in every state.

Bad:

- It can take years to become a government contractor.
- More than average paperwork - many companies hire a government procurement specialist out of necessity.
- Government can back out of a contract without penalties.

Basics

When your patron has decided that he is ready for his business to handle government contracting there are a few steps he will need to take.

First, the company will also need to get a DUNS number from D&B (formerly known as Dun & Bradstreet) at <http://mycredit.dnb.com/search-for-duns-number/>. This is a free service. Your patrons should not feel pressured to buy any other products; just the DUNS number is needed. The company will then need to register with the Central Contractor Registration. This can be done at <https://www.uscontractorregistration.com/>.

Your patron will also want to become familiar with the Federal Acquisition Regulations at <http://www.acquisition.gov/far/>. This site also includes amendments.

Looking for Contracts

The most popular source for searching for Federal Contracts is the Federal Business Opportunities website, for free at <http://www.cbd-net.com/>. This website has replaced the old Commerce Business Daily.

It is also important to establish face-to-face ties with the agency that your patron is interested in doing business with, even more than with commercial customers. A great way of doing this is to attend procurement seminars sponsored by local elected officials. These offer many things: sessions on how to work effectively with the government, the opportunity to find out what government projects are transpiring nearby and most important, the opportunity to meet with the people in charge of these projects.

Also, while your patron is contacting their Congressman or Senator's office, they can also check on legislation going through both houses. THOMAS is also a good source for federal legislation information at: <http://thomas.loc.gov>.

Help is Available

PTAP (Procurement Technical Assistance Centers) - These government centers assist and train businesses how to contract with the government. Many times this will also include not just the Federal government, but also state and local governments. Find your local PTAP at the APTAC website: <http://www.aptac-us.org/>.

The Small Business Administration is also a good place to turn to for information. SBA/SBDC often works closely with PTAP offices. Their Business Opportunities webpage is beautifully put together and touches on all the resources needed to sell to the government:<http://www.sba.gov/businessop/index.html>.

Most agencies have small business offices and can help your patron contact decision-makers.

Disadvantaged Businesses

The government is often required to sets aside part of their contracts especially for

- Small businesses
- Women-owned businesses
- HUBZone businesses
- 8(a)
- Minority
- And many other special business categories

Patrons can talk about this with their PTAP contact.

Subcontracting

Subcontract is not something that should be overlooked. Becoming a federal contractor usually takes several years. This is a much easier way of breaking into Federal Contracting and testing to see if a business is ready for working with the government. <http://web.sba.gov/subnet> - SUB-Net = Subcontracting website run by SBA. Local PTAP's should have information on available subcontracting opportunities.

General Help websites:

<http://www.about.com> - Keyword: Federal Procurement

<http://www.library.okstate.edu/govdocs/browsetopics/procurem.html> - List of Federal Procurement

http://www.firstgov.gov/Business/Business_Gateway.shtml - FirstGov's Business page

http://www.business.gov/topics/government_contracting/ - Government Contracting page on Business.gov

Subscription Databases:

GovSearch by Carroll Publishing (<http://www.carrollpub.com>)

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Disclaimer: This publication has been placed on the web for the convenience of BRASS members. Posted 21 November 2005.; Links updated November 2014.