



★ INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES/Syracuse University

# ARSENAL

ARMING YOU FOR SUCCESS IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

# BECOMING A SUPPLIER:

## Leading Practices for Corporate Buy-In

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ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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### About the Coalition for Veteran Owned Business (CVOB)

The CVOB is a coalition of industry leaders committed to providing innovative solutions and thought leadership to grow and support veteran- and military spouse-owned businesses in communities throughout the nation. How will we do it? By connecting veteran, service member and spouse-owned businesses with organizations, resources and information that will help them start or grow their business and employ veterans and military spouses in their communities.



### About the Center for Excellence (CoE) for Veteran Entrepreneurship

The mission of the Center of Excellence (CoE) for Veteran Entrepreneurship is to create, collect, organize, and share knowledge, resources, and networks to advance entrepreneurial opportunities for transitioning service members, veterans, and their families. This is accomplished through the development and delivery of innovative programs and educational resources; timely and relevant research and policy analysis; and by cultivating veteran-connected ecosystems across the United States.

### About the Author

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Elissa Gibbs is the Project Manager for Entrepreneurship and Small Business at the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University where she develops tools, resources, programming, and thought leadership pieces that advance the state of veteran- and military spouse-owned businesses. She works to increase opportunities for those businesses in the public marketplace and as suppliers to the private sector. Additionally, she strives to increase their access to capital, networking, and mentorship, encourage their certification and classification, as well as build valuable relationships with both internal and external stakeholders.

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### Introduction

Large companies understand the value of having a diverse supplier base that aligns to their diverse customer base. This creates opportunities for veteran-owned businesses (VOBs) as many larger companies are looking for VOBs to bring on as suppliers. Surprisingly, the biggest challenge that many of these companies face is identifying VOBs that fit a certain geographic or business need and have the ability to perform the work required. While there may be a number of VOBs that fit their specific requirements, large companies need to ensure that they hire the right VOB to meet their needs.

On the other side of the equation sits the VOBs. Many know that they have the expertise, the talent, and the ability to carry out the needs of the large companies, however, it can be equally difficult to find the opportunities and then get hired. This is where the Coalition for Veteran Owned Business (CVOB) can be of value. This brief exists to help VOBs position themselves in a way to get noticed and get hired by these large companies.

The Coalition for Veteran Owned Business (CVOB), managed by the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University, was founded by First Data and other corporate partners to assist VOBs in becoming “procurement-ready” through programming and resources. A procurement-ready business is prepared and equipped to bid on, and maintain, contracts with larger companies for business-related goods and/or services.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Coalition for Veteran Owned Business. “8 Tips to Know Your Business is Procurement Ready.” <http://veteranbusinesscoalition.org/10-ways-to-know-your-business-is-procurement-ready/>.





There are nine areas that VOBs should focus their attention in order to become procurement-ready. Below, you will find information and resources to help you tackle these nine areas.

**1. Do Your Homework** - Ensure that you have a fully-developed understanding of not only your product or service and what need it serves, but the company(s) you are looking to do business with.

Make sure that you fully understand:

- ▶ What they buy (what types of products or services and what they are currently buying)
- ▶ Where they do business
- ▶ How they connect or find suppliers
- ▶ Specific programs/events/opportunities offered to meet or engage suppliers
- ▶ How relationships with suppliers are sustained
- ▶ What certifications they accept/require
- ▶ What training is available to prospective suppliers

Many large companies have websites dedicated to their supplier diversity initiatives and informing businesses on their procurement practices. For instance, Walmart has a website and handbook dedicated to educating potential diverse suppliers; this includes VOBs. The site provides insights on how Walmart engages their suppliers, how a business can sign up to become a diverse supplier, and the various events Walmart holds to meet those diverse suppliers. Walmart even provides a link for consumers to purchase directly from their diverse suppliers.

**2. Take Advantage of Training Opportunities** - Taking advantage of educational programs, events, and resources can prove to be very valuable to VOBs. There are a number of organizations that provide free to low-cost programs relevant to businesses at varying levels, as well as local resources that can provide business assistance and procurement insights. This may help you hone your business acumen and provide valuable connections to your network.

Some of these include:

- ▶ **Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF)** [www.ivmf.syracuse.edu/our-programs](http://www.ivmf.syracuse.edu/our-programs)  
The IVMF has a portfolio of programs and resources, the ARSENAL, focused on veteran- and military spouse-owned businesses. They offer eight programs, one national procurement group, and a resource hub focused towards established and growing businesses.
- ▶ **Veteran Institute for Procurement (VIP)** [www.nationalvip.org](http://www.nationalvip.org)  
Focused on government procurement opportunities, VIP provides 3-day training programs that cover more than twenty areas related to procurement. They have three levels of training focused around procurement-readiness.
- ▶ **Bunker Labs** [www.bunkerlabs.org](http://www.bunkerlabs.org)  
Bunker Labs provides a number of programs to help veterans and military families with their entrepreneurial goals. Two of their programs are geared towards established and growing businesses.
- ▶ **Veteran Business Outreach Center (VBOC)** [www.sba.gov/tools/local-assistance/vboc](http://www.sba.gov/tools/local-assistance/vboc)  
A program of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), VBOCs provide localized business assistance to VOBs. Services include training, counseling, mentorship, financial statement reviews, and much more. Visit the SBA's website to find your local VBOC.
- ▶ **Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (PTAC)** [www.dla.mil/HQ/SmallBusiness/PTAC/All\\_PTAC\\_Locations/](http://www.dla.mil/HQ/SmallBusiness/PTAC/All_PTAC_Locations/)  
A program of the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA), PTACs provide localized assistance related to all things federal contracting. Their knowledge can assist with not only federal contracts but with state and local-level opportunities, as well as those with federal prime contractors.

Take advantage of any or all of these programs!

**3. Get Certified** - Getting certified as a VOB will help you stand out against the competition. Having such a designation helps large companies to verify that your business is, in fact, veteran-owned. This eliminates any extra work that they would have to do to ensure proper certification. There are a number of organizations and agencies that certify VOBs that are also recognized by these larger companies.

Some of these include:

- ▶ **National Veteran Owned Business Association (NaVOBA)** [www.navoba.org](http://www.navoba.org)  
NaVOBA not only offers a Veteran Business Enterprise (VBE) certification and a Service Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise (SDVBE) certification, they also partner with a number of corporate allies to help create contracting opportunities for VOBs.
- ▶ **National Veteran Business Development Council (NVBDC)** [www.nvbdc.org](http://www.nvbdc.org)  
NVBDC offers a Veteran Owned Business certification and has been recognized by the Billion Dollar Roundtable ([www.billiondollarroundtable.org](http://www.billiondollarroundtable.org)), experts on corporate supplier diversity, as the leading certification for VOBs.
- ▶ **Disability:IN** [www.disabilityin.org](http://www.disabilityin.org)  
Formerly the US Business Leadership Network (USBLN), Disability:IN seeks to provide third-party verification for businesses owned by individuals with disabilities. They offer three certifications: Disability Owned Business Enterprise (DOBE), Veteran – Disability Owned Business Enterprise (V-DOBE), and Service-Disability Veteran – Disability Owned Business Enterprise (SDV-DOBE).
- ▶ **Veterans Administration (VA)** [www.va.gov/osdbu/verification](http://www.va.gov/osdbu/verification)  
VA certifications are often recognized by many large companies seeking to contract with VOBs. Through their Veterans First Contracting Program (Vets First), the VA offers two certification types: Veteran Owned Small Business (VOSB) and Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business (SDVOSB).

Inherently as a VOB, you may also be diverse in other ways. Make sure you are aware of other certifications from organizations like the Women’s Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) and the National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC).

**4. Tell a Strong Story** - Ensure that wherever your business exists online, in print, or elsewhere, that you are telling your story appropriately.

Be sure to clearly articulate:

- ▶ What products/services your business offers
- ▶ What your business can do
- ▶ How your business stands out against the competition
- ▶ Your business’s success (past performance – include testimonials)
- ▶ Include your value proposition and capability statement



**5. Build Relationships** - Closely aligned with doing your research on large companies, building and maintaining relationships is an invaluable asset for small businesses. After researching the company you are looking to work with, attend the various networking and supplier events that they put on or participate in. Engage the procurement professionals in attendance and seek to maintain a relationship with them after the event. By showing them that you sell what they buy, the value you bring, coupled with a strong impression from meeting you in person, you increase your chances of being chosen as a supplier.

**6. Partner With Pros** - There are a number of ways for small businesses to work with and learn from businesses who have been suppliers for sustained periods. These include finding peer mentors, identifying subcontracting opportunities or joint ventures, and participating in mentor-protégé programs.

- ▶ **Peer Mentors** – Your network, and the networks of those you know, is key to your success. Networking can provide valuable connections for your development as an entrepreneur and for the development of your business. Attend networking events to broaden your reach – you may meet someone who is looking to buy what you sell.
  - Bunker Labs provides a great forum for veterans, military spouses, and civilians to come together on a monthly basis with their Bunker Brews. These meet-up events allow for different parts of the community to come together and learn from one another. [www.bunkerlabs.org/our-programs/bunker-brews/](http://www.bunkerlabs.org/our-programs/bunker-brews/)
- ▶ **Subcontracting** – Subcontracting is a great way for small businesses to get their foot in the door with larger procurement opportunities – this rings true for both the government and private sectors. By successfully delivering on a subcontract, a small business can build “past performance” for delivering on an expectation, which is often needed in prime contracting opportunities.
  - Department of Defense’s Office of Small Business Programs identifies a number of subcontracting opportunities available through the DoD’s prime contractors. [www.business.defense.gov/Acquisition/Subcontracting/Subcontracting-For-Small-Business](http://www.business.defense.gov/Acquisition/Subcontracting/Subcontracting-For-Small-Business)
  - Large companies like Lockheed Martin utilize a number of diverse, small businesses to meet their large defense contracts. While the prime contract may exist in the federal sector, subcontracting with Lockheed Martin exists in the private sector. Lockheed Martin has a Supplier Diversity website dedicated to educating potential suppliers. [www.lockheedmartin.com/en-us/suppliers/supplier-diversity.html](http://www.lockheedmartin.com/en-us/suppliers/supplier-diversity.html)

- Many large companies also have second-tier programs – this not only allows the company to invest in diverse prime contractors, but encourages their primes to utilize diverse small businesses as well. For example, the Walt Disney Company has established a second-tier program to encourage the use of diverse vendors from the top-down. [www.supplierdiversity.disney.com/](http://www.supplierdiversity.disney.com/)

- ▶ **Joint Ventures** – Joint ventures can create big opportunities for small businesses. When two small businesses come together to provide a greater product or service, they can situate themselves in a way to deliver on a contract.
- ▶ **Mentor-Protégé Programs** – Mentor-protégé programs are one of the most beneficial resources for small businesses. Many large companies have established mentor-protégé programs that seek to match current suppliers, who have an understanding of how the larger company works, with potential new suppliers. This allows the experienced business to train the new business on all things procurement for the larger company. Think of this as an entire company as a mentor for your business.
  - Lockheed Martin has a mentor-protégé program to more effectively fulfill their larger defense contracts. While the program is set up and managed by internal divisions of Lockheed, the larger prime contractors work directly with the small businesses who would like to become contractors.

**7. Get Your Finances In Order** - Understanding your financial well-being as a business owner is crucial to success in contracting. When you know where you are financially, you can better gauge your ability to take on more business through procurement opportunities.

Make sure that you have a handle on:

- ▶ Cash flow
- ▶ Payroll
- ▶ Payment options
- ▶ Financing



Have more questions on financing? Check out the IVMF’s Access to Capital Guide available here: <http://veteranbusinesscoalition.org/resources/>.

**8. Under-Promise & Over-Deliver** - Do not promise to be all things to all people. When you set realistic expectations for the fulfillment of a contract and do your due-diligence in ensuring you meet those expectations (and then some), you are establishing a good reputation and open yourself up to potential future business.

**9. Ask for Testimonials & Referrals** - After successfully delivering on a contract, don’t be afraid to ask for testimonials or referrals of your service. Even if from another small business, having this backing can prove invaluable when seeking out corporate contracts. It provides the larger companies with a confidence that you have performed well in the past and that you can deliver on a commitment. This is a great way to build your brand.



# STAY IN TOUCH

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