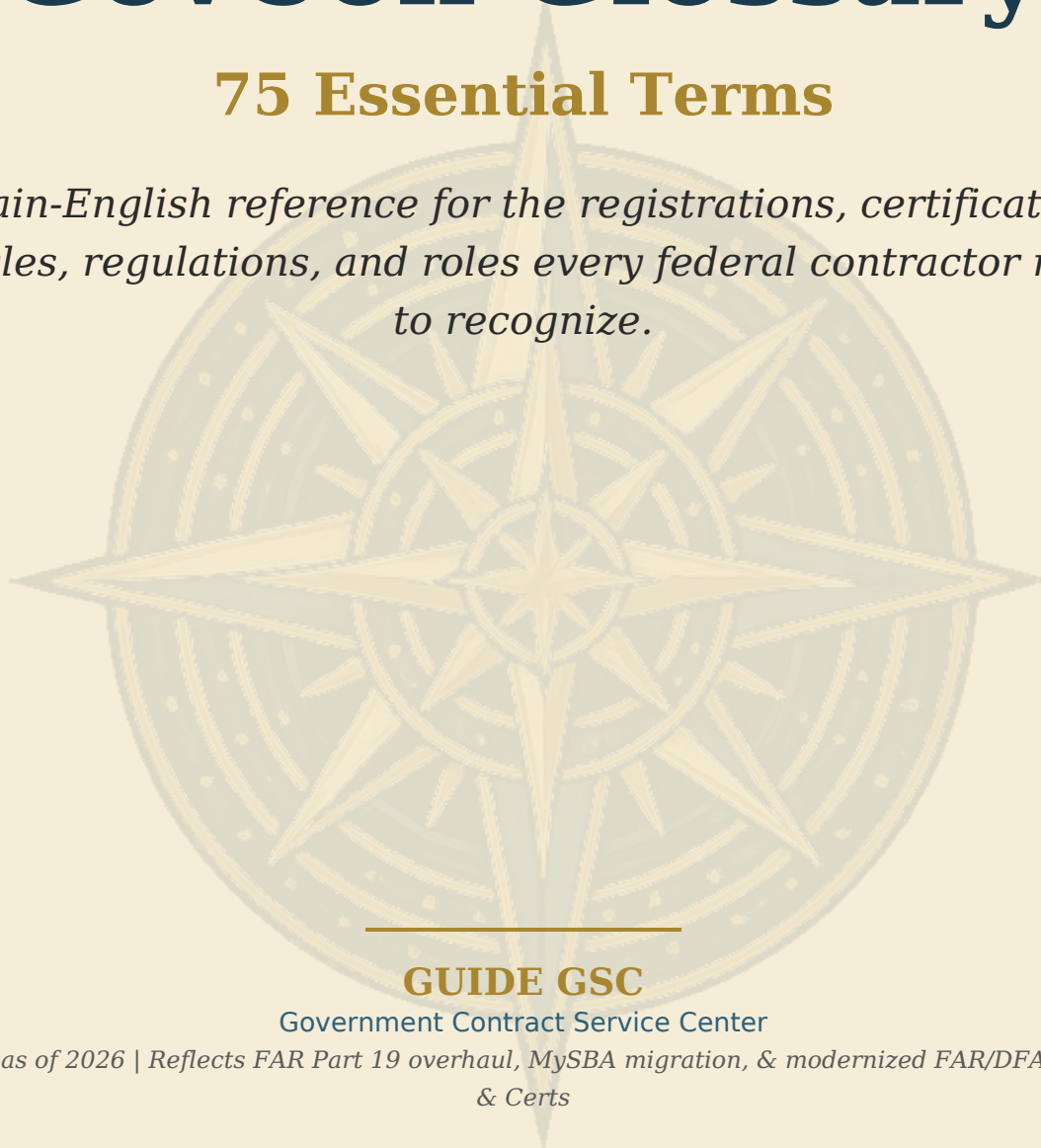


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GovCon Glossary

75 Essential Terms

A plain-English reference for the registrations, certifications, vehicles, regulations, and roles every federal contractor needs to recognize.



GUIDE GSC

Government Contract Service Center

Current as of 2026 | Reflects FAR Part 19 overhaul, MySBA migration, & modernized FAR/DFARS Reps & Certs



How to Use This Glossary

Federal contracting has its own vocabulary — much of it acronyms layered on acronyms — and the language alone is enough to keep small businesses on the sidelines. This glossary is the field guide we hand new GUIDE GSC clients on day one. It collects 75 of the terms you'll see on every solicitation, every teaming call, and every internal proposal review, and explains each in one or two sentences in the language a business owner actually uses.

Terms are grouped into eight categories so you can learn the field by area rather than memorizing alphabetically. Each category opens with a short orientation paragraph explaining why those terms cluster together. Read it once front-to-back to build the mental model; come back to it as a lookup when a specific term appears in a solicitation.

Categories

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**CATEGORY 01**

Registrations & Identifiers

The IDs and registrations that prove your business exists in the federal system. All free, all required before you can be awarded a contract.

SAM.gov

System for Award Management. The federal entity-registration database. Active SAM.gov registration is required before any federal contract award (FAR 4.1102). Registration is free and renews annually.

DUNS Number

Data Universal Numbering System. Legacy 9-digit identifier issued by Dun & Bradstreet. Retired in April 2022 and replaced by the UEI. No longer used or accepted in federal systems.

NAICS Code

North American Industry Classification System. A 6-digit code that classifies your industry. Your primary NAICS determines your small-business size standard (revenue or employee thresholds set by the SBA).

NCAGE Code

NATO Commercial and Government Entity code. The international equivalent of a CAGE code. Required for foreign entities registering in SAM.gov and for U.S. firms performing on NATO contracts.

UEI

Unique Entity Identifier. A 12-character alphanumeric ID assigned to your entity during SAM.gov registration. Replaced the DUNS Number in April 2022. The UEI itself does not expire — but the registration around it must be renewed yearly.

CAGE Code

Commercial and Government Entity code. A 5-character ID assigned by the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) and used by the DoD/NATO to identify contractor facilities. Auto-requested during SAM.gov registration; assignment takes 3-5 business days.

EIN

Employer Identification Number. The IRS-issued tax identifier for your business. Must match your SAM.gov registration name and address exactly — mismatches against IRS records are the #1 cause of registration failures.

Login.gov

The federal government's shared authentication service. Required to access SAM.gov, Grants.gov, MySBA Certifications, and most other federal portals. Multi-factor authentication is mandatory.

**CATEGORY 02**

Set-Aside Programs

Categories of small business that receive contract preferences. As of December 2024, self-certification is no longer accepted — you must hold an actual SBA certification.

Set-Aside

A contract or task order reserved for a specific category of small business — for example, an 8(a) set-aside or a HUBZone set-aside. Only firms holding the corresponding certification at time of offer and award are eligible.

HUBZone

Historically Underutilized Business Zone. Set-aside for firms whose principal office sits in a designated HUBZone and where 35% of employees live in a HUBZone. Awards include a 10% price evaluation preference in full-and-open competition. Recertify every 3 years.

EDWOSB

Economically Disadvantaged Women-Owned Small Business. A WOSB whose owners meet additional financial limits — personal net worth under \$850K, AGI under \$400K (3-year average), and total assets under \$6.5M.

VOSB

Veteran-Owned Small Business. Less stringent than SDVOSB; primarily relevant for VA contracting (Vets First). Certification renewal launched in MySBA Certifications November 2025.

MySBA Certifications

The SBA's consolidated certification portal (replaced certify.sba.gov). The single point of application for 8(a), HUBZone, WOSB/EDWOSB, and SDVOSB certifications.

8(a) Program

SBA business development program for socially and economically disadvantaged small businesses. Limited to a 9-year participation period. Sole-source authority up to \$4.5M for services and \$7M for manufacturing. Personal net worth limit of \$850,000.

WOSB

Women-Owned Small Business. SBA certification for firms at least 51% owned and controlled by women who are U.S. citizens. Set-aside eligibility applies in NAICS codes where women-owned firms are underrepresented.

SDVOSB

Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business. Centralized at the SBA's VetCert program (transitioned from VA in 2023). Self-certification eliminated as of December 22, 2024. Federal goal increased from 3% to 5% under NDAA FY2024.

SDB

Small Disadvantaged Business. Self-certification was eliminated; firms now need 8(a) certification to count for set-aside purposes. Still tracked for federal goaling statistics.

Mentor-Protégé Program

SBA program that pairs experienced mentor firms with protégé small businesses. Mentor and protégé can form a joint venture that competes as a small business even if the mentor is large. Powerful capacity-building tool.

**CATEGORY 03**

Contract Vehicles

The frameworks under which agencies buy. Most modern federal spending flows through these multi-year vehicles, not through one-off contracts.

IDIQ

Indefinite Delivery / Indefinite Quantity. A multi-year base contract under which the agency issues task orders or delivery orders for specific work. You compete to "get on the vehicle"; then compete again at the task-order level.

MAS

Multiple Award Schedule (formerly the GSA Schedule). A pre-negotiated catalog vehicle covering products and services across most categories. Agencies can buy directly from your MAS contract without a separate competition.

BOA

Basic Ordering Agreement. A framework agreement laying out standard terms; not itself a contract. Each delivery order under a BOA is the actual contract.

Delivery Order

An individual order for goods or supplies issued under an IDIQ.

GWAC

Government-Wide Acquisition Contract. A multi-agency IDIQ that lets any federal agency order through it. Major IT GWACs include GSA Alliant 2, NIH CIO-SP4, NASA SEWP, and GSA OASIS+.

BPA

Blanket Purchase Agreement. A simplified ordering arrangement for recurring needs at agreed-on terms. Often issued against a MAS contract.

Task Order

An individual order for services issued under an IDIQ. Each task order is competed (or sole-sourced) among contract holders on the vehicle.

SEWP

Solutions for Enterprise-Wide Procurement. NASA-managed GWAC for IT products, services, and solutions. Available to all federal agencies.

**CATEGORY 04**

Solicitations & Opportunities

How the government communicates what it wants to buy. Different solicitation types invite different kinds of responses.

Solicitation

The government's formal request for offers. RFPs, RFQs, and IFBs are all types of solicitations. Issued through SAM.gov Contract Opportunities.

RFQ

Request for Quote. Typically used for commercial items or simplified acquisitions. Quotes are not formal offers and can usually be revised.

Sources Sought

Pre-solicitation notice asking industry whether enough qualified small businesses can perform a given requirement. Drives set-aside decisions; respond even if you're not 100% qualified.

Synopsis

A pre-solicitation notice published per FAR 5.207 announcing an upcoming solicitation. Gives you a head start on capture before the RFP drops.

SLA

Service Level Agreement. The performance metrics written into a contract — uptime, response times, deliverable quality. Failure to meet SLAs can trigger remedies.

RFP

Request for Proposal. Used for negotiated procurements where both technical approach and price are evaluated. The most common large-contract format.

RFI

Request for Information. Used for market research; not a contract opportunity itself. Strong RFI responses position you for the eventual RFP.

SAM.gov Contract Opportunities

The federal opportunity database (replaced FedBizOpps in 2019). Where pre-solicitations, solicitations, and award notices are posted. Free to search.

Pre-Solicitation Phase

The period before formal solicitation release. The most valuable capture window — once the RFP drops, your ability to influence requirements is over.

NDA

Non-Disclosure Agreement. Common in teaming and capture conversations. Protects information shared between potential teaming partners.

**CATEGORY 05**

Regulations & Compliance

The rulebook. The FAR governs how every federal contract is awarded and administered; agency supplements like DFARS overlay agency-specific rules on top.

FAR

Federal Acquisition Regulation. Title 48 of the Code of Federal Regulations. The primary rulebook governing how federal civilian agencies acquire goods and services.

CFR

Code of Federal Regulations. The compiled set of all federal agency regulations. The FAR is Title 48; SBA regulations live in Title 13.

FAR Part 31

Contract Cost Principles. Defines which costs are allowable, allocable, and reasonable. Critical for any cost-reimbursable or T&M contract.

NIST 800-171

The federal cybersecurity standard for protecting Controlled Unclassified Information in non-federal systems. The technical foundation underneath CMMC Level 2.

DCMA

Defense Contract Management Agency. Manages DoD contracts after award — quality assurance, schedule, cost surveillance, and final acceptance.

DFARS

Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement. The DoD's overlay on the FAR. When DFARS and FAR conflict on DoD contracts, DFARS controls.

FAR Part 19

Small Business Programs. Underwent a major overhaul in September 2025 that eliminated "Once 8(a), Always 8(a)" — 8(a) follow-on contracts can now be moved to HUBZone, SDVOSB, or WOSB set-asides without SBA approval.

CMMC

Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification. Tiered cybersecurity posture required for DoD contractors handling Federal Contract Information (FCI) or Controlled Unclassified Information (CUI). Now woven into DFARS clauses.

DCAA

Defense Contract Audit Agency. Audits contractor cost data on DoD contracts. DCAA-adequate accounting is a configurable practice — not a software feature.

CUI

Controlled Unclassified Information. Federal information that requires safeguarding but is not classified. Triggers NIST 800-171 / CMMC obligations.



CATEGORY 06

Pricing & Cost

Federal pricing is a discipline distinct from commercial pricing. The cost build must be defensible on its components, not just on its total.

FFP

Firm Fixed Price. The contractor delivers the scope for a fixed price regardless of actual cost. Contractor bears all cost risk.

CPFF

Cost-Plus-Fixed-Fee. Contractor is reimbursed for allowable costs and earns a separately stated fixed fee. Government bears most cost risk.

Wrap Rate

The total billable hourly labor rate including direct labor + fringe + overhead + G&A + fee. Often expressed as a multiplier on direct labor (e.g., a 2.1x wrap rate).

Overhead

Indirect costs supporting direct labor — typically allocated at a rate against direct labor dollars. Distinct from G&A.

Indirect Cost

Costs that benefit multiple cost objectives and are not directly assignable to a single contract — overhead, G&A, fringe. Pooled and allocated using approved rates.

T&M

Time and Materials. Labor billed at agreed hourly rates; materials reimbursed at cost (often plus a small handling fee). Hybrid risk profile.

CPIF

Cost-Plus-Incentive-Fee. Like CPFF but with fee tied to cost-control or performance targets.

G&A

General and Administrative expenses. The indirect cost pool for company-wide expenses (executive salaries, accounting, legal, IT) allocated across all work.

CLIN

Contract Line Item Number. Each priceable item in a contract is given a CLIN, with its own price, quantity, period of performance, and deliverables.

**CATEGORY 07**

Past Performance & Contract Lifecycle

Past performance is typically the single most weighted evaluation factor on federal awards — and the lifecycle terms below define what creates that record.

Past Performance

Documented record of prior contract performance — relevance, quality, timeliness, cost control, and customer satisfaction. The most weighted evaluation factor on most non-LPTA solicitations.

PPQ

Past Performance Questionnaire. The form solicitations require your references to complete to validate your past performance. Cold references rarely respond in time.

Incumbent

The current holder of a contract being recompeted. Has unmatched familiarity with the work, the customer, and the personnel involved.

Option Year

A pre-priced contract extension period that the government can elect (or decline) to exercise. Most federal contracts are structured as a base year plus 4 option years.

Mod

Contract modification. A formal change to the contract — scope, price, period of performance, terms. Bilateral mods require both parties' agreement; unilateral mods don't.

CPARS

Contractor Performance Assessment Reporting System. The federal database of formal performance ratings on completed contracts. Negative ratings persist for 3 years and are visible to every contracting officer.

Recompete

Re-solicitation of an existing contract for the next performance period. Incumbents enjoy informational advantage, but the requirement may be restructured (e.g., moved to a different set-aside).

Award Term

A contract extension period the agency may grant based on superior performance. Distinct from option years; not pre-priced and not automatic.

PoP

Period of Performance. The contract's start and end dates. Performance outside the PoP requires a modification.

Award

The agency's formal selection of a contractor and execution of the contract. The award date starts the period of performance.

**CATEGORY 08**

Proposal, Capture & Roles

How proposals get built and who you'll work with on the agency side. Every contract has both — and the people frequently matter more than the paper.

Capability Statement

A one-page overview of your firm — core competencies, past performance, differentiators, corporate data (UEI/CAGE/NAICS), certifications, and contact. The standard handout for primes and contracting officers.

Section M

The portion of an RFP that tells offerors how the agency will evaluate proposals — factors, subfactors, weighting, basis for award.

Bid / No-Bid

The structured decision whether to pursue a solicitation. A disciplined framework keeps proposal quality high by eliminating low-Pwin opportunities.

Prime

The primary contractor on an award — the firm holding the direct contractual relationship with the agency. Primes can subcontract portions of the work.

KO

Contracting Officer. The federal employee with formal authority to bind the government on a contract — to execute, modify, or terminate. Treat the KO as the only authoritative voice.

Section L

The portion of an RFP that tells offerors how to prepare and submit their proposal — page limits, format, organization, content.

Pwin

Probability of Win. The capture team's estimate of the likelihood of winning a specific opportunity. Used to drive bid/no-bid decisions.

Color Teams

Internal proposal review checkpoints — Pink Team (early outline), Red Team (full draft), Gold Team (final), White Team (compliance/admin). The discipline that separates good proposals from compliant ones.

Sub

Subcontractor. A firm performing work under the prime. Subs do not have a direct contractual relationship with the agency.

COR

Contracting Officer's Representative. The day-to-day technical/programmatic liaison appointed by the KO. Has no authority to change the contract.



Want help putting these to work?

Vocabulary alone doesn't win contracts — application does. GUIDE GSC works with small businesses on the practical side of every term in this glossary: getting registrations right the first time, choosing the certifications worth pursuing, structuring pricing that passes scrutiny, building past-performance documentation that holds up at evaluation, and translating capture intelligence into proposals that actually win.

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Government Contract Service Center

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