

Workshop points small businesses toward government contracts

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The federal government is the world's biggest customer and a major driver in New Mexico's economy.

While only a fraction of the \$8.2 billion that Uncle Sam spent in New Mexico in fiscal year 2017 benefitted local companies, advisers at the state's four Procurement Technical Assistance Centers work to increase the flow of federal dollars to small businesses that offer products or services the government wants.

To that end, the Clovis PTAC is hosting a workshop March 20 at Clovis Community College for entrepreneurs who want to learn more about becoming a government contractor.

"The workshop is to educate business owners on how to do business with Cannon Air Force Base and other government agencies," said Jonnie Loadwick, procurement technical adviser at the Clovis PTAC and a certified VA verification counselor. "Cannon has been growing the last few years, and there is a lot of opportunity for government contracting in this area."

Obtaining government contracts can be just as onerous as securing contracts in the private sector: Businesses must aggressively market themselves, because competition is fierce.

As with all prospecting, it's up to the seller to research what the buyer needs, prepare a quote and present an offer — a process the seller might have to repeat numerous times before signing a deal.

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But PTACs, operated by the Procurement Technical Assistance Program (PTAP), are there to help in Clovis, as well as Albuquerque, Las Cruces and Santa Fe. “PTAC assists businesses with information and one-on-one counseling appointments free of charge to help [...] cut through the red tape of government contracting in general,” Loadwick said.

As workshop participants will learn, before registering as a federal contractor with the System for Award Management or SAM at www.sam.gov/portal/SAM/##11 the business must:

Obtain a free Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) identifier from Dun & Bradstreet at www.dnb.com

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Secure an Employee Identification Number, Taxpayer Identification Number or Form SS-4, all of which serve as a federal tax ID.

Know its North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code, which can be found at www.census.gov/eos/www/naics

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Find its Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) code at www.osha.gov/pls/imis/sicsearch.html .

Beyond that, the aspiring contractor should determine its Product Service Code at www.fpds.gov/fpdsng/cms/index.php/en and its Federal Supply Classification Code. While it isn't mandatory to provide these numbers at registration, doing so helps government buyers determine the best fit for their procurement needs.

The business owner also should determine the size of his or her venture based on the average number of employees over the past year or the average annual revenue over the past three years. Size standards, which can vary by NAICS code, govern small-business set-asides. Find

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details at www.sba.gov/contracting/getting-started-contractor/make-sure-you-meet-sba-size-standards

If the business qualifies as a service-disabled veteran-owned small business, veteran-owned small business or woman-owned small business, it has an advantage when bidding for contracts, as the federal government sets goals for the minimum number of contracts it awards to certain underrepresented groups.

To register for the free event, visit bizcalendar.org/calendar/index.php?eID=11971. The workshop is repeated throughout the year at other PTACs in the state. For additional information or to locate the nearest center, visit www.nmptac.org

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