

5 Ways Government Contractors Can Harness the Power of the New SAM.gov

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On May 24, 2021, the General Services Administration (GSA) launched the new SAM.gov. It looks different and has both new requirements and functionality. So what do government contractors need to know before they start using the new system? And how can they make the most of the new SAM.gov in building a successful government contracting business? We have spent years helping our clients navigate these government databases—and even helped build some of the legacy systems in a prior life. Based on that experience, here are our insights into how to make the most of the new SAM.gov.

What is the “new SAM.gov”?

After years of maintaining numerous legacy databases and public facing portals—including those incorporated into “beta.SAM.gov” over the last two years—the System for Award Management (SAM) is dramatically closer to achieving its objective of becoming a single point of entry for federal government procurement information. This is a laudable goal: by aggregating disparate federal acquisition databases, the system aims to improve the efficiency and transparency of the contract award process, and SAM’s “one-stop-shop” approach should allow government agencies, contractors, and the general public to better harness key information about federal procurement. The new SAM.gov includes: federal business opportunities (under Contract Opportunities); federal procurement data (under Contract Data and the Data Bank); entity registration; entity reporting (BioPreferred and Service Contract Act); Service Contract Act / Davis-Bacon Act wage determinations; the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (related to grants), and federal bureaucracy hierarchy data that had been spread across many different Government websites and databases.

How well did the new SAM.gov do?

Early reviews are mixed. On the one hand, the new SAM.gov succeeds in placing eight legacy information systems in one place. That is a notable accomplishment for any collection of government legacy systems. But one casualty is clarity and simplicity of use. Unlike a commercial system created from scratch, the new SAM.gov carries over a disappointing amount of the chunkiness of the legacy government systems. Long-term users will also immediately notice a different look and feel: there is a new landing page, different organization, and users need to create

an account with Login.gov to access entity registration data and certain other features (such as the new “Workspace”).

How can government contractors make the most of the new SAM.gov?

Despite these frustrations, government contract professionals— business leaders, lawyers, compliance professionals, and business development/capture teams—will be using the new SAM.gov features on an almost daily basis: to search for and track contracting opportunities, find teaming partners, research potential subcontractors, complete annual representations and certifications, maintain entity registration and execute other compliance related functions. The new SAM.gov offers these professionals several significant enhancements that will help build more successful and compliant government contracting businesses. Here are 5 insights that will help you make the most out of the new SAM.gov:

1. Government contractors can access more historical data on government spending to better develop their long-term business strategies

Historical contracting data is vitally important for government contract professionals developing long term business strategies. These professionals rely on historical contract (or “spend”) data to understand past buying decisions of customer agencies. They also use this data to perform competitive analysis, which may include examining a competitor’s top contracts, customer agencies, past performance, set-aside contracts, contract end dates, and contract modification records. While this data is not new, SAM’s enhanced search and data access features should make it easier for a wider range of contractors, including small business and non-traditional government contractors, to perform in-depth analysis for their long-term business strategies

For example, government contractors can now take advantage of 36 standard (pre-prepared) reports, covering such topics as “Bundled and Consolidated Contracts” and reports showing contracts terminated for default. In addition, the Ad-Hoc report builder allows users to apply complex search logic and criteria to develop custom reports. While some features of FPDS-NG are still being moved to the new SAM module, the migrated features offer enhanced, more robust capabilities. For example, the Ad-Hoc report builder now allows users to tap into 10 years of data instead of five years previously. The result is that government contracting professionals can access more historical contracting data and do so more easily—a tremendous development in the competitive government contract marketplace.

2. Government contractors can more readily access contract opportunity data, allowing them to better perform key business intelligence functions

Equally important for government contract professionals is finding new contracting opportunities. Business owners, leaders, and business development/capture staff rely on federal opportunities data to identify, research and access key documents related to upcoming bid opportunities. The new SAM.gov integrates the legacy Federal Business Opportunities (FedBizOpps or FBO.gov) public-facing government portal and retains the ability to search for opportunities. But with FBO.gov’s move first to “beta.SAM.gov” and now to the new SAM portal, contracting professionals have access to a

more robust record of linkage of bid opportunities through various stages—from pre-solicitation to award. Up to this point, opportunity records were haphazardly published by agencies, forcing contractors to track and string together various pieces of an opportunity through its different stages. The improved linkages will allow government contractors to more effectively track an opportunity throughout its lifecycle, saving them time and improving understanding of new opportunities.

3. Users can customize their experience and simplify repeat tasks by creating their own “Workspace” within SAM.gov

Traditionally, each visit to SAM.gov meant starting from ground zero. As a result, contractors would use third-party data aggregation services to build and manage opportunity pipelines. These third-party data providers often limit many functionalities and features to premium subscription holders. However, the new SAM.gov offers tools that allow users to conduct more of this research themselves. For example, the new SAM.gov allows users to customize their experience and save searches for the future, including through a “Workspace” feature. Using Workplaces, government contract professionals can track opportunities, save their search results, set email notifications to get alerts about updates, and manage their user profiles.

In addition, government contractors can develop their own applications to analyze procurement data. The new SAM Application Programming Interface (API) allows for in-house development of analytical tools. For example, by retrieving data from the API, companies can build applications and tools specific to their needs. The ability to export large datasets into their own environments/tools will allow more contractors to perform complex research more effectively and at lower cost than by using third-party distributors of federal procurement data. This significant enhancement will allow users—including small businesses that can’t afford third-party data aggregation services—to harness more power directly from the primary source of this federal data.

4. Government contractors can conduct more robust searches across all SAM datasets and more easily work with the resulting data

Lawyers, compliance teams, and supply chain professionals rely on government entity registration data to identify potential business partners and conduct due diligence to ensure they are working with ethical, responsible entities. The new SAM.gov makes it easier to conduct this important research by allowing users to perform unified searches across all SAM datasets. In addition to unified searches, SAM provides access to many more filters. Search results are also easily exportable to a comma-separated values (CSV) file or to a PDF for further review and diligence.

With the new integrated SAM search capability, excluded parties will also likely get more exposure, as users run across these entities while performing other SAM searches. This will make it even easier for supply chain, compliance, and legal teams to ensure they are meeting their contract obligations to avoid excluded companies / individuals in their business dealings.

Finally, with increased public access to procurement data, contractors may be more likely to face bid protests and other litigation based on data available on SAM. Competitors could glean insights from

historic contract data to highlight potential performance issues. From example, termination records or significant numbers of contract modifications may be used by competitors or other litigants to support protest arguments or other claims.

5. Government contractors can manage users within their company

The Workspace feature also allows users to more efficiently manage their own reporting obligations. Users are now able to set up email notifications about required updates and manage user profiles within their organization. For example, if you are an entity administrator for a company with many SAM registrations (say, due to multiple locations/facilities), you can assign and manage role-based access for other users within your organization. This reduces internal administrative burden in keeping SAM registrations up-to-date.

Government contractors will be getting to know the new SAM.gov over the next year. While it may take a bit of time to master the organization and features within the new SAM.gov, government contractors will ultimately come to appreciate this important evolution of such a critical resource. These tips will help you make the most of the new portal—to convert quickly and begin to harness its new features to build a successful and compliant government contracting business.

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