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Procurement That Turns Pilots Into Programs

By Stephen Goldsmith

Had I started a large procurement on my first day as deputy mayor of New York, it wouldn't have been completed for as long as twenty-four months, around the time I returned to Harvard. That delay frustrated me then, and it still frustrates mayors everywhere. But time is only part of the problem. Too often, local governments write procurements as if they already know the answer.

New York City now includes what are known as challenge-based procurements to address these problems. Instead of drafting an RFP that prescribes a product, the city publishes a challenge statement that defines the problem and the outcomes it needs. A traditional request for proposals, said Julia Fusfeld, who oversees procurement reform as a deputy director in the Mayor's Office of Contract Services (MOCS), tells the market, "This is everything that we need. How much does it cost? Thank you. Have a great day."

A challenge statement instead lets vendors propose how to get there. The city pilots the most promising ideas in small, time-limited demonstrations. If a solution performs in the real world, it expands it without restarting the procurement cycle from scratch.

Yet, even successful pilots often go nowhere because when one ends, an agency still has to reprocure it competitively. It's frustrating for everyone involved, notes Fusfeld, whose job involves producing innovation inside the department. She summed up the city's message to vendors: "You can work with us for a couple years, we'll try your thing out, and if we like it, you still have to spend all this time and money to compete to get a contract with us longer term." Not surprisingly, when the city's Economic Development Corporation talked with tech firms, it heard that the city seemed "incredibly difficult to sell to," as Fusfeld put it.

Three lessons stand out for making this whole process work better for both the city and its vendors:

First, clearly state the problem to be solved. New York's first technology-focused challenge, issued by the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS), described the problem the city faced and left the answer to vendors. At the vendor information session, Fusfeld recalled, companies



kept asking about procedural requirements: "Do you need this or do you need that?" The DCAS answer: "You tell us what your product does and how it might work with the city's operations." She said the format sits closer to a request for information, though

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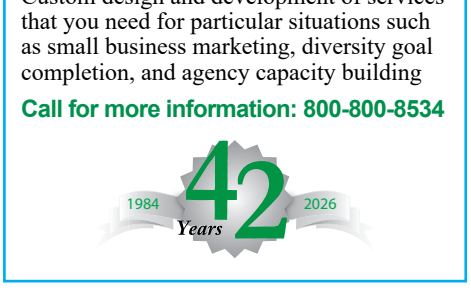
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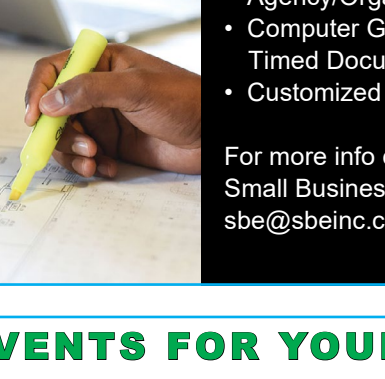




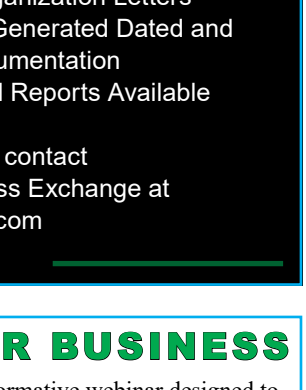
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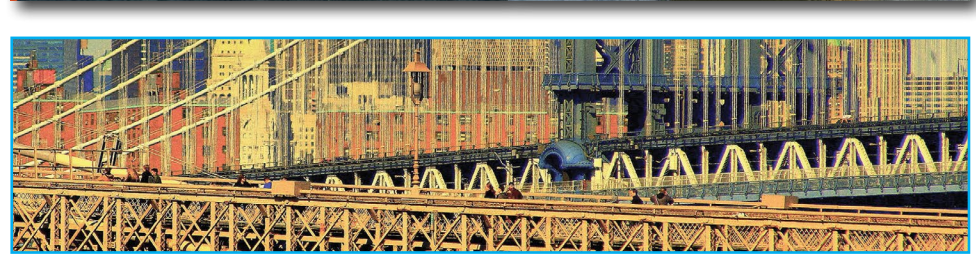
Federal Contracting: Woman-Owned Small Business (WOSB) Certification Program Webinar
Tuesday, November 17, 2026, 11:00 am–12:00 pm
Online
Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration, Arkansas District Office
Contact: Suzanne Terrazas, 501-324-7379, Arkansas_DO@sba.gov
Fee: Free; registration required
This webinar will provide valuable insights into the Woman-Owned Small Business (WOSB) Federal Contracting Program certification process, which is crucial for accessing a pool of billions of dollars worth of federal contracting opportunities that are set aside specifically for woman-owned businesses. Your woman-owned small business can obtain federal contracts with less competition if you qualify. To learn how accessing these resources can significantly impact a business's growth and sustainability, and to meet with resource partners who can provide you with free one-to-one consulting, register at https://legacy.sba.gov/event/77957

Understanding SBA Programs Webinar
Tuesday, November 17, 2:00 pm–3:00 pm
Online
Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration, Houston District Office
Contact: Elizabeth Charles, 713-773-6505, elizabeth.charles@sba.gov
Fee: Free; registration required

Join us for an informative webinar designed to help entrepreneurs, startups, and existing small business owners navigate the wide range of resources and programs offered by the United States Small Business Administration (SBA), including an overview of SBA's core programs: capital, counseling, contracting, and disaster assistance. Whether you're looking to launch a business, expand operations, secure funding, or recover from a disaster, the SBA has tools to support your goals. Attendees will also have the opportunity to ask their small business questions to mentors/advisors from SBA's Resource Partner Network! Register online for the free webinar at https://legacy.sba.gov/event/78036

Federal Contracting for Small Businesses Webinar
Tuesday, December 8, 2026, 12:00 pm–1:30 pm
Online
Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration
Contact: Irene Gonzalez, 208-334-1673, irene.gonzalez@sba.gov
Fee: Free; registration required
Learn the essentials of federal contracting for small businesses. This event will cover the basics of navigating the federal contracting process, as well as the various certifications available to help your small business succeed in the government marketplace. Certifications include: 8(a) Business Development Program, HUBZone Certification, Woman Owned Small Business (WOSB/EDWOSB), and Veteran Owned Small Business (VOSB). Don't miss this opportunity to gain valuable insights and resources to help your small business. Register at https://www.eventbrite.com/e/federal-contracting-basics-and-certifications-for-small-businesses-tickets-1977729664666





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