

Federal Business Development for Firms with Little or No Federal Business

An Introduction:

Know what services or products you can sell to Federal agencies then identify two or three agencies that would use your services or products. Use all of your contacts (and those of your employees, family, and friends) in an effort to develop direct access to your target agency's mid-level program managers (e.g., GS-14, GS-15). If you have no target agency contacts then you can develop contacts using more traditional business development or marketing techniques. The mid-level program managers are the individuals in your target agency or agencies that will have budgets and can fund projects. Agency political appointees and small business staff will not be that helpful in getting you direct access to the mid-level program managers you must make contact with. Over a period of six months or more you want to have at least several meetings with the mid-level program managers and their key staff. Your objective in these meetings is to understand their objectives, their challenges, their pain, and their availability of funding. In the process, the government managers will get to know you and your firm, building some level of knowledge, trust, and respect (KTR) in your firm's capabilities to help them in a specific situation.

Regardless of the business opportunity you or someone else identifies and what others tell you, the winner of any Federal procurement will almost always be a firm that knows the client and has established some level of KTR with the client. This is especially true of the smaller procurements that firms with little or no Federal business will be most likely to win in their early forays into the Federal market. Keep in mind that "chasing" Federal business by responding to Requests for Proposals (RFPs) found on the Federal Business Opportunities (FEDBIZOPS) website will almost certainly result in no business because you will not know nearly enough about the opportunity to win it in competition with other firms unless you have had direct access to the program staff sponsoring the opportunity. Almost always the firm that wins business by submitting a proposal in response to an RFP is a firm that knows the client, is known by the client, understands the requirement well beyond what is described in the RFP, knows the price, and prepares a really good proposal.