OFFICE OF SMALL & DISADVANTAGED BUSINESS UTILIZATION ■ Winter 2021

@VAVetBiz News

Your Connection to VA OSDBU News, Information and Resources

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VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Sharon G. Ridley

Letter from the Executive Director

The VA Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) received encouraging news on its fiscal year (FY) 2021 goaling report through the end of January, and VA remains on track to achieve its targets. This past year has provided a solid foundation for continued success beyond FY 2021. COVID-19 may have presented major challenges, but OSDBU not only adapted, it also innovated, never losing focus on its mission to help Veterans and small businesses gain access to economic opportunities.

OSDBU helped Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses capture nearly $1.68 billion in contracts – an impressive 23% of total VA contract spend. Veteran-Owned Small Businesses also netted over $1.72 billion in contracts, or 23.6% of total contract spend. In total, VA awarded $2.3 billion in contracts to small businesses, or 31.7% of total contract spend during this period.

Teleconferencing technology helped OSDBU reach broader audiences while minimizing costs to taxpayers. Virtual events and webinars proved to be a safe and effective means to continue the mission during the COVID-19 pandemic, and nearly all of OSDBU's total training events during FY 2020 were provided virtually, with no travel costs, health risks to the Government or participants and reached over 5,100 Veterans through 88 events. In February alone, OSDBU reached over 1,000 Veterans and small businesses in just five events.

This month is International Women's History Month, and OSDBU has been working hard to promote women Veterans and Woman Veteran-Owned Small Businesses as valued partners for both VA and the Federal Government at large. For more on OSDBU and Women-Veteran Owned Small Businesses, see the article on page 10.

Preparing to do Business with VA – Introduction to Procurement Readiness

No matter how small your business is, VA is a potential customer

Procurement readiness is a small business' demonstrated ability to effectively participate in the federal government contracting marketplace and successfully meet contract requirements. One characteristic of procurement readiness is a firm's ability to identify and respond to solicitations. A procurement-ready small business has the registrations, capabilities, performance history and competitive advantage to be a viable government contractor. Applying for VA verification as a Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) or a Veteran-Owned Small Business (VOSB) is a great start.

Contracts valued at billions of dollars are awarded to small businesses each year, so it is important for firms that want to do business within the federal marketplace to ensure they are procurement ready. Procurement readiness aids small businesses and procurement decision makers (PDM). A PDM is the individual that develops contracting requirements and the acquisition strategy to identify whether small businesses can fulfill those requirements. The VA OSDBU team assists VOSBs by reviewing their capability statement and providing feedback. Submit your firm's capability statement for review at OSDBUSTRATCOMM@va.gov. Resources available to small businesses seeking information about procurement opportunities include the Small Business Administration (SBA) and Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (PTAC). Information about the Department of Veterans Affairs procurement opportunities is located at https://www.vendorportal.ecms.va.gov/eVP/fco/FCO.aspx.

Procurement Readiness Basics

These actions may increase the probability of success in the government marketplace.

- Ensure that your capability statement is current.
- Your company website should be current and inviting to visitors. A firm's website helps PDMs learn more about your business, its capabilities and performance history before face-to-face contact is made. To ensure that VA staff can access your website, submit your website URL to PaloAlto (https://urlfiltering.paloaltonetworks.com) to verify that there are no issues. A fact sheet is available with detailed instructions at: https://www.va.gov/OSDBU/docs/Final_Fact_Sheet_PaloAlto2019.pdf.
- Register with beta.SAM.gov, the official U.S. Government website for people who make, receive and manage federal awards.
- Consider subcontracting: a small business with experience as a subcontractor gains the opportunity to increase experience and earn PDM confidence for future contracting opportunities.
- Differentiate your small business from competitors in areas that matter to the PDM and specific contracting opportunities. Identify what makes your firm different from your competitors and how that benefits the target agency. Ensure you list any special qualifications your company possesses.
- Submit an application to become a VA-verified SDVOSB or VOSB. Unlike other Federal agencies, small businesses must be VA-verified to be eligible for VA's set-aside SDVOSB and VOSB contracts. The VA Verification Program doesn't guarantee small businesses a contract award, but rather, makes them eligible to compete for SDVOSB and VOSB set-aside opportunities.
- Attend procurement events which help small businesses learn how to do business in the federal marketplace. Visit https://vetbiz.va.gov/events to learn more about small business events hosted by VA OSDBU. For free virtual training sessions, industry and government agency-specific networking events, visit VA OSDBU's Event Calendar at https://www.va.gov/osdbu/calendar.asp.

Take advantage of small business resources.

- **PTAC events - http://www.aptac-us.org/contracting-assistance/ptac-training-events**
- **Small Business Administration events - https://www.sba.gov/tools/events**
- **Doing Business with VA OSDBU - https://www.va.gov/osdbu/library/dbwva.asp**
- **Download the abridged Doing Business with VA Reference Guide Here - https://www.va.gov/osdbu/docs/DoingBusinessWithVA_ReferenceGuide.pdf**

An Effective Capabilities Statement

A **capabilities statement** is critical for any business that hopes to be procurement ready. A capabilities statement is a clear, concise, overview that provides just enough information for potential customers to gain confidence in your company. Ideally a capabilities statement is a one page searchable PDF (two pages in some rare cases) that describes who you are and what you do. This document should be visually appealing with graphics, your company's logo and should focus on what makes your company unique.

A company should have three different versions of their capabilities statement: general, industry or agency and solicitation specific.

- **General:** Present an overview of your company. Used for general marketing events and trade conferences. It should also be posted on the company website.
- **Industry or Agency Specific:** Shows your company is capable of performing specialized types of work and demonstrates how your company's services align with the agency or industry needs.
- **Solicitation Specific:** Used to address a specific solicitation. Include key words and terms from the solicitation in the capabilities statement and ensure required North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes match.

An effective capabilities statement incorporates five major components.

- **Core Competencies** are the unique abilities possessed or developed by your firm that can't be easily imitated. Core competencies are the distinctive abilities that gives your company a competitive advantage to deliver value.
- **Past Performance** details your company's experience and expertise relevant to those sought by the procurement decision maker. You should select and prioritize this information based on how recent and relevant it is. Your past performance section should give a brief overview of the situation or need, resolution provided, and value added. It's important for mature businesses to revisit their capabilities statement to ensure it is current and fresh.
- **Differentiators** are the unique features and benefits of the products or services your company offers. Differentiators set you apart from your competitors. This can be how you are diverse or better positioned.
- **Company Data** should contain the company's identity, including office locations, relevant codes (North American Industry Classification System, Commercial and Government Entity, Data Universal Numbering System, etc.), website, social media handle, accolades and certifications.
- **Contact Information** should include a name, phone number and email address of the individual at the firm who can generally talk about the offerings in a meaningful way. This should be for a specific individual, avoiding "info@company.com."

HOW TO MAKE SURE YOUR CAPABILITIES STATEMENT IS EFFECTIVE AND STANDS OUT

Keep it brief. A contracting officer's time is limited and valuable. A one or two page document is more likely to be reviewed.

Tailor to the solicitation. A capabilities statement tailored toward the solicitation or agency shows you have done your homework and can complete the work requested.

Match key words. Use the solicitation instead of using your own internal language to describe your products or services. This extra step will help set you apart when key terms are searched for by procurement decision makers. Be careful not to simply regurgitate the narrative from the solicitation.

Highlight differentiators. Emphasize the characteristics that distinguishes your firm from the competition.

Include relevant past performance. This demonstrates that your company has been successful in performing the requested work. You can take it even further if you are able to match the same language of the solicitation to verifiable past performance. When possible address past performance of similar size and scope.

Responding to a Sources Sought Notice & Request for Information

What's the difference?

A **sources sought notice** is a form of market research to determine business capabilities. A sources sought notice is a solicitation of ***interest***. An sources sought notice ***is not*** an actual bid or solicitation.

A **request for information** is a government market research tool used for a potentially new requirement that has no acquisition history. A procurement decision maker (PDM) transmits a request for information to determine what resources would be necessary in support of a procurement being developed.

SOURCES SOUGHT NOTICE

- Helps identify potentially capable businesses to perform requirements of a planned contract
- Strategic market reseach

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

- Garners information about whether or not there is a solution to an identified problem
- Tactical market research

Why should I respond to one?

Market research is one of the most important actions taken by a PDM to determine if a solicitation can become a Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business or Veteran-Owned Small Business set-aside. Failure to respond to sources sought notices and requests for information may limit the pool of available firms and keep the solicitation from becoming a set-aside. Other advantages to answering include:

- Distinguishes yourself from competitors
- Influences the acquisition strategy that would govern a future solicitation
- Contributes to increased subcontracting goals and opportunities for small businesses

If your business is interested in federal procurement opportunities, responding is a great way to test the waters and become familiar with the requirements of answering federal solicitations.

Anyone can view current sources sought notices and requests for information that federal agencies have released. Also, you can search beta.SAM.gov for available opportunities based on North American Industry Classification System Code, Product Service Code or place of performance.

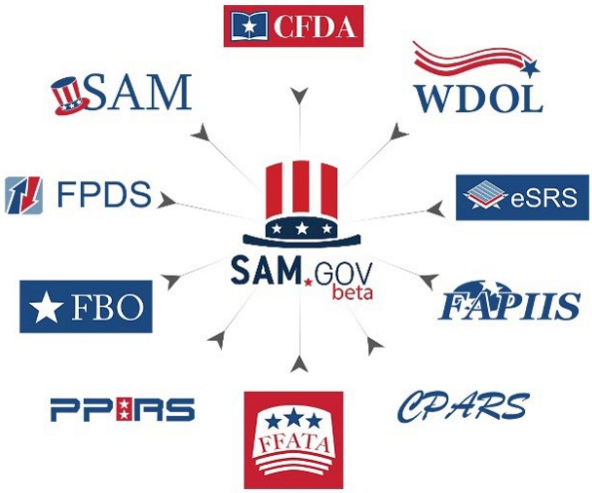
When responding, be sure to answer all the questions in the inquiry. Remember, no matter what the outcome, your response is a great opportunity to introduce your company to PDMs. This connection can be a valuable resource for future procurement endeavors.

How to Navigate beta.SAM.gov

What is Beta SAM?

The General Services Administration manages federal acquisition and awards processes for 10 websites, which are currently being merged into one centralized hub. While parts of the site are fully migrated and "official," some remain in beta form and will be supported on their original platform until they can be fully exported.

When all legacy websites are officially integrated into beta.SAM.gov, it will become the new System for Award Management (SAM) website, and serve as the official U.S. government website for those who make, receive, and manage federal awards.



How do I start?

You must create a login.gov account before accessing beta.SAM.gov. This account gives users single-sign-on authentification and eliminates the need for multiple usernames and passwords. After establishing an account , you can log in and begin searching for information. You can search for contract opportunities, contract award data, assistance listings, federal hierarchy information, and information on wage determinations.

After logging in, you can search for opportunities for a specific federal agency such as VA. For notices and opportunities to work with VA, scroll to "Federal Organizations" and search for "Department of Veterans Affairs." You can search for solicitations based on place of performance or Service Classifications.

The site also gives users the option to save searches, download search results, and/or enable email alerts to be notified when new information is posted.

Why should I use it?

Using beta.SAM.gov gives you access to the entire Federal government's awards processes in one centralized system. This system is used for registering to do business with the federal government, listing contract opportunities, capturing contractor performance, viewing contract data, searching assistance listings, reporting subcontracts, and more. SAM streamlines processes and eliminates the need to enter the same data multiple times. SAM improves efficiency for all users, federal and public.

Need more information?

Beta.SAM.gov has additional information and tutorials on its "Learning Center" page. At the bottom of the homepage, under the Customer Service heading, you'll find the "Learning Center" (beta.SAM.gov | Home). In the Learning Center library, you can obtain information on the transition to beta.sam.gov, data content migrated from legacy systems, and how to use the contract data reporting features in the new system. You can create static reports, standard reports, or create your own ad hoc custom designed report.

Beauty and Batik

Henry E. Sumpter, an Army Veteran, knows the value of beauty and art, and their importance to the Veteran community. A native of Myrtle Beach, SC, Henry was born into a family of self-taught artists, uncovered his passions early in his life, and quickly gained recognition.

Learning under masters like Charles Schultz, Henry learned about artistic techniques and principles, and became the first student to receive a scholarship from his high school, earning him five years of artistic training.

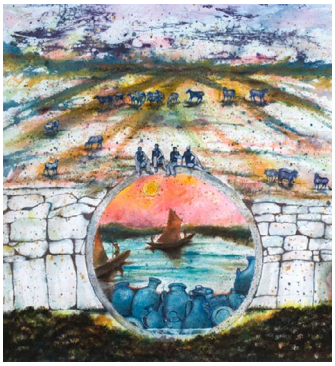
During his freshman year attending Claflin University, Henry met the acclaimed batik master and professor, Leo Twiggs. Henry quickly became fascinated with the batik process, consisting of using waxes and dyes to create beautiful works of art. Henry knew the batik style was the artform he wanted to pursue. Henry told Leo Twiggs he would surpass the eminence the professor achieved. Henry and Leo are still friends to this day, albeit still quietly competitors.

During the Vietnam era, Henry was drafted into the US Army. Instead of being seen as a normal draftee, Henry was told that the material performance branch was looking for talent, something he certainly possessed. While in basic training, Henry was assigned to a craft shop, where he worked several times a week. Henry recalls being summoned to his First Sergeant's office and told the craft shop would be his primary duty station. Henry was also told to "develop skill that is unique to you." Henry realized that his assignment provided a chance to showcase his artistic ability.

Following his tour in the Army, Henry began to exhibit his art regularly, winning numerous awards across the country. The unique and unusual technique Henry uses may result in a single piece requiring thousands of hours to complete. Henry's art has evolved from silhouettes to meticulous detail and landscape settings.

Henry also has a passion for teaching. Henry has taught at several schools and colleges, continually refining his artform and searching for new and innovative methods to produce batik pieces.

Currently working out of a collaborative workspace and studio in Greensboro, NC, Henry is proud of his work and loves to inspire others to find beauty in their life. He fondly looks back at his time in the Army in providing him the resources and motivations to excel in his artistic career.



First Row: Henry E. Sumpter
Second Row (left to right): Julip Seed Harvest, Hidden Treasures II
Third Row: Edgewater Caravan

How Melissa Leger Built Kindpact: Trial and Error, Resilience, and Resourcefulness

When Melissa Leger was working in the corporate world, she found herself at a dead end. It didn't happen overnight. Melissa deployed to Iraq as military police in 2003 and when she returned, began working in finance. "I would say with both being in the reserves and being in finance, I'm kind of a type-A personality and a striver," Leger says.

On paper Melissa was succeeding professionally, climbing the corporate ladder, yet she felt unfulfilled. At this point, Melissa had been practicing yoga for a while as a means to cope with the stress of her job. "I hit a point in my career where I just felt no matter what I did, I'd get to a point and then I'd get bored. I'd get frustrated. I'd get a little depressed, and I just finally had it. I had a strong bout of depression for about a year, and yoga and meditation were the only things that pulled me out of it. I was trying everything, doing everything that you're supposed to do, and it was just the one thing that helped."

Melissa Leger

Melissa left her job, and from there, Kindpact was born. In 2012, Melissa opened two yoga studios. She set out with a goal: to make yoga and meditation accessible to everybody.

Developing a business model may take time.

As Melissa sees it, there is no one way to run your business. Melissa believes you may end up with a business that looks nothing like what you conceived at the beginning of your journey. To Melissa, it's all about trial and error. "I had this massive business plan before I got started, and my business looks absolutely nothing like that now."

Kindpact doesn't have the standard business model of the yoga and mindfulness industry, and it took time to develop a model that worked best. Kindpact began with a more traditional model, a yoga studio. "I opened two yoga studios and even that was not a great fit because with the yoga studio you have to charge a certain amount of money and attract a certain type of client, and even though you want to offer all of these programs to marginalized communities, it just wasn't possible. You're just trying to pay your own bills. You're trying to put food on your plate. It wasn't working." Once Melissa realized something was amiss, she knew she had to pivot. She eventually sold the studios and shifted her focus toward creating partnerships.

Today, Kindpact focuses on developing mindfulness and yoga programming for communities, businesses and organizations. This business model hearkens back to her original goal: to make yoga and meditation accessible to marginalized communities. Melissa partners with members in the community to create customized low-cost programs that meet their participant's specific needs. "We are just trying to change the model, that way everyone has access to it. "

Melissa removed financial barriers to entry for participants by putting her energy toward partnering with organizations rather than the logistics of maintaining studios. Reflecting on the approach used to remove the financial barriers Melissa stated "It fits in with the overall mission and that's the benefit of what my company can do— we are not the entire picture. We're not trying to run everything. What we're trying to do is the yoga and mindfulness. Anywhere that we go, we do that well, and we let the organizations handle their big picture and their community, we just get really hyper-focused on what we do."

Flexibility is key.

The resilience that Melissa gained during her time in the Army has been key to her business endeavors. Although she helped other small business owners when she worked in finance, she still encountered a fair share of roadblocks and failures when she began her small business. Melissa said "I think from being in the military and having that resilience, when things don't go the way that you intended you think, 'How can I bounce back as soon as possible and learn from it?'"

Continued on next page

The ability to shift— and do so quickly— is now more critical than ever. According to Melissa, it is essential to "be able to, even though it might be tough, see what is happening around you and make those shifts as soon as possible." For Kindpact, that meant transitioning to online classes at the start of the pandemic and learning along the way. Melissa stated "We automatically just told people, 'Hey, we have to shift. It's not going to be perfect. It's going to take us some time to work through it.' But just being able to shift and adapt the business to change was really important for us."

Be resourceful and nurture your relationships.

One piece of advice Melissa has for fellow Veteran entrepreneurs is to research the resources available to your business and utilize them. During Melissa's business development journey, she discovered an array of resources are available to Veteran business owners, be it through VA OSDBU or other organizations.

When it comes to available resources, Melissa says she has learned how much relationships can contribute toward the success of a small business, even when it comes to working with the federal government: "I would say relationships are vital. I'm going through this awesome program, the Veterans Institute of Procurement, to help with Federal Contracting. I thought initially you just put in your response and hope someone takes you, but it's more about building the relationships with the communities and the agencies you want to work with."

Outside of government programs, Melissa also partners with organizations that give back to the Veteran community. "I'm a member of Bunker Labs which focuses on the Veteran entrepreneur community and it's really been able to help me build relationships and also get a lot of insider knowledge I didn't have before. As a Veteran, look for some of those organizations that are there to support you because they are great resources."

Melissa Leger and Team

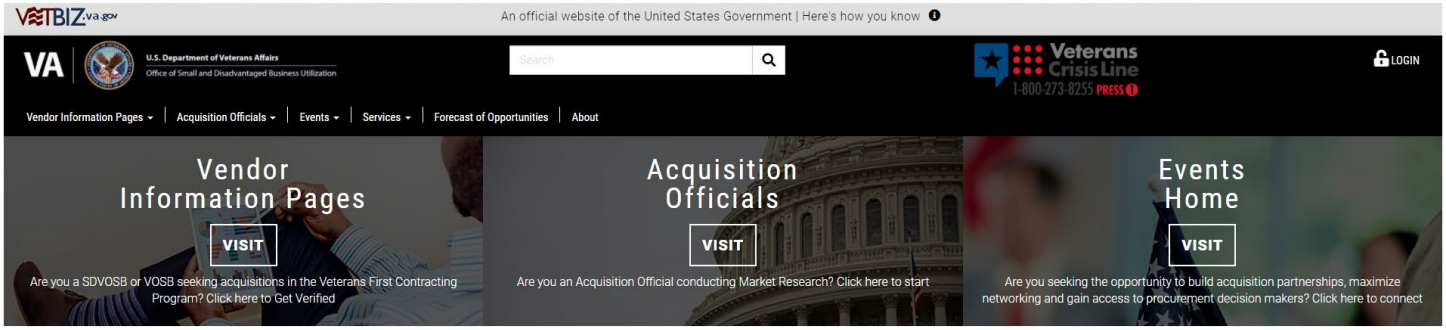
Preparing small businesses for success takes center stage at VA

The Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) rapidly addressed new presidential executive orders and laws while advancing procurement readiness initiatives for small businesses in the first quarter of calendar year 2021. Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB), Veteran-Owned Small Business (VOSB), Women Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (WVOSB), Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB), Historically Underutilized Business Zones (HUB Zone) and other stakeholders joined OSDBU's initiatives for guidance on winning and successfully performing on contracts. Both new and prior endeavors include:

1. President Biden signed an Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities in January 2021. This order reinforces VA's dedication in providing equitable service to all communities, and we ask that you please inform us of any known barriers to enrolling or accessing VA benefits, services, or procurement/contracting opportunities.
2. On January 1, 2021, Congress passed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 2021. The law, which formalizes discussions that began in the Spring of 2017, provides that the Veterans First Verification Program will transfer to the Small Business Administration (SBA) within 2 years. Nineteen CVE employees and approximately $13.5M in annual contracts will be impacted. Additional federal employees, assets, and contracts may be impacted after further analysis. VA and SBA seek to be open and transparent, and to provide a seamless transition with minimal impact to Veteran small business participants. A comprehensive review is underway that will inform a plan to address all aspects of the transfer. Internal and external stakeholders will be consulted and contribute to the plan on an ongoing basis. Check va.gov/osdbu for updates on this landmark transfer.
3. The American Rescue Plan calls for modernization in Federal information technology. OSDBU has taken the first step with the new release of vetbiz.va.gov. Visit the site to verify your business, register for events, and take advantage of information on procurement readiness and doing business with VA.
4. The Doing Business with VA Reference Guide on the website helps small businesses to:
    a. Understand how VA procurement opportunities are managed and sourced
    b. Gain better insight on how to effectively participate in the procurement marketplace
    c. Navigate the procurement process and become familiar with decision makers
    d. Identify the right contracting and teaming opportunities and
    e. Demonstrate capabilities to perform on contract awards.
5. VA encourages businesses to educate, hire, and train America's Veterans. OSDBU invites Veterans to take advantage of unique training and employment programs designed to engage and equip Veteran business owners with tools for a bright and rewarding future.
6. The U.S. Department of Labor announced its Veterans Employment and Training Service is accepting applications for the 2021 HIRE Vets Medallion Award, presented annually to employers that meet standards for excellence in the recruitment, hiring and retention of America's military Veterans. To complete the application process, employers must verify that their organization meets award requirements, pay the application fee and comply with the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights and the Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment acts. Employers must apply by April 30, 2021. Apply for HIRE Vets Medallion Award.

Billions of dollars in contracting opportunities are awarded to small businesses each year, so it is crucial that those wanting to do business within the Federal marketplace ensure they are procurement ready. OSDBU guides small businesses through the processes of registration, capability statements, performance history, and competitive advantage to meet the needs of the customer. Join OSDBU's trainings, events, and resources to help your business grow.

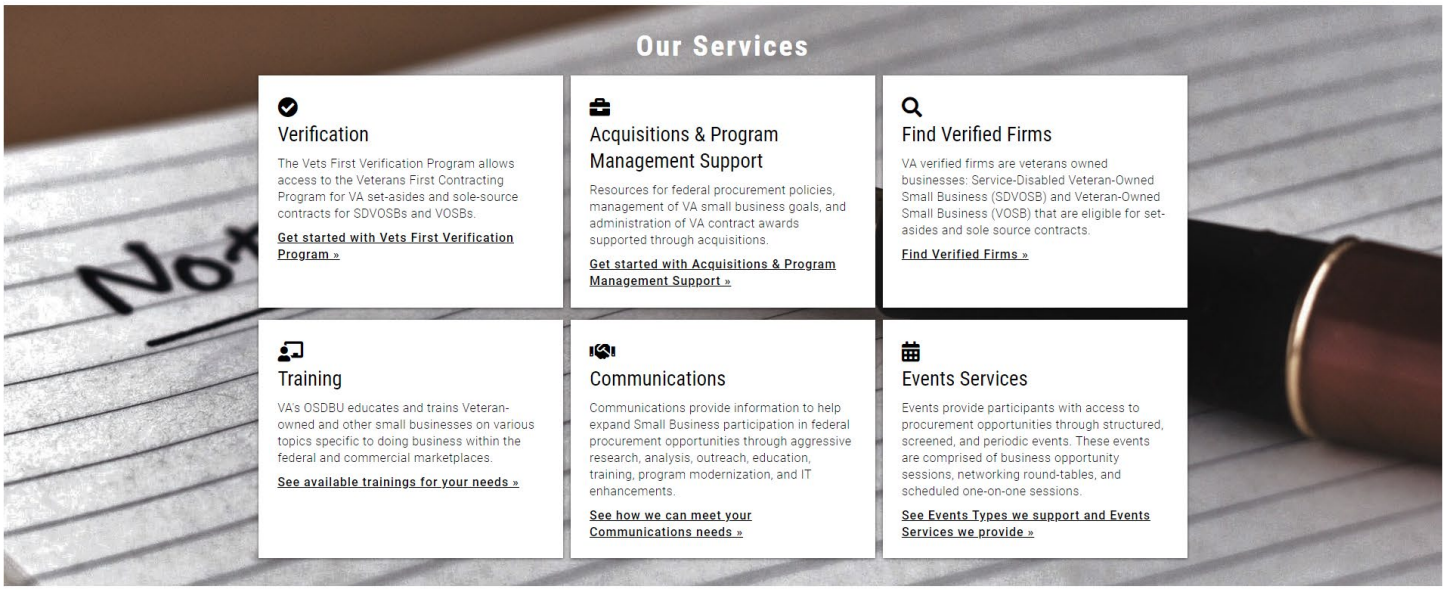
Article written by Suzana Ivelijic, Director Shared Services



VERIFIED BUSINESSES

STATS

11332	3134	14466
SDVOSB	VOSB	TOTAL



VA OSDBU Tweets

Vetbiz.va.gov landing page

Upcoming Events

Gain quick access to the VA OSDBU Events Calendar at: https://www.va.gov/osdbu/calendar.asp

Teaming Webinar
March 24, 2021 2:00 PM (EST)
Register

Risk Mitigation
March 31, 2021 2:00 PM (EST)
Register

First Annual Women Veteran Small Business Summit
March 31, 2021 9:00 AM (EST)
Register

GSA IndustryDay
April 1, 2021 1:00 PM (EST)
Register

Accenture Federal Services Analytics Virtual Information Session: Leveraging Commercial Best Practices in the Public Sector
March 24, 2021 1:30 PM (EST)
Register

Deloitte Virtual Information: Tools to Surviving COVID From a Business Perspective - Tax Considerations for Business Owners in an Ever-changing Landscape
April 6, 2021 1:30 (EST)
Register

VA Direct Access Program- LMI Virtual Business Opportunity Session
April 15, 2021 1:30 PM (EST)
Register

Useful Links

Learn more about VA OSBDU
http://www.va.gov/osdbu

Education and Training Reference Guide
http://www.va.gov/osdbu/library/dbwva.asp

Direct Access Program Schedule of Events
https://vetbiz.va.gov/events

VA Vendor Information Pages
https://www.vetbiz.va.gov

How to Get Verified
http://www.va.gov/osdbu/verification/index.asp

Doing Business with VA Reference Guide
http://www.va.gov/osdbu/docs/doingBusinessWithVA_ReferenceGuideFULL.pdf

Procurement Readiness Reference Guide
http://www.va.gov/osdbu/docs/procurementReadiness_FULL.pdf

beta.SAM.gov
https://beta.SAM.gov

VA Forecast of Contracting Opportunities
https://www.vendorportal.ecms.va.gov/eVP/fco/FCO.aspx

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization

VISIT US: WWW.VA.GOV/OSDBU

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YOUTUBE.COM/VAOSDBU
TWITTER.COM/VAVETBIZ
LINKEDIN.COM/COMPANY/VAOSDBU