

Breaking into the Government Marketplace by Subcontracting

Breaking into the Government marketplace requires knowledge. If you don't have that knowledge, one way to get started is to work with someone who does. In the Government marketplace, business is often pursued by teams instead of single companies. One company is the prime contractor, and the others are subcontractors. By becoming a subcontractor, you can break into the marketplace more easily.

The prime contractor can help you understand the acquisition regulations and to complete the paperwork process. The prime contractor can also help you with the government's requirements during performance. The best part is that the prime contractor will take care of finding the opportunities and knowing who to talk to within the vast Federal Government bureaucracy. All you have to do is find the prime contractor and make the case for why having you on the team will help them win.

One approach to finding a prime is to find work currently being done that you would like to support. Find out who is doing that work now. Then find out when the contract expires and if it will be replaced. Government contracts typically run for several years. If you can find one that is about a year away from expiring, you have time to get to know the company, let them know that you would like to team with them on the re-compete, and make the case for how you can help.

Try to identify the project manager and business development manager responsible for pursuing a specific opportunity within a company. Most large contractors keep a subcontractor database. And while it probably doesn't hurt to be in it, you really want to get to know the people who will determine the bid strategies for the work you are interested in since most teams are really built from personal networking contacts.

The most important thing to work on is your value to the prime contractor. The only reason they have to give up work to you is that they are more likely to win the work with you than without you. This could be because you have recognized niche capabilities, relevant resources or intellectual property, a local presence, or other discriminating factor.

Another potential reason that a large prime contract might need you is that some contracts require a certain percentage of the work to be performed by small businesses and sometimes by small-disadvantaged businesses. You should find out whether you qualify as a small or small-disadvantaged business. Many agencies have groups within their procurement offices that help small businesses. You may also be able to contact an agency you are targeting to find out what opportunities they have coming up with a small business requirement and who the incumbent prime contractors are.