For more than 20 years, Frazier Engineering had a strong commercial and municipal/county
government customer base that comfortably sustained our small business.

But as the economy changed, we knew we had to change.

We decided to pursue unique certifications that would enable us to compete for federal work in a
smaller competitive pool certifications such as 8(a), Disadvantaged Business Enterprise/DBE
and Minority Business Enterprise/MBE).

Through the Small Business Administration 8(a) program, we were given opportunities that we
would not have had had before. However, if we did not already have the knowledge and manpower
to support the requirements of those opportunities, our certification would only have been as
good as the paper it was printed on. Our success to date has been the result of a solid team, being financially and technically sound, having a strong work history, and being actively responsive.

I’d like to share some lessons we’ve learned over time.

As a small-to-midsize, growing business leader, I would definitely recommend the time and effort involved in pursuing government contracts. Here are a few tips on how to approach government contract bids that could significantly benefit your business:

- Know what the government is buying (by the way, the government buys everything.)

- Find out what the government requires your business to have in order to do business with you, that is: insurance/bonding requirements, a DUNS #, Cage Code, special licensing/certifications, accounting infrastructure, credit history, past performance history, etc. Chances are you have most of these elements already if you are interested in government business.

- Find out how the government buys the service or product you provide, as local government is different than county, different than state, different than federal, etc. (Some entities may use existing contracts — like a state contract — some may have dollar thresholds you should be aware of, some use GSA schedules, etc.)

- Understand what elements will catch the government’s eye. For example, in Federal Government contracting, we are often asked for our “Capabilities Statement” — a single page company descriptor with a specific format. We may also be asked to state if we are registered on government websites such as the System for Award Management/SAM. Use your local resources (like your closest SBA Procurement Technical Assistance Center/PTAC office) to ask for assistance in writing your Capability Statement or registering in SAM.

What lessons have I learned over time? Quite a few. First, there is a perception that it’s “just too hard” and “takes too much time” to pursue government work. I can agree that it is hard and it does take a lot of time and resources, but only you and your business team can determine if that
time is worth the trouble. In the case of our construction and engineering company, the government has proven to be a critical piece of our growing business and is absolutely worth the effort!

Having someone on your team that has worked for and understands the internal policy and procedures of the client you are pursuing (in this case, the government entity that you are seeking to do business with) can make life easier. You might be able to find that person or that institutional knowledge through many channels, including the FIT Women’s Business Center, the Small Business Development Center (SBDC), the PTAC offices, the Society of American Military Engineers, U.S. Women’s Chamber of Commerce, Florida Minority Supplier Development Council, etc.

Don’t be afraid to ask for help. People within these groups may help facilitate an introduction or even be willing to hold your hand and walk you through the process. And don’t forget to stay involved in your local community.

There are several free resources for learning how to do business with the government, including your local PTACs, OSDBU offices (Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization), SBA, GSA and USWCC.

You can listen to training programs for these sites online. And don’t forget to get on the email lists of the organizations and agencies that work with government procurement — the Small Business Administration, fedbizops.com, etc.

And last, but not least, have patience. Government work takes time to understand — time to get your infrastructure setup, time to develop the right relationships and time to be fruitful.

Good luck with your pursuit of government business.