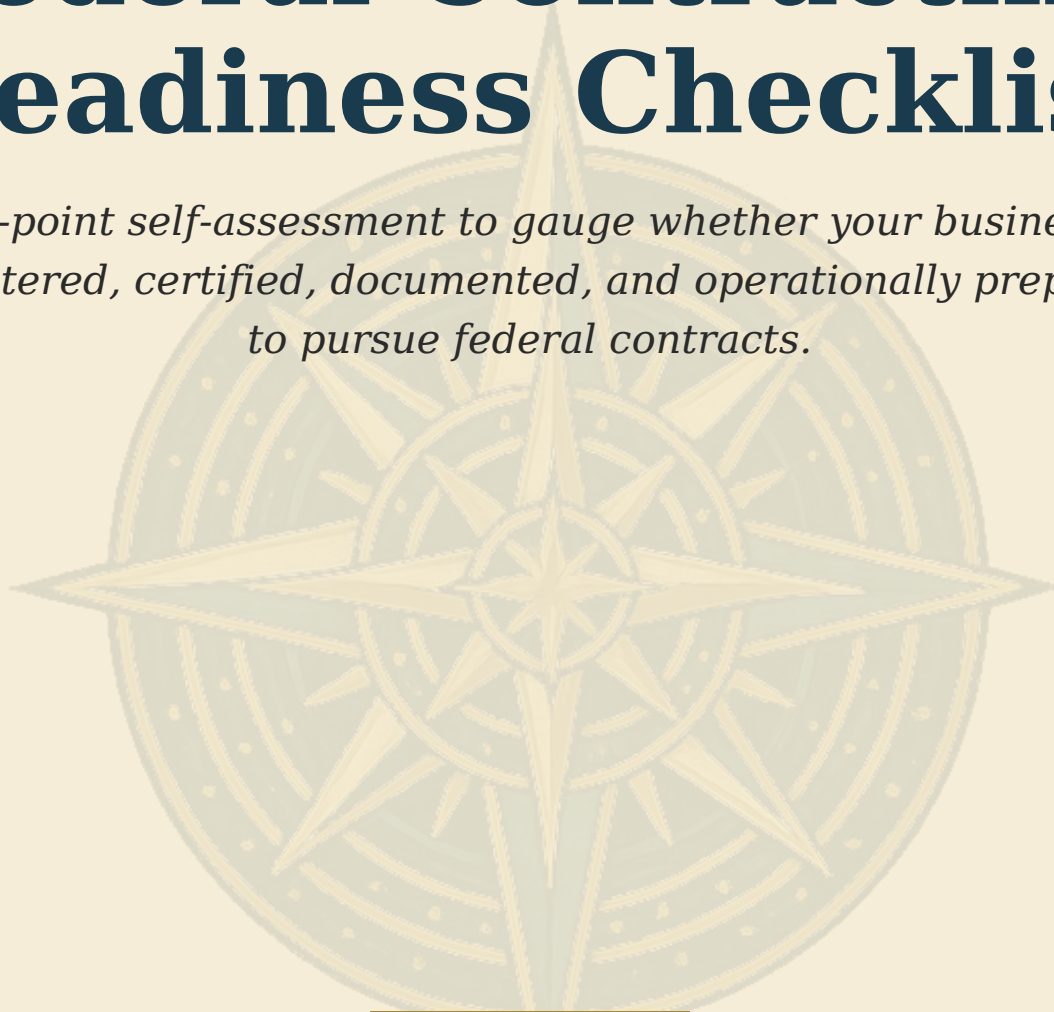


FREE • SUBSCRIBER RESOURCE

Federal Contracting Readiness Checklist

A 30-point self-assessment to gauge whether your business is registered, certified, documented, and operationally prepared to pursue federal contracts.



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Current as of 2026 | Reflects FAR Part 19 overhaul & MySBA Certifications



How to Use This Checklist

Federal contracting rewards preparation. The agencies awarding \$700+ billion in prime contracts each year evaluate your business against a specific framework — registrations, certifications, capabilities, past performance, pricing systems, and compliance posture. A capability statement and a SAM.gov registration are not enough; the difference between firms that win and firms that watch is usually visible long before the solicitation drops.

This checklist captures the 30 readiness checkpoints we use with GUIDE GSC clients across seven categories. Work through each item honestly. Check the box only if the answer is an unambiguous yes, today. Partial credit doesn't exist in source selection — and it doesn't here either.

Scoring

Total your checked boxes across the seven sections. Your tier tells you where to focus next:

Score	Tier	What it means
27 - 30	Mission-Ready	Actively pursue solicitations. Your gaps are operational tuning, not foundational.
22 - 26	Bid-Ready	You can submit competitive proposals. Close 1-2 gaps before chasing larger awards.
16 - 21	Build Phase	Meaningful gaps. Plan for 30-90 days of preparation work before serious bidding.
0 - 15	Foundation Phase	Pre-bidding work needed. Premature bids risk past-performance and compliance issues.



SECTION 01

Business Foundation

Before federal-specific work, the underlying business must be solid. Source selection officers will look here first.

- ☐ Legal entity is properly formed and in good standing in your state of incorporation.
LLCs and corporations only — sole proprietorships are eligible but face limitations on set-asides, liability, and team-mate confidence.
- ☐ Federal Employer Identification Number (EIN) is assigned and matches IRS records exactly.
Name and address mismatches against IRS data are the #1 cause of SAM.gov registration failures.
- ☐ Business is registered to operate in every state where you have employees, a physical office, or expect to perform contract work.
Out-of-state foreign qualification is a common compliance gap on multi-state federal awards.
- ☐ Dedicated business banking with the capacity to receive ACH payments from the U.S. Treasury.
Some banks block government ACH by default. Confirm with your bank in advance.

SECTION 02

Federal Registrations

These are the gating registrations every contractor must hold. None of them cost money; all of them must be active and accurate at time of offer and award (FAR 4.1102).

- ☐ Active SAM.gov entity registration with status confirmed in the Workspace dashboard.
Registration must be renewed annually (every 365 days). Set a 60-day pre-expiration reminder.
- ☐ Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) — 12-character alphanumeric — assigned and recorded.
UEI replaced the DUNS Number in April 2022. UEI itself does not expire; the SAM registration around it does.
- ☐ CAGE Code assigned by the Defense Logistics Agency and active in SAM.gov.
CAGE is automatically requested during SAM registration but processed separately by DLA — typically 3–5 business days.
- ☐ Primary and secondary NAICS codes selected with size standards verified against SBA thresholds.
Your primary NAICS drives your small-business size status. Mis-selection here cascades into every bid.



- ☐ FAR & DFARS Representations and Certifications completed and current in SAM.gov. *SAM.gov released the modernized FAR/DFARS Reps & Certs on March 24, 2026 — re-review and re-confirm yours.*

SECTION 03

Certifications & Set-Aside Status

As of December 2024, self-certification is no longer accepted for any program. All set-aside eligibility now flows through MySBA Certifications.

- ☐ You have honestly evaluated eligibility for 8(a), HUBZone, WOSB / EDWOSB, and SDVOSB and pursued every program you qualify for. *Stacking certifications multiplies your competitive surface area; an 8(a) HUBZone SDVOSB firm can compete on any of those set-asides.*
- ☐ All claimed certifications are active in MySBA Certifications and verifiable by a contracting officer. *Self-certification is no longer accepted for set-asides. Only SBA-certified firms count toward agency goals.*
- ☐ You understand the September 2025 FAR Part 19 overhaul and what "Once 8(a), Always 8(a)" no longer means for follow-on contracts. *8(a) follow-ons can now move to HUBZone, SDVOSB, or WOSB set-asides without SBA approval — this changes capture strategy on incumbent recompetes.*
- ☐ Recertification deadlines are tracked: HUBZone every 3 years, SDVOSB renewal in MySBA (launched November 2025), WOSB program examinations every 3 years. *Lapsed certification at time of award is fatal — even if eligibility is unchanged.*
- ☐ If pursuing SDVOSB work, you understand the federal goal increased from 3% to 5% of prime and subcontract dollars under NDAA FY2024 — and that VetCert backlog is now ~12 days. *The expanded goal puts roughly \$31B annually in targeted reach for properly-certified SDVOSBs.*

SECTION 04

Capabilities & Marketing Assets

Contracting officers and prime teaming partners do not have time to figure out what you do. These assets do that work for you.



- ☐ Capability Statement is current (within 6 months), one page, and uses the standard six-section format.
Core Competencies, Past Performance, Differentiators, Corporate Data (UEI/CAGE/NAICS), Certifications, and Contact.
- ☐ A federal-specific company website (or landing page) exists, with UEI, CAGE, NAICS, and certifications visible.
Many primes will not initiate a teaming conversation with a firm whose website does not surface this data.
- ☐ Key personnel resumes are formatted to federal proposal standards, with security clearance status (if applicable) noted.
Resumes built for commercial recruiting rarely survive Section L/M evaluation. Reformat in advance.
- ☐ You can articulate, in two sentences, why an agency would award to you over an incumbent or larger competitor.
If you cannot, your proposals will not be able to either.

SECTION 05

Past Performance & References

Past performance is the single most weighted evaluation factor on most federal awards. It must be documented, retrievable, and verifiable.

- ☐ You have at least three relevant past-performance examples documented in a structured format (scope, period, value, customer, outcome, references).
Relevance is judged against the specific solicitation — start building a reusable library now.
- ☐ References are pre-warned and have agreed to respond to past-performance questionnaires within solicitation deadlines.
Cold references rarely respond in time. A "yes, please use me" conversation is not the same as a written commitment.
- ☐ If you have prior federal awards, your CPARS evaluations have been reviewed and any disputed ratings have been addressed.
Negative CPARS ratings persist for three years and are visible to every contracting officer.
- ☐ Commercial past performance is documented at federal-grade detail — not just a logo wall on your website.
Government evaluators are required to consider commercial past performance, but only if you make it evaluable.



SECTION 06

Financial & Pricing Readiness

Federal pricing is a discipline distinct from commercial pricing. The agency expects an audit-defensible cost build, not a number you can defend in conversation.

- ☐ You maintain GAAP-basis financial statements that could survive review by an outside CPA.

A teaming partner, surety, or contracting officer asking for financials should not produce a scramble.

- ☐ Your accounting system can segregate direct costs, indirect costs, and unallowable costs in compliance with FAR Part 31.

QuickBooks alone does not do this without deliberate setup. DCAA-adequate accounting is a configurable practice, not a software feature.

- ☐ You have a written pricing methodology that can produce a defensible cost-volume in 5 business days or less from a clean RFP.

On most federal opportunities, your competition can. If you cannot, you will rely on guesswork under deadline.

- ☐ Working capital, lines of credit, and surety capacity (where relevant) are sized for the contracts you intend to pursue.

Federal payment cycles average 30 days post-invoice — but invoicing has its own runway. Plan for 60-90.

SECTION 07

Compliance & Operational Readiness

These are the items that disqualify otherwise-strong firms late in source selection.

- ☐ Required commercial general liability, workers' compensation, and (where applicable) professional liability insurance are in place at federal-contract levels.

Many federal solicitations require minimums (often \$1M / \$2M aggregate) and specific endorsements. Verify with your broker before you bid, not after.

- ☐ Cybersecurity posture is documented and CMMC-aware. If pursuing DoD work, CMMC Level 2 readiness is mapped.

CMMC compliance is now woven into DFARS clauses on most DoD opportunities — unprepared firms are screened out at responsibility determination.



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- ☐ Personnel are positioned for required clearances or vetting (Public Trust, Secret, Top Secret, or contract-specific suitability) where the work demands it.
Clearance lead-time can exceed 6 months. Cleared-staff requirements written into solicitations are pass/fail at proposal time.

- ☐ A bid / no-bid framework is in place, applied honestly, and used to walk away from low-Pwin opportunities.
Pursuing every solicitation dilutes proposal quality across all of them. Discipline here often distinguishes mature contractors from new ones.



Score Yourself & Next Steps

Total your checked boxes across all seven sections (out of 30) and locate yourself on the readiness ladder below.

Tier	Where to start
Foundation Phase (0 - 15)	Stabilize the foundation first. Complete legal-entity housekeeping, finish SAM.gov registration with FAR/DFARS Reps & Certs, and pursue every set-aside certification you actually qualify for. Bidding before this layer is solid produces poor past-performance outcomes that follow you for three years.
Build Phase (16 - 21)	You are registered but not yet competitive. Spend 30-90 days on capability statement, past-performance documentation, pricing methodology, and a federal-spec website. Begin attending matchmaking events and pre-bid conferences as observation, not as a bidder.
Bid-Ready (22 - 26)	You can submit competitive proposals on the right opportunities. Close your remaining gaps in parallel with active capture, and use a disciplined bid / no-bid filter to keep proposal quality high. This is where teaming relationships start to compound.
Mission-Ready (27 - 30)	You are operating at the level of a mature federal contractor. Focus on capture intelligence, GWAC and IDIQ positioning, and the operational discipline that turns awarded work into renewals, expansions, and CPARS ratings that win the next bid for you.

Want help closing the gaps?

GUIDE GSC works with small businesses on every layer of this checklist — registration cleanup, certification strategy, capability development, past-performance documentation, pricing methodology, and capture support. If your score surfaced two or three places where you'd benefit from a second set of eyes, that's exactly the conversation we have most often.



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Phone [your-phone-here]

Reflects current 2026 federal contracting framework: September 2025 FAR Part 19 overhaul, the elimination of self-certification, MySBA Certifications migration, and the modernized FAR/DFARS Reps & Certs released March 24, 2026. Provided for educational purposes; not legal, accounting, or contracting advice.



My Action Plan

Use this page to capture the specific gaps your score surfaced — and the next concrete step you'll take on each. The subscribers who turn this checklist into awarded contracts are the ones who write down their next moves the same week they take the assessment.

Top 3 Gaps to Close First

Next Steps & Owners

Target Re-Score Date
