

## How to Find the Right Government Business Development Consultant?

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**Summary:** More and more Government Business Development Consultants are popping up as federal spending reaches record breaking heights. Finding one that is a good fit for your company can be a challenging process. Below we provide some helpful questions and answers that any qualified consultant should be able to answer. It is important to hire the right person, who aligns with your company goals and is working in your best interests.

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A Government Development Business Consultant is trained to help companies develop and build their business with the Federal government. As Federal spending continues to be on the rise, more companies are interested in pursuing this market. As a result, more government consultants are emerging. Hiring a consultant can be challenging and business owners are often skeptical. This is because of the fear of the unknown. How do you avoid the pitfall of choosing the wrong person - and more importantly how do you know when you have found the right match?

**Why would you hire a Government Business Development Consultant?** The reason many businesses are hiring such people is because they are aiming to become a pre-approved vendor on the General Services Administration (GSA) schedule. The GSA is the largest acquisition arm of the Federal government and is responsible for vetting companies to become contractors to Federal Agencies. In 2009, more than \$550B was spent in Federal contracts and that number is expected to grow. To capture a piece of this market, it is essential to become pre-approved with a long-term fixed price contracting mechanism in place. If a GSA is not feasible, these consultants should be able to provide direction at a minimum. In this market for full positioning, prices can range anywhere from \$15K to as much as \$85K. This varies based on skill levels and the host of services they can provide.

**What should you ask a potential Consultant?** Once you have decided that you want to enter the Federal market, you should begin preparing your goals. There are many ways to enter the market, and it is important that you clearly define the outcome you desire. One of the hardest avenues to pursue is that of becoming a GSA pre-approved vendor. Coincidentally, once approved, this is the best way to effectively compete.

Below are six good questions to ask consultants about what *they* can do for you!

- 1) **Is there a fit for my products/services?** Consultants should be able to tell you where your organization will fit within the GSA space, if at all, how much money was spent in this area over the last few years and identify your competition. What is the opportunity? Where should you start? Determining the right fit is crucial for exposure. If placed incorrectly, you can lose out on many contracts.

- 2) **What process are you going to follow?** Qualified firms should be able to detail the process in steps and give you an estimate of time based on milestones to complete the process. The more products you offer, the more time intensive the process.
- 3) **How much time do I need to dedicate to this?** While your hired consultant should handle most of the work, a liaison within the company will be required to provide necessary company information. This can be a significant time requirement of as much as five hours per week the first few months. Anyone who insists that you will not have to devote some time and energy to the process is not looking out for your best interests.
- 4) **How long with this take?** This process can take anywhere from 8 – 12 months. Be wary of any shorter time periods being promised.
- 5) **What will be the outcomes?** First and foremost, pre-positioning cannot be guaranteed. More than 85% of all proposals submitted to GSA are rejected. For the most part, this is due to incomplete or inadequate information; a pitfall that should be avoided with a competent consultant. Obtaining an award is only about 40% of the picture you need to be successful. The consultant should teach you how to use it effectively, how to market it and how to maintain it.
- 6) **What happens after I get my Schedule?** Market it correctly and develop relationships with local buyers first then expand outward. Your current materials should be modified as federal buyers like to see certain language and they look for key points that make it easy to do business with you. You should be persistent and your consultant should have armed you not only with the right tools to do business with the government but the know how. This market is different and should be approached as such. Once in however, the rewards are well worth the efforts.

After asking these questions, you should be satisfied with what that particular company or consultant can do for your company. Often time's firms provide 20%-60% of what you need. Ensure it is a one-stop shop and you will work with the same team throughout. Make sure they understand your company, develop a contract specific business plan which will provide direction, can quantify social and environmental attributes if applicable, can modify your current marketing materials and teach you how and who to pitch to. Additionally, you need to make sure they teach you how to maintain your award in preparation for government audits. It is a process and a good consultant will make it manageable for you to understand and perform.

You should be able to pick out those fly by night companies that won't be around after your award. Look at credentials or resumes. Ask to speak to former clients or view testimonials. You will be working with these people for nearly a year, so a good fit is essential and trust is paramount. Finally, ensure that their projected outcomes are aligning with your desired goals from this process. If they don't, you should keep looking.

*\*Leslie Hulser earned her MBA from Florida International University and specializes in business to government consulting. She brings extensive experience in project management and business planning to companies that are interested in working with the Federal government. To learn more, visit her website at [www.courtneyconsultingsolutions.com](http://www.courtneyconsultingsolutions.com)*