

GUIDE TO GOVERNMENT CONTRACTING

A Handbook for Kentucky Businesses



Kentucky Procurement Technical Assistance Center

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INTRODUCTION

The Kentucky Procurement Technical Assistance Center (KY PTAC) is administered by the Kentucky Small Business Development Center (KSBDC) within the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment in partnership with the Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development.

The Kentucky PTAC is funded in part through a cooperative agreement from the Department of Defense (DoD) through a program that is administered by their Defense Logistics Agency (DLA). The content of any written materials or verbal communications of the PTAC does not necessarily reflect the official views of or imply endorsement by DoD or DLA.

The mission of the KY PTAC is to help Kentucky firms market their goods and services to federal, state, and local government agencies. The vast majority of services offered by PTAC are *free*.

KY PTAC offers the following services to business firms located in Kentucky that are interested in selling to government agencies:

- **Marketing** – PTAC can help your company identify contracting opportunities with federal, state, and local government agencies through a computerized bid matching program, as well as other market research services.
- **Consulting** – PTAC procurement specialists are available to help you in all phases of government contracting. Examples of assistance include: helping with vendor registration procedures, understanding government contracting rules and regulations, and assistance with preparing a government bid, quote, or proposal.
- **Training** – Group instruction on a variety of government contracting topics such as marketing to the government, how to prepare winning proposals, and more. To learn about training and networking opportunities in your area, contact the KY PTAC office at (859) 257-7668, PTAC@KSBDC.org, or access the website at www.KentuckyPTAC.com.

Two Offices to Serve You:

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SELLING TO THE GOVERNMENT

The “government” is a huge, diverse market with many buying offices. If you are interested in selling to the government, you should first answer some basic questions and gain a general understanding of how the government buys. Some initial questions to be answered include:

- ❖ Does the government buy my products/services?
- ❖ If yes, how do they buy?
- ❖ Who are my competitors?

Does the Government Buy My Products/Services?

One of the best ways to determine if the government buys your product or service is to look at historical buying patterns. Many (but not all) government buying offices maintain databases of current or previous buys. Some of these databases are accessible via the Internet. In other cases, you will need to contact the buying office directly to obtain this information (see page 14 for information on identifying government buying offices). Examples of online databases of information include:

- ◆ <http://www.outreachsystems.com/isearch> – Access to databases containing various government buys including: FedBizOpps, which consists primarily of federal government buys over \$25,000; Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) and other federal purchases, which includes some, but not all, federal government buys under \$100,000; and a state and local government buys database (USABID). To log in at this site, enter *ssquest* for both the mailbox and password. Most local government (i.e., city, county) bid opportunities in Kentucky *are not* viewable by general users. Contact PTAC at PTAC@KSBD.org or (859) 257-7668 for more information about contract opportunities in this market.
- ◆ <http://www.fbo.gov> – (click on “Find Opportunities” under the “Vendors/Citizens” heading) – FedBizOpps database, consisting primarily of federal government buys over \$25,000.
- ◆ <http://www.gsaelibrary.gsa.gov> – List of products and services for which the federal government awards schedule contracts (pre-negotiated contracts for items or services used by multiple agencies, such as furniture, office equipment, marketing services, etc.).
- ◆ <http://finance.ky.gov/services/eprocurement/Pages/contractinginfo.aspx> – Select “ALL STATE Master Agreement Report” for a list of Commonwealth of Kentucky statewide price contracts.
- ◆ <http://opendoor.ky.gov/search/Pages/contractsearch.aspx> - Commonwealth of Kentucky search of various state contracts, grants, and memoranda of agreement.

This representative listing of databases with past or current procurement information will help you to answer the first important question: does the government buy my product or service? If you need assistance with this research, contact PTAC at (859) 257-7668 or e-mail PTAC@KSBD.org.

How Does the Government Buy?

If you find that the government does buy the types of products or services you can supply, the next step is to understand how the government procures the goods and services it needs. The answer to this question varies among government agencies. The government market can be segmented into three major groups: the federal government market, the state government market, and the local government market (cities, counties, schools, etc.).

Each of these levels of government have unique procedures that determine how they contract for the items they need. This differentiation can lead to a confusing maze of rules and regulations. Procurement Specialists with PTAC are available to help you understand the government contracting process. For free consultation and assistance, call (859) 257-7668 or e-mail PTAC@KSBD.org.

While a detailed analysis of all government contracting procedures is beyond the scope of this guide, some of the more important procurement trends and concepts impacting most businesses that want to sell to the government are described in the following sections.

Centralized/Delegated Purchasing Authority

A key concept in government contracting involves understanding who has purchasing authority. Most government agencies have centralized contracting offices that are responsible for the larger, more complex contracts. In many cases, limited contracting authority is delegated to field buying offices or even individual end users of the products or services.

For example, the Commonwealth of Kentucky has three main centralized contracting divisions: 1) the Office of Procurement Services, which is responsible for procuring most general goods and services; 2) the Division of Engineering and Contract Administration, which handles non-roadway related architectural/engineering, capital construction, and major maintenance projects for the state; and, 3) the Transportation Cabinet, which handles roadway-related engineering, construction services, and transportation supplies. State agencies, however, have authority to make some buys directly without going through these centralized purchasing offices. See page 14 for more information about contacting these offices.

Small or Large Purchases

Most government agencies classify their buys into two or more groups. These groupings may have different names, but in general they can be referred to as large purchases and small purchases. The government's contracting rules and regulations will designate a dollar limit or threshold that

separates the two groups. When the government has a need for a product or service that exceeds the dollar threshold established (i.e., the expected cost of the item means that it will be considered a large purchase), certain rules for publicly advertising and making information available on the opportunity must be followed. In general, large purchase opportunities are more widely publicized because the agency typically wants to create more competition among potential vendors to ensure the best possible value to the government.

Small purchase regulations are usually designed to give government buying offices more flexibility in the purchasing process. The emphasis is on making the buy quickly with minimal paperwork. In some cases, no public advertisement or competition of the opportunity is required. In other cases, only companies selected by the government agency are notified of a potential opportunity and given a chance to bid or submit a quote.

Understanding the difference between large and small buys is an extremely important key in designing the approach you take in marketing to the government. In many cases, the government personnel making small purchase buys are not the same ones responsible for large purchases. They may not even be located in the same office. Determining how and where your marketing efforts should be targeted can become even more complicated when you realize that different government entities have differing dollar thresholds dividing their small and large dollar buys. They may even have varied levels for different organizational units within their agency. For example, the Commonwealth of Kentucky has established small purchase limits for the purchase of goods and services for all state agencies, but the limit varies from agency to agency and among buyers. A list of small purchase limits by agency and buyer can be obtained at <http://mars.ky.gov/AgencySmallPurchaseLimits.xls>.

Schedule Contracts and Master Agreements

Another important concept to understand is the use of schedule contracts, also known as master agreements or statewide price contracts. You may encounter different terms for this concept, but essentially they refer to pre-negotiated contracts that government entities enter into with one or more firms for products or services that are used by a large number of the government agency's personnel. Examples would be items like office supplies, computers, and training. Instead of going through the entire purchasing process every time a repetitive purchase is made, government agencies often negotiate pre-approved prices for certain products and services. Government agencies can then purchase the items they need directly from the vendor, without going through the formal contracting process every time. These types of contracts are almost always large procurements that are contracted through centralized buying offices. A list of the federal government's schedule contracts can be found at <http://www.gsaelibrary.gsa.gov>. Information on the Commonwealth of Kentucky's master agreements can be accessed at: <http://finance.ky.gov/services/eprocurement/Pages/contractinginfo.aspx> (click on ALL STATE Master Agreement Report).

Purchase Card/Procurement Card

Government agencies do a lot of business via purchase card/procurement card, particularly small dollar buys. Although the government card is actually a purchase card, from the vendor's perspective the transaction is handled just like a credit card. For example, if a government agency used a VISA purchase card to buy something from your firm, you would process the purchase just like any other VISA credit card transaction. Government agencies typically prefer to use purchase cards for small buys because of the reduced paperwork required to process a payment.

The great majority of purchase card transactions are for purchases less than \$5,000. On the federal government level, the purchase card is the preferred method of payment for micro-purchases (buys less than \$3,000 except for construction contracting, which has a \$2,000 limit, and certain services, which have a \$2,500 limit). Micro-purchases can be made without competition to virtually any vendor as long as the buyer believes the price to be reasonable. Agencies of the Commonwealth of Kentucky can use a purchase card for buys up to their agency's single quote limit for commodities and services, which ranges from \$1,000 to \$5,000, depending on the agency.

Some government agencies have hundreds of purchase cards that have been issued to individuals to make routine small purchases of the items they need to do their job. This critical fact may mean that your government marketing efforts need to be directed at these individuals. Getting your company information in their hands is extremely important, because in most cases little or no public advertisement is made on these small buys. Some agencies make lists of credit card holders available, while others have display areas, newsletters, or conferences that offer opportunities to market to this key component.

How do you know if the government buys your product or service via purchase card? If the items you sell are routinely bought for \$5,000 or less, chances are good that this market may be an important one for you. Commercial products and services, in particular, are good candidates for the purchase card. The bottom line is, talk to the buyers in government agencies. This networking will give you insight into whether or not you need to pursue this market.

If you are not currently able to accept credit cards, you will need to decide whether it is financially prudent to make the investment. To accept credit cards, you must establish a "merchant account". Set-up costs will vary depending on your expected volume (typical costs for the first year may range from \$700 - \$2,000), but most merchant account providers charge a percentage fee per transaction. For additional information about establishing a credit card merchant account, contact your local bank/financial services provider or a company specializing in credit card processing. Typing "credit card merchant account" in the search box at one of the Internet search engine sites will help you identify companies in this field.

Vendor Registration

Most government agencies maintain some type of vendor registration list. This list may be used to identify companies interested in doing business with that agency. In some cases, registration is mandatory before you can do business with an agency. In other cases, registration is optional, but recommended, because the buying agency may be able to notify you of opportunities that you would not otherwise know about.

While many agencies still maintain their own vendor registration lists, the federal government has implemented a centralized vendor registration database called System for Award Management (SAM), which is explained in more detail in the next section. For state and local government agencies, check the agency's website or contact them directly to identify vendor registration options. You will usually be asked to complete a registration form and provide basic information about your company.

Many government agencies have made their vendor registration process accessible via the Internet. For example, you can register as a vendor with the Commonwealth of Kentucky at <https://emars.ky.gov/webapp/vssonline/AltSelfService> (click on Register). The Commonwealth of Kentucky has a supplemental vendor database exclusively for small businesses located in Kentucky. Eligible Kentucky small businesses can register in the Small Business CONNECTION database at <https://secure.kentucky.gov/sbc/database.aspx>.

Some agencies may still require you to complete a paper form to register, while others don't have an official form, but still accept and maintain information on potential bidders. While registering with multiple agencies can be a time-consuming task, this process may be the only way for you to find out about some opportunities. Registration does not guarantee that you will be notified of every opportunity, but should generally increase your chances, especially for small purchase opportunities.

How do you contact the agencies that offer registration opportunities? Many are available online (see page 14 for a sample listing), or you can contact KY PTAC for additional assistance in this area. The format for contacting buyers will vary by agency, but you can be better prepared by reviewing agencies' websites for available information. You may want to call or email as an initial contact. Explain the product or service you are selling and inquire about potential opportunities. If your initial research or contact appears promising, seek additional contacts/information to enhance your firm's opportunities for success.

System for Award Management (SAM)

SAM has been designated as the federal government's primary vendor registration database. In almost all cases, firms must be registered in this database before federal contracts can be awarded. For vendors interested in doing business with the federal government, SAM registration is a key step. The official site for SAM registration is <https://www.sam.gov>. SAM User Guides and demonstration videos can be found under the help tab on the SAM website. Registration in SAM is **FREE**. Don't be fooled by private companies offering to perform this registration on your behalf for a fee.

SBA Dynamic Small Business Search (DSBS)

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) maintains a supplementary database to SAM called the Dynamic Small Business Search (DSBS). The objective of DSBS is to provide a searchable database of small businesses that will help government buyers and prime contractors identify small business vendors that can supply the products and services that they need. The searchable DSBS database can be found at http://dsbs.sba.gov/dsbs/search/dsp_dsbs.cfm.

Registration in DSBS is required for firms seeking HUBZone certification or SBA 8(a) certification (see pages 7-8 for more information on these programs). We recommend that all small businesses register in this database, as it can be a powerful tool to support your government marketing efforts. Registration in this database is done after completion of the SAM registration/update process. Firms that qualify as a small business are then given the opportunity to enter optional data in the SBA's DSBS database by selecting "SBA Supplemental Pages" and clicking on the "Register or Update SBA profile" link.

Electronic Commerce

Electronic Commerce (EC), also known as E-Commerce or E-Business, is a broad general term that refers to doing business electronically. Many government agencies are making efforts to reduce paperwork and provide greater access to information electronically. The ability to access bid packages, drawings, and other documents electronically is becoming increasingly important. In some cases, the government will require you to respond to opportunities via e-mail, the internet, or some other form of electronic response, or they may require you to participate in an online "reverse auction". Many government agencies now require that you submit invoices electronically, or they may pay only by means of electronic transfer of funds. If you do not have these capabilities, you won't be able to pursue some government contracting opportunities.

Special Contracting Programs for Small Businesses

Some government agencies have implemented special programs for various types of small businesses. To see if you qualify for any of these preferential programs, you must first determine if your business meets the government's definition of a small business. The definition can vary, so be sure to check with specific agencies to determine their small business size standard.

On the federal government level, the Small Business Administration (SBA) is responsible for determining small business size standards. The SBA sets size standards based on North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes. The NAICS code system attempts to classify businesses by using a numeric code. Refer to <http://www.census.gov/eos/www/naics/> for more information on NAICS codes. Size standards vary depending on the type of business, but for most businesses the standard is based on either the average annual receipts of the firm for the past three years, or the average number of employees for the past twelve months. Go to www.sba.gov/size and click on the header "Table of Small Business Size Standards" to see a full listing of size standards by NAICS codes. The headers "Guide to Size Standards" and "What are the Small Business Size Standards" also found at www.sba.gov/size provide more insight into determining whether your business would be defined as a small business by the federal government.

Many government agencies have some type of set-aside program for small businesses. A set-aside means that some contracting opportunities will be reserved exclusively for small businesses (large businesses will not be allowed to compete). In addition, large dollar contracts awarded to large firms usually have stipulations that require them to subcontract a portion of the work to small businesses. See the subcontracting section on page 12 for more information.

Minority Business Enterprise (MBE), Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB), and Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE)

Some government agencies have established goals for the amount of contracts awarded to Minority Business Enterprises (MBE), Small Disadvantaged Businesses (SDB), or Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE). As with the definition of a small business, the definition of an MBE/SDB/DBE can vary depending on the individual government agency. The federal government's definition of a disadvantaged business is one:

- which is at least 51 percent owned by one or more socially and economically disadvantaged individuals; or, in the case of a publicly owned business, at least 51 percent of the stock is owned by one or more socially and economically disadvantaged individuals; **AND**
- whose management and daily business operations are controlled by one or more of such individuals.

Socially disadvantaged individuals include Black Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans (i.e., American Indians, Eskimos, Aleuts, and Native Hawaiians), Asian-Pacific Americans (i.e., U.S. citizens whose origins are from Japan, China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Korea, Samoa, Guam, the U.S. Trust Territories of the Pacific, Northern Marianas, Laos, Cambodia, and Taiwan) and other minorities or any individuals found to be disadvantaged by the Small Business Administration. Economically disadvantaged individuals are those individuals with a personal net worth less than \$750,000, excluding the individual's ownership interest in the business, equity in the owner's personal residence, and certain retirement accounts.

The federal government has a business development program to help socially and economically disadvantaged individuals compete for federal government contracts. This program, called the 8(a) program, offers the potential of set-aside contracts, or contracts limited exclusively to 8(a) certified firms. You are required to complete an application for certification. More information on the 8(a) program can be found at <http://www.sba.gov/content/8a-business-development>.

Disadvantaged business designation varies on the state and local government level. State transportation agencies are required to have minority certification programs for highway-related work that involves federal Department of Transportation dollars. Find information on the KY Transportation Cabinet's Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) program online: <http://transportation.ky.gov/Civil-Rights-and-Small-Business-Development/Pages/default.aspx> (click on "DBE Application Packet"). The Commonwealth of Kentucky has a Minority and Women Business Enterprise Certification Program. More information on this program can be found at <http://mwbe.ky.gov>. Other government agencies, such as the City of Louisville, and

several private organizations offer their own minority business certification programs. None of the certifications are universally recognized by all buying agencies, so be sure to determine which one(s) will best fit your needs.

Women-Owned Businesses (WOB) and Women Business Enterprises (WBE)

Many state and local government agencies, including the Commonwealth of Kentucky, include women-owned businesses (WOB) or women business enterprises (WBE) in their definition of minority businesses. The federal government (except for the Department of Transportation and NASA) does not consider WOB's to be minority businesses. The Women-Owned Small Business Federal Contract program authorizes the set-aside of some federal contracts. Set-asides are limited to women-owned small businesses in certain business categories. More information about this program can be found at <https://www.sba.gov/contracting/government-contracting-programs/women-owned-small-businesses>. The federal government has a five percent federal government-wide goal for contract awards to women-owned small businesses.

The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet has a formal certification program and certifies qualified women-owned businesses under their Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) program. Go to <http://transportation.ky.gov/Civil-Rights-and-Small-Business-Development/Pages/default.aspx> and click on "DBE UCP Application" for more information. The Commonwealth of Kentucky offers a WBE certification program. You can learn more about this program at <http://mwbe.ky.gov>. Other government agencies and several private organizations offer their own formal certification programs. None of the certifications are universally recognized by all buying agencies, so be sure to determine which one(s) will best fit your needs.

HUBZone

A program on the federal government level gives preferences on some federal contracts to small business firms located in high unemployment and/or low personal income areas, called Historically Underutilized Business Zones, or HUBZones. Firms whose principal office is located in a designated HUBZone, and also meet other program eligibility criteria (must be a small business, have majority ownership and control by U.S. citizens, and at least 35% of the firm's employees residing in a HUBZone area) can apply for HUBZone certification.

To find out if your company is located in a HUBZone designated area, go to <http://map.sba.gov/hubzone/maps> and enter the address of your company's principal place of business. Additional information on the HUBZone program can be obtained at <http://www.sba.gov/hubzone>. Note: HUBZone designated areas can change based on updated census data.

Veteran-Owned Businesses

The federal government is seeking to do more business with veteran-owned and service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses. Federal agencies have a goal of awarding three percent of their prime contract dollars to service-disabled veteran-owned businesses (SDVOB). In some circumstances, contracts can be set aside exclusively for SDVOB's. To assist in locating veteran-owned businesses (VOB's), the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has established a verification program and created an online searchable database of VOB's. Veteran-owned businesses are encouraged to obtain certification and register in this database to market their capabilities to government buyers. To learn more about the registration and verification process, go to <http://www.va.gov/osdbu/>.

Geographical Preference Programs

Some government agencies (particularly state and local governments) give preference to firms based on their geographical location. This policy may take the form of pricing preferences given to local firms, or regulations restricting competition to firms within a defined geographical area. The Commonwealth of Kentucky has a reciprocal preference law that gives preference to in-state bidders if the in-state bidder is competing against an out-of-state (nonresident) bidder from a state that gives or requires a preference to bidders from that state. Go to <http://finance.ky.gov/services/eprocurement/Pages/LawsPrefRegsPolicies.aspx> for additional information on Kentucky's preference law.

Who Are My Competitors?

A third fundamental question to ask when pursuing government contracting involves understanding your competition. Finding answers to this question will probably require some direct research with the government agencies buying your products. In some cases, databases containing prior contract award information are available online. Check with specific agencies to see if the information is available, or use an overall source such as the federal government's Federal Procurement Data System (<https://www.fpds.gov/fpdsng/cms/index.php/en/>) or USA Spending (<https://www.usaspending.gov/Pages/Default.aspx>) websites, or the Commonwealth of Kentucky's Open Door website at <http://opendoor.ky.gov/search/Pages/contractsearch.aspx>.

In addition to identifying your competitors, you may also be able to determine what the government paid for their products or services. Some agency websites simply list the contract with the awarded firm's name, while other agencies also supply the awarded contract amount or even the tabulated results of the bid evaluation. This information can help you make a realistic assessment of whether you can be competitive in the government market. Please note, however, that price is usually not the only factor that government agencies consider when awarding contracts. "Best Value" contracting usually considers other important factors such as previous experience, ability to deliver or perform in a timely manner, technical expertise, etc.

HOW CAN THE KENTUCKY PROCUREMENT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER (KY PTAC) HELP ME?

Consulting Services

The Kentucky Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) procurement specialists are available to help answer your government contracting questions. Consulting services are available free of charge to any business located in Kentucky; simply contact PTAC at (859) 257-7668 or e-mail PTAC@KSBD.org. PTAC staff members offer a wide range of services, from basic market research to assistance in completing complex bid packages or proposals.

Bid Match Services

One of the most time consuming tasks in government contracting can be finding the procurement opportunities that are of interest to your firm. PTAC can help you find targeted government marketing opportunities. We have a computerized bid match program that can automatically notify you of potential government contract opportunities. We collect notices from hundreds of government buying offices. These notices are sorted and classified by category (see the categories at <http://www.outreachsystems.com/resources/tables/pscs/>) and entered into a computer database on a daily basis. The notices contain summary information about a potential contract opportunity. A sample notice is listed below:

Commonwealth of Kentucky, 702 Capitol Ave. Capitol Annex Bldg. - Room 096; Frankfort, Kentucky 40601

Z -- Replace Security Doors KCPC. SOL RFB-288-16 DUE 06/16/2016 Website: <https://www.stateofkyplanroom.com/> PreBid Info: 6/2/2016 1:30 PM, Eastern Time KY Correctional Psychiatric Center, 1612 Dawkins Lane, LaGrange, Kentucky. For additional information go to <https://eprocurement.ky.gov> Project Manager Name: Keith Bohart, Phone: (502) 564-3155, Email: keith.bohart@ky.gov Estimate: \$71,760.00. Estimated Length of Project: 105 (Substantial Completion) + 7 (Final Completion). Remove and replace approximately 21 security doors at the Kentucky Correctional Psychiatric Center, 1612 Dawkins Road, LaGrange, KY. Door types include electronic sliding and swing doors. Sliding doors will require removal and re-installation of existing (electronic) operators. The project is located within a secure area of the facility and has special requirements such as site access, communication, vehicle parking, construction site security, etc. These requirements are included in the contract documents. This notice is provided by the Kentucky Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC). The information is believed to be correct, but should be verified with the issuing agency/organization.

These notices are e-mailed to you for your review. Our bid match system **DOES NOT** list every government contract opportunity. No single source contains every government contract. We collect a large number of the opportunities that are publicly advertised (primarily large purchase opportunities) as well as some small purchase opportunities. Remember, however, that making direct contact with government agencies to pursue small purchase opportunities is extremely important.

PTAC collects information from federal, state, and local government buying offices located all over the United States (and even some from overseas, such as Air Force Bases in Europe, Japan, etc.). If you register for our free bid match service, we will ask you to provide detailed information on the types of products or services you want to sell to the government, as well as your geographic

marketing area. This information helps us develop a company profile containing keywords that describe your business. Our bid match software uses these keywords to automatically match your firm's capabilities and interests against the government contract notices we collect on a daily basis. If a match is found, a copy of the notice describing the opportunity will be e-mailed to you. If you want to register for this free service, complete our online application questionnaire by clicking on "Register for PTAC Services" at www.KentuckyPTAC.com or contact KY PTAC at PTAC@KSBD.org.

What Do I Do with the Notices You Send Me?

If you register for our bid match program, you will start receiving e-mailed notices of government opportunities (assuming we are able to find anything in our database that matches your interests). If you don't receive any notices, potential reasons may be:

- the government primarily buys your product through small purchase procedures (opportunities may not be publicly advertised);
- the government uses prime vendor or schedule contracts for your products or services, resulting in infrequent direct contracting opportunities (see page 3 for more information);
- the government may not buy your product or service (maybe you have developed a new product that they don't know about yet);
- we may need to review or adjust your company keywords (maybe you call your product a widget, but the government calls it a whirligig);
- or some other unexplained reason that we need to investigate.

If you do receive notices, review them to see if they are of interest. Some notices contain more information than others, but most contain at least the following basic information: name of the buying government agency, brief description of what they want to buy, contact (name, address, phone number, website, etc.) where additional information can be obtained, and due date (date by which you must respond to have an opportunity to do business). Government agencies often use acronyms or abbreviations that can be confusing to understand, so contact us if you have any questions or experience difficulty reading these notices.

Requesting Contract/Solicitation Documents

If you decide that a particular opportunity is not of interest to you, no additional action is required (unless you want to contact PTAC to modify the types of notices that we are sending to you). If the opportunity is of interest, typically (but not always) you must obtain the "official" contract or solicitation documents. These documents may be available online at a website, or you may need to contact the buying office by mail, phone, fax or e-mail to request the appropriate documents. Review the notice to find the contact information. You should request the documents as quickly as possible to allow for the maximum amount of time to develop your response. KY PTAC usually does not have a copy of the contract documents, but we can help you obtain them if needed.

Subcontracting/Teaming/Partnering/Joint Ventures

If part, but not all, of an opportunity is of interest to you, or the opportunity is of interest but the scope of work is too large for you to handle by yourself, subcontracting or teaming/partnering may be a viable alternative. Subcontracting means that you work for someone else who has a direct (or prime) contract with the government. Teaming/partnering/joint venturing means that two or more entities work together for the purpose of pursuing a specific contracting opportunity. The firms may share responsibility equally, or one may take a lead role.

If you want to subcontract, your basic task is to identify the prime contractors that will be seeking a direct contract with the government, and then market your capabilities to one or more prospective prime contractors. Ways to identify potential prime contractors include:

- Access databases of past buy information (contact our PTAC office for assistance in this area, or see if the buying office has a website with the desired data).
- Contact the buying office to request lists of previous contractors and/or firms requesting the contract documents for a specific opportunity (you may be asked to submit a formal request under open records laws or similar freedom of information regulations).

In addition to the methods listed above, firms pursuing teaming/partnering/subcontracting arrangements might want to consider the following resources as well:

- Searchable online databases of companies interested in government contracting such as the U.S. Small Business Administration's Dynamic Small Business Search (DSBS) database found at http://dsbs.sba.gov/dsbs/dsp_dsbs.cfm.
- The Commonwealth of Kentucky's Small Business Connection database at <https://secure.kentucky.gov/sbc/database.aspx>.
- The Transportation Cabinet's Certified DBE Directory: <http://transportation.ky.gov/Civil-Rights-and-Small-Business-Development/Pages/Certified-DBE-Directory.aspx> or the Finance Cabinet's MWBE certified businesses: <http://mwbe.ky.gov/Pages/default.aspx>.
- Consider joint venturing or teaming with other companies with whom you are familiar.
- Contact PTAC via email (PTAC@KSBD.org) or call (859) 257-7668 (we may be able to help you identify potential partners).

Bid/Quote/Proposal Preparation

PTAC can also help you review, understand, and prepare an appropriate response to contract documents. Understanding the government's requirements and appropriately responding to those requirements is critical to successful government contracting. Contact a KY PTAC staff member if you need assistance in this area. Helping firms successfully obtain and complete government contracts is the reason that the Kentucky Procurement Technical Assistance Center exists.

Training

In addition to individual consulting services, PTAC offers group training opportunities on a variety of government contracting topics. Training events are held on a wide range of topics from basic "How to Do Business with the Government" workshops to all day conferences. Many of our training events include buyers from government contracting offices. Attending these events can give you an opportunity to market your firm, as well as the opportunity to learn more about how to do business with specific agencies. For information on upcoming training events in your area, visit our website at www.KentuckyPTAC.com and click on "View Upcoming Workshops".

Summary

In summary, you can take a number of steps to increase your chances of being a successful government contractor. These steps include:

- Learn how the government buys and what resources are available to you;
- Make marketing contacts with buyers and complete vendor registrations;
- Take advantage of any preferential programs that may give you a competitive edge;
- Seeks ways to differentiate yourself from the competition (ask yourself the question: why should the government buy from me?).

ONLINE RESOURCES FOR IDENTIFYING GOVERNMENT CONTRACTING OFFICES

Federal government contracting offices: <http://prod.nais.nasa.gov/pub/fedproc/home.html>

State government contracting offices: <http://www.naspo.org/>

Websites for Commonwealth of Kentucky Purchasing/Contracting:

General purchases and services – <http://eprocurement.ky.gov>

Roadway and transportation construction contracting –
<http://transportation.ky.gov/Construction-Procurement/Pages/default.aspx>

Roadway-related professional engineering services –
<http://transportation.ky.gov/professional-services/Pages/default.aspx>

Architect/engineer services and construction contracting (other than roadways) –
<http://finance.ky.gov/offices/support/Pages/DECA.aspx>

Websites with links to local government agencies:

List of Kentucky County Judge Executives, Mayors, and Industrial Authority contacts:
http://www.thinkkentucky.com/kyedc/kpdf/Local_ED_Contacts.pdf

Kentucky Secretary of State City/County Database:

<http://apps.sos.ky.gov/land/cities/>

National League of Cities website:

<http://www.nlc.org/about-nlc>

United States Conference of Mayors website:

<http://www.usmayors.org/meetmayors/citiesonline.asp>

National Association of Counties website:

<http://www.naco.org/topics/about-naco>

Public Housing Authorities website:

<http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/pha/contacts/index.cfm>

Kentucky Colleges and Universities:

<http://cpe.ky.gov/institutions/state/>

Kentucky Department of Education website with Kentucky school district information:

<http://openhouse.education.ky.gov/Directory>

Kentucky Educational Cooperatives:

<http://education.ky.gov/comm/about/Pages/Kentucky-Education-and-Special-Education-Cooperatives.aspx>