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Finding Government Contracts

There are many opportunities for substantial contracts with the US Government. However, finding your way through all the Govt. websites and learning some of the unique Govt. nomenclature and acronyms can be a time-consuming task. In this article I will discuss some basics and key indicators that should save you a considerable amount of time.

First, some basic terms you should know:

- Dun and Bradstreet (B&D) Registration
 - ▶ You probably already have this, but if not your company needs to apply
 - ▶ Their website is:
<http://www.dnb.com>
- Contractors Central Registration (CCR)
 - ▶ You must be registered in CCR to do business with the Govt.
 - ▶ Their website is:
<https://www.bpn.gov/ccr/>
- Online Representations and Certifications Application (ORCA)
 - ▶ Required to receive an award from the Govt.
 - ▶ Their website is:
<http://orca.bpn.gov>
- Federal Business Opportunities (FBO) website
 - ▶ This is your main website for finding opportunities for Govt. contracts
 - ▶ Their website is:
<https://www.fbo.gov>
- Business Partner Network
 - ▶ A very helpful source of information
 - ▶ Contains links to CCR, SBA, ORCA and FBO
 - ▶ Their website is: <https://www.bpn.gov>
- The Commercial and Government Entity (CAGE) Code
 - ▶ Required for Govt. contracts
 - ▶ The CAGE request process is incorporated into the CCR registration
- Federal Service Desk
 - ▶ Contains great info on how to register in CCR
 - ▶ Their website is: <https://www.fsd.gov/app/answers/list>
- Small Business Administration
 - ▶ Registration is very helpful in getting awards as many contracts are set-aside for small businesses
 - ▶ Their website is:
<http://www.sba.gov>



- North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes
 - ▶ ORCA and CCR require you to select these codes that describe your business
 - ▶ You will find the codes are non-specific but adequate to describe the kind of work or services you can provide
 - ▶ Check out categories under codes 221, 236, 237, and 238 for a start
- Product Service Codes (PSC) and Federal Supply Classification (FSC) codes
 - ▶ Only a few of these apply to construction work, for example:
 - ▶ Y—Construction of structures and facilities
 - ▶ Z—Maintenance, repair, and alteration of real property

The foregoing is a lot to take in at first glance, but don't get discouraged. You only need to accomplish each task one step at-a-time. The most time-intensive tasks are getting registered in CCR and ORCA.

If you have never searched for Request for Proposals (RFP) or Request for Quotations (RFQ) from the Government; the best place to get a feel for how things work, is the FBO website. This will be the main emphasis of this article.

The first step is to go to the Federal Business Opportunities website:

<https://www.fbo.gov>

- ▶ Click on "Find Opportunities"
- ▶ In the "Keyword/Solicitation#" box type in: Construction Projects
- ▶ Select "Last 30 Days" in the "Posted Date" drop-down menu
- ▶ Click "Search"
- ▶ This will give you an idea of what type of projects are available

- ▶ Clicking on a single project shows you details of the solicitation
- ▶ If there are numerous entries (denoting changes or revisions) you will be able to backtrack to the original solicitation when you will find a link to the "Solicitation" or "Synopsis" on the webpage
- ▶ Important note: FBOs programming does not like use of the back button. If you need to go back to the opportunities list, use the "Return to Opportunities" button near the top of the page. This will save you a lot of time and frustration!
- ▶ There are many things that can frustrate and discourage you during your searches for work. Many of the posting are limited to contractors already working on the projects. These are often noted on the opportunities list as "Special Notices" in the "type/set-aside" column. You may also see "Awards" in this column. You can skip that opportunity unless you want to see who won the contract and at what bid price.

The better way to search for opportunities is to set up one or more a "Search Agents". There are many benefits to using search agents, including email notifications and quick searches individualized to your specific criteria. To be able to set up search agents and receive customized alerts you will need to have a DUNS number and be registered in CCR.

Once you are registered on FBO, you can log in as a "Vendors/Citizen". Next, click on the "Opportunities" tab. At the top of the web page you will see a tab marked "Search Agents"; click on this tab. Now you can create a new search

agent by clicking on the "Add New Search Agent" box located on this page. Fill in the required data. You can limit searches geographically or by appropriate set-aside code, but most importantly, you can specify the type of work you are interested in by selecting the NAICS Code and the Classification Codes that describe your specialty. You should also set up a schedule for the search agent to run on. I have mine set up to run daily. This saves a great amount of time later on when you receive your email alerts or want to run the search agent manually. By using search agents; you will not be overwhelmed with projects that don't meet your criteria.

The next tip is for sorting through the email alerts you will receive. Below is an example of an alert that I received for Construction projects:

*Saturday, January 28, 2012, 07:59 am
Dear Paul:*

Your FBO Opportunity Search Agent called: 'construction projects' has identified the following opportunities that have either been newly posted or modified and match your search criteria.

Title: RECOVERY—Z—PROJECT NUMBER 16040, Sam Rayburn Dam and Reservoir, TX

Sol. #: W9126G10R0091

Agency: Department of the Army

Office: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

*Location: USACE District, Fort Worth
Posted On: Jan 27, 2012 2:40 pm*

Base Type: Award Notice

Link: <https://www.fbo.gov/spg/USA/COE/DACA63/Awards/W9126G10C0055P00003.html>

Note that the second-to-last line is entitled "Base Type". In this example the base type is "Award Notice". If I am

looking for new opportunities, I can skip this one and look for those labeled “Pre-solicitation” or “Combined Synopsis/Solicitation”. I usually look at this Base Type line first. This allows me to scan for new opportunities more quickly.

It has been a long time since I first learned all of this, as I stared back in 1993, and learned it one step at-a-time. So I may have forgotten a step or two. However, there are lots of guides and good tutorials on the FBO site and individual help can be obtained by calling the Federal Service Desk. They have been very helpful to me in the past. These links and instructions appear on the “My FBO” web page.

Updates at Press Time: The Government is consolidating several of their websites. You can now find the former websites for CCR and ORCA at <https://www.sam.gov>. SAM stands for “System for Award Management”; yet another government acronym, but you can forget CCR and OCRA-not a bad deal. When I logged onto CCR on August 8th; I was automatically re-directed to the SAM website—pretty slick.

I also should explain Government fiscal year-end buying: Like many corporations I have worked for; the

amount of money you spend in a given fiscal year has a direct impact on the amount you can budget for and spend the following year. For this reason there is some frantic buying going on during August and September. Government contracting personnel are under great pressure to spend all the money, in the budgets they are responsible for, before the end of the Government’s fiscal year (September 30th). The closer it gets to the end of September, the less amount of time you will have to respond to RFQs and RFPs. Where you may have seen RFQs with response deadlines of several weeks (or even months) in April or May; come September-it may only be a matter of days. Contracting officers and specialists will be working long days and even weekends during this end-of-year time period. It is sort of a “feeding frenzy” for spending money by awarding contracts. They don’t need to payout all the money by the end of September, but it must be obligated by then. During this period I check FBO, and a few other Govt. websites, on an hourly basis. Last year, one of my clients did the majority of their Government business in the last five weeks of the fiscal year. If you really want to compete

for those year-end contracts you need to get plugged-in and closely monitor opportunities during August and September. You may also see increased activity in the amount of small projects and contracts at this time of year. Many times the contracting folks are prioritizing which goods and services to buy by the contract dollar amount, rather than some other criteria.

Finding Federal Government work can be a big boost to your company’s business. There are many new projects announced daily. I hope I have offered up some good tips to save you time getting started and wading through the daily announcements. There is no need to feel intimidated; lots of good help is available from the Federal Service Desk and online tutorials. Once you learn a few new terms you will find easy to stay abreast of the government contracts up for grabs.

Good luck finding U.S. Government contracts. If you have any questions drop me a line at Machine Control Online and I will do my best to help you out. ☐

Paul Hahn has more than 30 years of experience, and has held senior management positions at Carl Zeiss, Nikon, Geotronics, Spectra Precision, and Trimble, and is now a consultant.