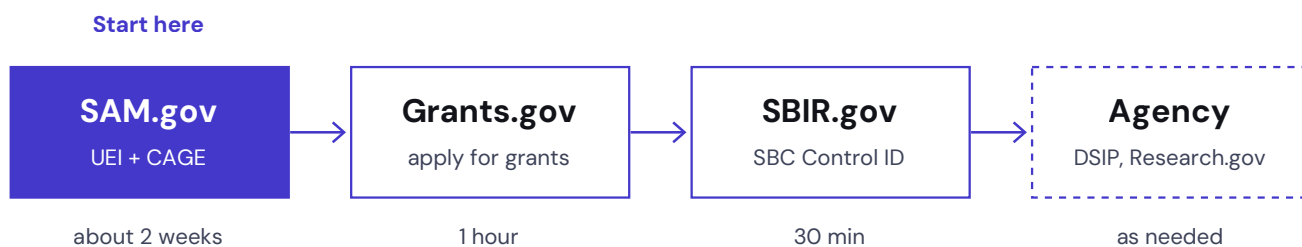


A free guide

Registering a small business for federal contracts and grants

This guide takes you from an empty SAM.gov account to a registration that can win federal contracts and grants. All four systems are free. Contracts are posted on SAM.gov, grants on Grants.gov, and SBIR topics on SBIR.gov and each agency's own portal. The guide also covers the mistakes that stall registrations, and how to avoid them.





What this covers

There are four systems. SAM.gov comes first, and each of the others depends on your SAM registration. A clean registration takes about two weeks, most of it waiting. The work itself is about four hours if nothing goes wrong. This guide is mostly about the things that go wrong.

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01 Before you start

Gather these first. Hunting for them mid-form is how mistakes get made.

- ☐ Legal business name, exactly as the state registered it
- ☐ State file or entity number
- ☐ EIN, and the exact taxpayer name the IRS holds
- ☐ Formation date, meaning the effective date on the state certificate
- ☐ Physical address where the business actually operates
- ☐ Bank routing and account number for award payments
- ☐ Five years of gross receipts
- ☐ Employee count

Settle this before you touch the form

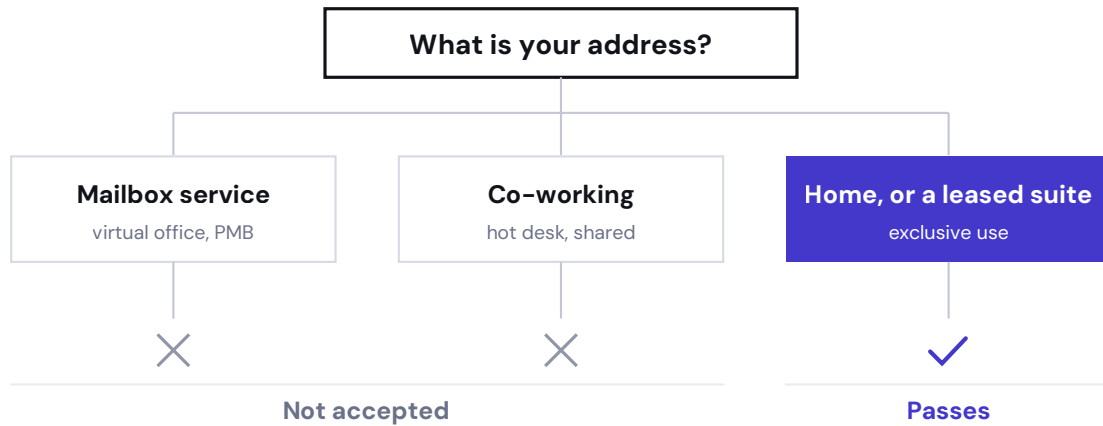
Your physical address has to be a place the business occupies. This is the most common reason registrations fail, and no document can fix it after the fact. Read the next section before you start.

02 The physical address problem

SAM states this plainly on the form:

We do not accept a P.O. Box, virtual office, mailbox service, or co-working space for your physical address.

That excludes a lot of what small companies use. A mail-forwarding suite with a mailbox number is out. A virtual office is out. A co-working desk is out, even a paid one, because none of them is **a place the business itself occupies**.



The address test, and the only answer that passes it

The privacy question

You can hide a home address from SAM's public search, as section 09 explains. Before you rely on that, check whether your state already publishes it. Texas, for example, lists officer addresses on the Public Information Report, which anyone can read. If your address is already public at the state level, hiding it in SAM protects less than you think.

Mailing address is separate

You can keep a mail service as your mailing address. The restriction applies only to the physical address, so your mail can keep arriving where it does today.

03 Entity validation

Create an account through Login.gov and start a new entity registration. SAM matches your legal name, address and formation date against public records. If it cannot match them, you must upload documents.

Accepted

- A certified state filing, such as a certificate of formation or articles of organization or incorporation
- A recent business bank statement
- A utility bill
- The original IRS EIN assignment letter



Not accepted

- Screenshots of federal websites
- Unfiled IRS forms such as a W-9 or SS-4
- Leases and award documents

The rule that catches people

Whatever you upload must show the **legal business name and the physical address in the same document**, dated within the last five years. A document proving one without the other does not work, and neither do two documents that each prove half.

That is why a bank statement is often the answer: the entity name and the address sit together in the address block.

Redacting properly

Black out the account number and balances. Keep the bank name, the entity name, the address and the statement period. Upload only the single page you need. Nobody needs your transaction history.

Two ways people get this wrong. A **highlight hides nothing**; it makes the numbers more visible. And a black box drawn over live text can still be **selected underneath**. Draw the boxes, export the PDF so they flatten, then try to select the text where the box sits.

Two fields that need care

Start date is the effective date on your state certificate, which may differ from the date on the cover letter. Use the certificate.

Doing Business As (DBA) can be left blank. If your company has several trade names, naming one says nothing useful, and every name you enter must match a filed certificate.

Validation usually takes a few business days, and sometimes longer. The UEI is issued when it clears, before the rest of the registration is finished.

04 Taxpayer information

The IRS matches your **legal name and EIN as a pair**. The taxpayer name must be exactly what the IRS holds, which is the legal entity name. A trade name fails the match.

The address here should be what the IRS has on file, which may differ from your physical address. That is fine. The check covers only the name and EIN.

This step takes two to five business days.

05 Business types, and the field that breaks everything

Three fields matter more than they appear to.

Field	Answer for a typical small LLC
Entity structure	Corporate Entity, Not Tax Exempt. The partnership option is for actual partnerships and LLPs.
Profit structure	For Profit Organization
Organization factors	Limited Liability Company, plus Subchapter S Corporation if you made that election

This one field breaks the small business track

If profit structure is set to **Non-Profit** by mistake, two later pages report "**not a small business concern**," and the Small Disadvantaged Business question never appears at all.

A nonprofit falls outside the FAR definition of a small business concern, so the entire small business track silently disappears. Correcting this one field fixes both.

If any page tells you that you are not a small business concern, come back and check this field first.

Socioeconomic categories

These are self-representations and need no certification: minority-owned (with the specific category), women-owned and veteran-owned.

They make you **findable**. Large prime contractors on bigger contracts carry subcontracting plans with goals for small, veteran-owned, service-disabled veteran-owned, HUBZone, small disadvantaged and women-owned businesses, and they search SAM for firms that help them meet those goals.

The programs that carry set-asides (8(a), HUBZone, WOSB and SDVOSB) each need separate SBA certification.

06 Financial information and legal proceedings

Enter the bank details for award payments: routing number, account number and account type.

Executive compensation applies only if, in your last fiscal year, at least 80% of your revenue came from federal sources and that federal revenue was \$25,000,000 or more.

The legal proceedings section is a series of certifications subject to 18 U.S.C. 1001 and the False Claims Act. A clean company answers No to most of them.

The tax question deserves care

Within the past three years, has the entity been notified of any delinquent federal taxes above the FAR threshold for which liability remains unsatisfied?

The answer is Yes only when **all three** are true:

- 01 The IRS formally **notified** the entity, through an assessment or a notice
- 02 The amount exceeds the threshold in FAR 9.104-5, currently **\$15,000**
- 03 It **remains unsatisfied**, meaning unpaid and outside any approved installment agreement you are current on

The question covers the **entity** and its EIN. For a pass-through entity such as an S corporation, income tax usually falls on the owner's personal return, which this question does not reach.

If you are not sure, find out before answering. Your accountant can tell you in one call, or you can set up an IRS Business Tax Account online.

07 Goods and services

NAICS codes

These classify what you do. Each code you list carries its own size standard, and SAM shows whether you are small under each one. On a contract, the code in the solicitation decides your size. Your **primary** code is how buyers find you and matters for SBA programs. A reasonable set for a software or AI company:

Code	What it covers	Size standard
541511	Custom computer programming services	\$34,000,000
541512	Computer systems design services	\$34,000,000
513210	Software publishers	\$47,000,000
518210	Computing infrastructure, data processing, hosting	\$40,000,000
541611	Management consulting	\$24,500,000
541990	Other professional, scientific and technical services	\$19,500,000
611420	Computer training	\$16,000,000

Size standards are from SBA's table effective March 17, 2023, which is still in force. SBA has two proposals open, from August 2025 and August 2026, that would change many of these figures and remove most exception rows. Check the current table before you certify.

[There is no NAICS code for artificial intelligence.](#) The system was last revised in 2022 and classifies a business by what it delivers. In federal procurement, an AI company is a software company. AI shows up in solicitation text and Product and Service Codes, so search on those.

Choose your primary code for visibility. Most federal software solicitations are issued under 541511, so that is where contracting officers and primes will look for you. A higher size standard you will never approach is worth less than being findable.



Watch for exception rows. Some codes have variants with different rules. 541519 has an Information Technology Value Added Reseller exception using a 150–employee standard, and adding it can put an N in your small business column. If you do not resell hardware, leave it out.

About eight codes are plenty. A long, scattered list reads as unfocused.

Product and Service Codes

These are optional and more granular than NAICS, and contracting officers filter on them. For software and AI, the current codes are in the D series.

Code	What it covers
DA10	Business application and application development software as a service
DA01	Business application and application development support services
DB01, DB02	Compute support services
DF01	IT management support services

The older D302, D307 and D399 codes were retired. If a code will not resolve, type the two–letter prefix into the picker and see what exists. Research and development work falls in the A series.

Business size

Employees means people on payroll, averaged over 24 months, including part–time. Contractors paid on a 1099 are generally not counted.

Annual receipts is an average

Receipts are total income plus cost of goods sold from your tax returns, including any affiliates. Add the last five completed fiscal years and **divide by five**. If the company has been in business for fewer than five completed fiscal years, divide its total receipts by the number of weeks it has operated and multiply by 52.

This is a certification. Get the real figures from your accountant, and correct the field if you entered a placeholder.



Small Disadvantaged Business

If the question does not appear at all, check the profit structure field in section 05.

All four tests must be met:

- 01** At least 51% owned by socially and economically disadvantaged US citizens
- 02** Each person claiming economic disadvantage has a net worth under **\$850,000** (excluding their ownership in the business, the equity in their primary residence and qualified retirement accounts), average adjusted gross income of \$400,000 or less, and total assets of \$6,500,000 or less
- 03** Those individuals control management and daily operations
- 04** The firm is small under the applicable size standard

The social disadvantage test changed on September 10, 2026

SBA removed the presumption that members of certain groups are socially disadvantaged. Each individual now has to show their own social disadvantage with evidence. The rule was written for the 8(a) program, and SDB status draws on the same criteria in 13 CFR part 124. Read the current 13 CFR 124.103 before you check this box, and ask your SBA district office or a government contracts attorney if your case is unclear.

08 The remaining certifications

Question	Answer, and why
Security levels	Not applicable, unless you hold an actual clearance granted through the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency.
EDI	No. It is for large suppliers with automated invoicing.
Disaster Response Registry	Only if you provide physical relief work, such as debris removal, supplies or reconstruction.
Registration purpose	Choose All Awards . It covers contracts and financial assistance, including grants.
DoD question	Answer Yes if you might sell to the Department of Defense. This adds DFARS certifications, all straightforward. DoD contracts that involve controlled information later bring NIST SP 800-171 and CMMC requirements.
GAAP statements	A tax return plus bookkeeping is not GAAP. Most small companies answer No, and the answer disqualifies you from nothing.
Points of contact	Three are required, and all three can be you. The E-Business POC matters most, because it controls who can act for your entity in federal systems, Grants.gov included.
Price determination	Name yourself. This is the certificate of independent price determination, an anti-collusion provision.

Two that matter more than they appear to

Limited rights data and restricted software. If you sell proprietary software, answer Yes or choose "vendor will provide information with specific offers." Answering No misstates your position and can invite a dispute over your data rights later. Mark your deliverables properly as well.

Covered telecommunications. This is Section 889, which bans certain telecommunications and video surveillance equipment from Huawei, ZTE, Hytera, Hikvision and Dahua. The second question asks whether you use such equipment as well as whether you sell it. Check your router and any cameras.

09 Public search: what opting out costs

During registration, SAM asks you to decide on this line: "I authorize my entity's non-sensitive information to be displayed in SAM public search results."

Public: Yes	Public: No
Who can see you Anyone, signed in or not Federal agencies Prime contractors	Who can see you Federal government users only Federal agencies Primes cannot find you
Subcontracting stays open	Subcontracting route closes

Who can see your record

Opting out keeps you visible to federal agencies, which covers grants and SBIR. It makes you invisible to prime contractors, who search SAM publicly for small and disadvantaged subcontractors to meet their subcontracting goals.

Subcontracting is one of the few routes into federal work that needs no past performance, and opting out closes it. If your address is already public through state filings, opting out gains you little and costs you that route.

To change the setting after your record is active, start an update to your registration in your SAM Workspace. An opted-out record still appears in SAM's data extracts and API.

10 The CAGE email you will probably get

After you submit, the Defense Logistics Agency reviews the registration and assigns the CAGE code. Many registrations get an automated email from CAGEReview@dla.mil asking for verification.

Three business days

You have three business days to reply, and you must keep DLA's subject line so they can track it. Miss the deadline and the registration stalls.

What they ask for

Legal business name documentation, dated within the last 12 months, from your Secretary of State or equivalent:

- Certificate of good standing
- Articles of organization or incorporation
- A screenshot of active status from the state registry, with your computer's date and time visible

DLA does not accept IRS documents or assumed name (DBA) certificates. A DBA certificate proves a trade name and says nothing about the entity.

The 12-month rule catches anyone whose formation certificate is years old. In many states, the tax or revenue department publishes an entity status page that reports the Secretary of State registration status. In Texas this is the Comptroller's Franchise Tax Account Status page. It is free, needs no account, and prints with the date of the search. Say in your reply which agency it came from and what it reports.

The other questions

Co-location. They list other companies registered with similar names and ask whether any are associated with you. Answer only what you know.

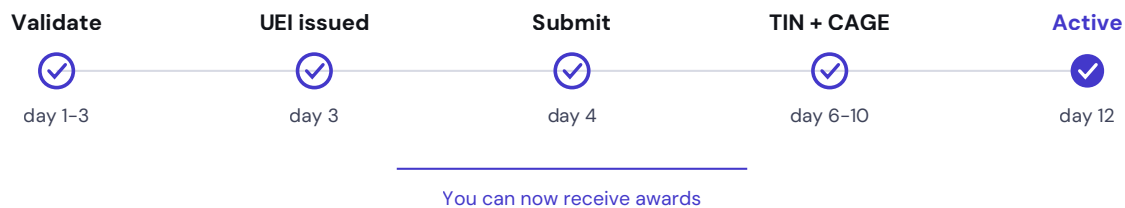
Location type. They ask whether it is a virtual office, business incubator, residential home office, rental suite or something else. Residential home office is a normal and acceptable answer.

Point of contact. They check that the email is on your company's own domain and that the phone number reaches you personally. They may call it. DLA does not recommend a free email address when your company has its own domain, and it may decline to process a registration whose phone number does not work.

Writing the reply

Keep it short and factual, and answer each question in the order asked. Attach the document. Reply to their email so the whole exchange stays in one thread. If your mailing address differs from your physical address, explain it in one line before they ask, because it will appear on whatever document you attach.

11 Active, and the numbers to keep



The five stages, with an example timeline

Write these down

Every proposal and registration asks for them.

What	Format
UEI	12 characters, from SAM
CAGE	5 characters, from DLA
EIN	9 digits, from the IRS
State file no.	From your Secretary of State
SBC Control ID	From SBIR.gov, once registered

Set a renewal reminder

SAM registration expires every year. A lapsed registration means you cannot be awarded anything until you renew, and renewals are not instant. Set a reminder for two months before your registration expires.

12 Grants.gov and SBIR.gov

Grants.gov

This is a separate account, and it is free.

- 01 Register with your own name and company email
- 02 Add an **Organization Applicant Profile** using your UEI, which pulls your entity from SAM
- 03 Request the **Authorized Organization Representative** role, which is the role that can submit. If you are the E-Business POC, you receive the Expanded AOR role automatically.

The E-Business POC named in SAM approves AOR requests. Grants.gov recognizes you as the E-Business POC when the email and UEI on your Grants.gov account match the E-Business POC in SAM, and you can then approve roles for others. The old EBiz login was retired in January 2023.

Confirm the role well before a deadline

A profile without the AOR role can build a complete application and then fail to submit it. Most people find out on deadline day.

SBIR.gov

SBIR.gov signs you in through Login.gov, the same as SAM.gov, and checks your email against the point of contact listed for your UEI in SAM. The 8(a) application at MySBA Certifications uses a separate SBA login.

Registration gives you an **SBC Control ID**, which every SBIR application at every agency requires.

The **company profile field** may be seen by agencies and partners. Describe what the company builds in two or three sentences. Specifics beat adjectives.

Employee count means people on payroll, as in SAM. Consultants are not employees. The ownership questions ask who owns the company.

13 What registration does not give you

Registration means you can be paid. Finding the work and winning it are separate jobs. Three things stand between an active registration and a first award.

A capability statement

This is one or two pages covering what you do, your UEI, CAGE code, NAICS codes and socioeconomic status, and why an agency should choose you. Primes and contracting officers ask for it constantly. Write it now, because whoever asks for it usually wants it the same day.

A way around past performance

This is the real barrier. Prime contract competitions weigh past performance heavily, and new firms have none. Three routes work without it.

SBIR / STTR

Scored on technical merit and commercial potential.

You keep the IP.

No equity taken.

Phase I: up to \$323,090

Phase II: up to \$2,153,927

Sources sought

Market research, open to any firm.

Your response can decide whether the work is set aside for small business.

Takes a few hours to answer

Subcontracting

Primes have binding small business targets.

They carry the performance risk.

Builds the past performance you lack

The three routes that do not require a track record

Time

A serious SBIR Phase I proposal takes weeks. SBIR and STTR were reauthorized on April 13, 2026, and now run through September 2031. From fiscal year 2027, which began on October 1, 2026, each agency must set a limit on how many proposals one company may submit, and the limits are due within 90 days of the start of the fiscal year. One strong proposal is worth more than five thin ones.



The most useful step in SBIR is one almost nobody takes: contacting the topic author. The Department of Defense publishes its topics in a [pre-release window](#) before the solicitation opens, and during that window you can ask the author questions directly. Once the solicitation opens, that door closes.

Programs to consider once you are registered

Program	What it gives you
8(a) Business Development	A nine-year program with sole-source awards up to \$5,500,000 for most contracts and \$8,500,000 for manufacturing. Apply through MySBA Certifications at certifications.sba.gov . It requires the economic disadvantage tests, individual evidence of social disadvantage, and usually two years in business.
HUBZone	Available if your principal office sits in a designated zone and at least 35% of your employees live in one.
GSA Multiple Award Schedule	A long application that puts you in a standing catalog that agencies buy from.

The short version

- 01 Settle the physical address first. A mailbox will not pass, and no document fixes it.
- 02 Gather the documents before you start.
- 03 Get the profit structure right, or the entire small business track vanishes.
- 04 Answer the tax question honestly, and find out the facts before you answer.
- 05 Pick the primary NAICS code where buyers will look for you.
- 06 Average your receipts over five years, or annualize them by weeks in business if the company is younger.
- 07 Expect the CAGE email, and have a current state document ready for it.
- 08 Register on [Grants.gov](https://grants.gov) and [SBIR.gov](https://sbir.gov) once the UEI exists.
- 09 Write the capability statement.
- 10 Set a reminder to renew.



The part this guide cannot do for you

Registering was the free part. Finding the work is the hard part.

You now have a UEI, a CAGE code and an active registration. You still need to know which of this week's thousands of notices you could win, who to team with and what to bid, and then you need a draft you can submit.

That is what Crafteny does. Enter your UEI and it reads your registration, matches you against live contracts and grants on the codes and certifications you just set, tells you whether you are eligible and what the work is worth, finds partners for what you cannot cover alone, and drafts and scores the proposal against the criteria the government published.

Start free at crafteny.com

This guide is general information, current as of October 2026. It is not legal, tax or financial advice. Federal systems change, so check the current wording on the form in front of you. Registration in every system described here is free.