

## US Government Procurement: A Short Market Entry Checklist

No checklist can cover all the things that every company will need to consider...so I don't claim that this one is comprehensive. It's intended to raise questions and get you thinking.

If your experience suggests there are steps missing, please let me know! And if you have questions about anything here, I'm always pleased to speak with you!

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- ❑ **Viable Offering:**  
Your product or service is ready for market, and ideally has already been sold in the commercial market or to governments in Canada
- ❑ **Production Capability:**  
What's the largest order you are ready to meet, and how quickly can you do that? What will you do if the US government wants more than that? Are they likely to?
- ❑ **Export Experience:**  
You already know how to get your goods and people back and forth across the border, with no delays and with all the proper documentation, including but not limited to customs forms, export controls requirements, and visas
- ❑ **Known (or no) Barriers:**  
You've looked at NAFTA and, if appropriate, the bilateral defence trade agreements and related US procurement regulations. You know whether (and if so, how) you will tackle provisions including Buy American, Small Business Set Asides, export controls, visit clearances, security clearances.

- **Realistic Prospects with Money & Authority:**  
You've researched and identified potential government customers who have a compelling need for what you offer (best of all, an urgent problem that you can solve), budget to buy from you, and authority to spend the money and implement the project.
- **Market Process Information:** You've learned...
- ***How the US Government Buys:***  
Procurement processes, contracting vehicles, and funding cycles. That includes GSA Schedules – you know what they are, and whether or not they are part of your strategy, and what other options you're your buyers have. You must learn this even if you plan to be a subcontractor, because the procurement rules and system drive the behaviour of your prime contractors and partners. They will take advantage of you if they figure out that you don't know the rules of the game.
- ***Who the Players Are:***  
You've identified the largest prime contractors, whether they represent competitors, partners, or both, and who the most influential buyers are that you want to target.
- ***How Congress & the Money Work:***  
You know what the US government fiscal year funding cycle is, where the money comes from that can fund purchases of your products and services, and can estimate how long it's likely to take you to win business.
- ***How You Will Meet Prospects and Partners:***  
Which conferences and publications are critical to your prime prospects? What do they read, where do they convene, and how you can raise awareness, interest and liking for you, your company, and what you do.
- ***Government Sales Techniques:***  
How will you adapt your marketing materials, web site, communications, and PR, and what channels will be most effective to reach your prospects? What shows, conferences, marketing calls, travel and presentations will give you the best value? Selling to US government is a unique art – see [www.governmentmarketingbestpractices](http://www.governmentmarketingbestpractices) for great free examples. What's your plan?

- **Skills Assessment:**  
You've learned enough about these things to decide whether this is expertise you are going to develop so you can do it yourself, or something that you know enough to hire someone to do it well for you
  
- ***Bid & Proposal Arts:***  
You've read the Solicitation Guide at [www.international.gc.ca/sell2usgov](http://www.international.gc.ca/sell2usgov) and have decided whether you already have the expertise to prepare your own proposals, or you want hire help to do that. \*\* The GSA Schedule Contract Proposal is a very special art form. GET HELP. You have options at a wide range of price points – see the article at [www.summitinsight.com/article10--gsatimemoney.asp](http://www.summitinsight.com/article10--gsatimemoney.asp)
  
- ***Business Development – Finding the Money, and Focusing***  
How will you find out if your prospects have money already allocated that someone can use to do business with you – either end users or one of dozens of programs to try and test and pilot technologies? And if not, will you need to invest in getting a congressional budget provision added to fund a project to buy your goods or services? Some speciality consultants do both.

If you're selling innovative technologies, things nobody has ever heard of, or just about ANYTHING with applications in homeland security or defence, it's not enough to find the right people. What really makes the difference is being introduced TO the right people BY the right people. Cold calling or dumping proposals in response to Broad Agency Announcements without those introductions is a waste of your time and money. Who do you know who can introduce you?

Having done that initial research, what will your priorities be? You can only go after so many prospects at once; success in the early going requires FOCUS...on high potential prospects with an urgent requirement and money to spend to meet that need.

- ***Teaming Agreements:***  
Will you need to partners to reach your clients? What are the key elements that must be in an agreement to do business on a US government contract? What provisions in the prime contract flow down to subcontractors, and which do not?

□ ***Budget:***

It all comes down to money. What will it cost you to do all those things? And what people will you need to do it?

Expect a 2-3 year horizon over which you invest before you break even. You will spend time and you will spend money. And you need the right mix; shortchange either, and your investment is wasted.

□ ***Corporate Commitment:***

Okay, it's a big number. Do you have the working capital to finance not only the market development but also the increased production capability you may need to meet the demands of the world's biggest customer? And, given the prospects and process you propose, is corporate management willing to commit the resources to do it right?

This is a very expensive market to enter without careful thought. It's far better to say, "This isn't right for me right now – or at all" than to say, "Well, listen, this won't cost a lot. Let's give the US government territory to the rep who already covers from Buffalo to Orlando and figure he'll bring in a cool million by year-end." If the latter is your strategy, save your money to fund the company picnic. Everybody will be happier.

US government buyers are unforgiving if you screw up – which is what happens when you don't meet your commitments – and word travels fast. But an enthusiastic US government customer is a treasure who can light your path to more business if you treat her well.

□ **Go / No-Go Decision**

If it's a go, then I wish you every success!

I'm with Winston Churchill on this one: "Plans are useless; planning is everything."

Once you have your plan, your team – in house and hired – and your budget, set milestones, check in with your team often, listen to the people you've hired to help and counsel you, and be prepared to change course and adapt to new information and emerging opportunities.

***If it's a No-Go, I also congratulate you for making a well-considered decision, and I wish you luck with the other markets you will undoubtedly pursue with success!***

