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Why qualified companies lose government contracts

The insider's guide to think like the buyer. Win Smarter.

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Table of Contents

BEING QUALIFIED ISN'T ENOUGH	01
YOU STARTED WITH THE RFP	02
ARE YOU ACTUALLY READY TO DELIVER?	03
SAM.GOV IS NOT A SALES STRATEGY	04
PRIME ISN'T ALWAYS THE BEST FIRST MOVE	05

WRITE FOR THE EVALUATOR, NOT YOURSELF	06
KNOW WHEN TO WALK AWAY	07
THINK LIKE THE BUYER	08
GOVERNMENT CONTRACT READINESS SCORECARD	09
PRIME ISN'T ALWAYS THE BEST FIRST MOVE	10





Being qualified isn't enough

You know your business can do the work. You have the experience. You have the team. You may even have the certifications.

So why aren't you winning?

Because government buyers aren't simply looking for a qualified company. They're looking for the company that gives them the most confidence that the work will be done correctly, compliantly, on time, and with the least amount of risk.

When I sat on the other side of the table reviewing proposals, I wasn't asking: "Which company sounds the most impressive?"

I was asking: Can this company actually perform the work?

That distinction changes everything.

Winning government contracts requires more than finding opportunities and submitting proposals. It requires understanding how the buyer thinks. And that starts long before the RFP is released.



Common Mistakes

01.

You started with the RFP.

02.

You're chasing contracts your business isn't ready to deliver.

03.

You think SAM.GOV is a sales strategy.

04.

You're trying to be the prime too soon.

05.

You're writing for yourself - not the evaluator.

06.

You're bidding when you should walk away.

A photograph of two women in a grand, marble-clad interior, likely a government building. The woman on the left is seen in profile, wearing a green blazer and a pearl earring. The woman on the right is facing her, wearing a dark blazer. They appear to be in conversation.

MISTAKE #1



You Started With The RFP

One of the biggest mistakes companies make in government contracting is waiting until an opportunity appears to start pursuing it. By then, you're already behind.

Government agencies often publish procurement forecasts months before an RFP is released. Award history can tell you who currently holds the contract, how much the agency has historically spent, and when the contract may be up for competition again. The smartest contractors aren't simply searching for open bids.

They're studying what agencies are likely to buy next.

Stop asking: "What contracts are available today?"

Start asking: "What will my target agencies need six to twelve months from now?"



Helpful Tip

- Research early.
- Understand the agency.
- Know the incumbent.
- Watch the recompet.
- Build relationships.

The best time to position yourself for a contract is before everyone else starts bidding on it.

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MISTAKE #2



You're chasing contracts your business isn't ready to deliver

Winning a government contract can change the trajectory of a business. It can also expose every weakness inside it.

Before you pursue the opportunity, ask whether your business actually has the capacity to perform.

The Readiness Check

People- Do you have the staffing and expertise required to deliver?

Finances - Can your business support upfront costs and cash-flow demands?

Operations - Can your current systems handle the additional workload?

Resources - Do you have access to the materials, technology, equipment, or partners required?

Compliance - Can you meet the reporting, documentation, and regulatory requirements?



Helpful Tip

Winning the contract isn't the finish line. It's the beginning of your obligation to perform.

A million-dollar contract isn't a win if your business isn't built to deliver a million-dollar contract.



MISTAKE #3



You think SAM.GOV is a sales strategy

Let's clear up one of the biggest misconceptions in government contracting.

Registering in SAM.gov does not get you government contracts.
It makes you eligible to receive them.
That's an important distinction.

Your registration, UEI, CAGE Code, representations and certifications, banking information, and NAICS codes establish that your business can participate in the federal marketplace.

But registration isn't positioning. And eligibility isn't competitiveness.



Helpful Tip

Government contracting still requires:

- Research.
- Relationships.
- Strategy.
- Capability.
- Compliance.
- Execution.

Treat SAM.gov as your ticket into the game, not the strategy that wins it.

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MISTAKE #4

You're trying to be the prime too soon

Many business owners enter government contracting with one goal: Become the prime contractor. But bigger isn't always smarter.

As a prime contractor, you're directly responsible for the contract, including performance, compliance, delivery, reporting, and accountability.

For a newer government contractor, subcontracting can sometimes be the better strategic move. It allows you to:

- Build past performance
- Learn how government contracts operate
- Develop agency and prime relationships
- Strengthen your capabilities
- Reduce administrative risk
- Establish a track record



Helpful Tip

The question isn't: "How do I get the biggest contract?"

It's: "What's the smartest path into this market for my business?"

Sometimes the fastest way forward isn't starting at the front.

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A photograph of three Black women sitting around a table in a meeting. The woman on the left is looking towards the center, the woman in the middle is looking towards the right, and the woman on the right is looking towards the center. They are all wearing professional attire.

MISTAKE #5

You're writing for yourself, not the evaluator

Your proposal isn't your company brochure.

It's not the place to tell the government everything you've ever accomplished.

And pretty graphics won't compensate for a proposal that doesn't answer the requirements.

Evaluators are trying to answer four fundamental questions:

01 - COMPLIANCE - Did you follow every mandatory requirement?

02 - CAPABILITY - Do you understand the work, and can you actually perform it?

03 - STAFFING & PRICING - Is your team qualified, and is your pricing realistic?

04 - UNDERSTANDING - Does your proposal demonstrate that you truly understand what the agency needs?



Helpful Tip

Your job isn't simply to convince the evaluator that your company is great.

Your job is to make choosing your company make sense.

Every section of your proposal should make that decision easier.



MISTAKE #6

You're bidding when you should walk away

Not every opportunity deserves a proposal.
That's one of the hardest lessons for growing businesses to learn.
Preparing a strong government proposal requires time, people, and resources.
Before you invest them, conduct a real bid/no-bid assessment.

Ask Yourself

Capability - Can we confidently perform the scope of work?
Past Performance - Can we demonstrate relevant experience?
Compliance - Can we satisfy every mandatory requirement?
Pricing - Can we submit competitive pricing without creating unnecessary financial risk?
Capacity - Do we have the people, cash flow, systems, and resources to deliver?
Fit - Does this opportunity align with where we're trying to take the business?



Helpful Tip

If the answer to several of these questions is no, submitting anyway isn't persistence.

It's a strategic distraction.

Winning government business isn't about bidding more. **It's about bidding smarter.**

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The Mindset Shift

Stop thinking like a vendor.

Start thinking like a buyer.

Vendor Thinking

"What contracts can I apply for?"

"How do I tell them about my company?"

"What certifications do I need?"

"How do I win this RFP?"

Buyer Thinking

"What problem is the agency trying to solve?"

"What does the evaluation criteria tell me
they value?"

"How do I demonstrate that we're capable?"

"What would make choosing us feel like the
right decision?"



Government contracting becomes very different when you stop looking at the opportunity from your side of the table.

The goal isn't simply to sell what you do.

The goal is to understand what the buyer needs to confidently say yes.





Government contract readiness scorecard

Is your business actually
ready to compete?

Score each statement:

0 = No / Not Yet

1 = Somewhat

2 = Yes / Strongly



1.We clearly understand
which government agencies
buy what we sell.

0|1|2



2.Our SAM.gov registration, NAICS
codes, and required business
information are current and accurate.

0|1|2



3.We actively research procurement
forecasts, previous awards, incumbents,
and upcoming recompetes.

0|1|2



4.We understand when it makes sense
to pursue work as a prime versus a
subcontractor.

0|1|2



5.We have the people and operational
capacity to deliver a government
contract.

0|1|2



6.Our business has the cash flow
and financial resources required
to support performance.

0|1|2



7.We can demonstrate relevant
capabilities and past
performance.

0|1|2



8.We understand how to evaluate
an opportunity before deciding
whether to bid.

0|1|2



9.We can build a compliant proposal
around the agency's evaluation criteria,
not a generic description of our business.

0|1|2



10.Government contracting fits into a
larger, intentional growth strategy for our
business.

0|1|2

Your Score

0-7

BUILD BEFORE YOU BID

The opportunity may be real, but your foundation needs work. Focus on readiness before investing heavily in proposals.

8-14

POSITION BEFORE YOU PURSUE

You have some of the right pieces in place, but gaps could make competing harder—or put unnecessary pressure on the business if you win.

15-20

READY TO COMPETE

You have a stronger foundation. Now the focus shifts to opportunity selection, positioning, relationships, and disciplined execution.

Your Next Move

DON'T START WITH: "Where can I find a government contract?"

Start with: "Is my business positioned to win one?"

If government contracting is part of your growth strategy, your next move isn't submitting as many proposals as possible. It's becoming intentional about the opportunities you pursue.



Assess Your Business

Identify gaps in capacity, finances, compliance, operations, and past performance.



Identify Your Market

Determine which agencies buy what you sell and where your capabilities have the strongest fit.



Build Your Position

Research future opportunities, understand the buyer, develop relationships, and prepare before the RFP hits the market.



Then, and only then, start thinking about the proposal.
The goal isn't to win any contract.

It's to win the right contract, and be ready to
deliver when you do.



Before you chase the contract, make sure the business is ready for it.



Government contracting can create significant opportunities for growth. But opportunity alone doesn't create a stronger business.

You still need the strategy, infrastructure, operational capacity, and financial readiness to turn that opportunity into sustainable growth.

That's where Stone Advisory Services comes in.

We work with business owners to look beyond the immediate opportunity and identify what the business actually needs to move forward, from strategic direction and operational readiness to growth planning and executive decision-making. Because winning the contract is only one part of the equation. Building a business capable of supporting what's next is the bigger goal.

Yolanda J. Stone
Stone Advisories CEO



Ready to Find Out Where You Stand?

Book a Government Contract Readiness Strategy Call.

We'll look at where your business is today, identify the gaps that could stand between you and your next opportunity, and help you determine your smartest next move.

Don't just chase growth. Build for it.

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