Competing for government contracts can be a challenge, but it can be done. There are many small businesses out there that don’t believe they can compete against the larger businesses and win but, trust me, you can!

When I decided to bring my part-time business into full-time operations in March of 2011, it started at the kitchen table with only two people. Our focus was going to be on government contracts. We started by reaching out to local government contracting officers and letting them
know who we were and what we had to offer. Since then, we have won four government prime contracts, one commercial prime and two government subcontracts.

As a small business, there are several critical things to know:

• Your first stop should by on the Small Business Administration’s website SBA.gov. It is your best resource with everything from getting started to managing your business, how to obtain loans and where to go from there.

• Use local resources: There are a myriad of local resources available to help you navigate the world of government contracting. These include (but are not limited to) the Women’s Business Center at Florida Tech, the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Eastern Florida State College, SCORE and the Florida Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC). You will need to be registered in the Federal System for Award Management (SAM) and have a DUNS (Dunn and Bradstreet) number to get started, and organizations like the SBDC and PTAC are there help.

• Socioeconomic status and certifications: Nearly every government contract has a small business plan and having a unique certification can give your company an edge over the competition. There are a number of different certifications: 8M/Women Owned Small Business (WOSB), Economically Disadvantaged WOSB, HUB Zone, 8A, Service Disabled Veteran Owned, Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) and many more. You can find a good list of these certifications at (SBA.gov).

• Financing: When bidding on government contracts, you need to show financial stability. The Small Business Administration (SBA.gov) provides information and assistance with loans and grants. Many of the major banks and financial institutes have small business liaisons who work to help small businesses grow.

• You don’t have to pay to get leads: There are free tools to assist, including Fed Biz Ops (fbo.gov), and Go Contracts (a service provided through the local EDC), just to name a few. Most government entities have a small business office you can contact.

• Don’t be afraid to partner: We don’t see other companies that do what we do as competition — we see them as potential teammates.

When you’re considering responding to a proposal, know that sometimes the decisions are based primarily on cost — a lot of times a small business has the advantage because they have lower overhead.

Another deciding factor may be technical expertise — you can utilize your staff experience history/background to supplement that past performance.
In three years, we’ve grown from two to 18 full-time employees and our business is thriving.

Susan Glasgow is the president and CEO of Kegman Inc., an economically disadvantaged women-owned small business and veteran-owned. Kegman is also a graduate of the Florida Tech Women’s Business Center IGNITE 360 Mentoring Program for second-stage businesses. The Edge columnist series is sponsored by the Women’s Business Center at Florida Institute of Technology in Melbourne. Visit http://wbc.fit.edu/.