GovConcepts

GACO APEX ACCELERATOR QUARTERLY INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

NATIONAL VETERANS SMALL BUSINESS WEEK IS NOVEMBER 9 - NOVEMBER 13!

The GACO 37th Procurement Opportunities Fair is on November 12!

The GACO Procurement Opportunities Fair is almost here! Registration is still open for our November 12 event which features networking with all levels of government and training for all business types and sizes. Click **here** for more details and to register today!

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Proposed Changes to SBA Small Business Size Standards

In August, the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) proposed new size standards that would reshape the way the government determines which businesses qualify for small business set-aside contracts and business development resources. The SBA is seeking feedback on the proposed changes by November 20th.

The rule change is meant to increase the number of companies that can participate in federal contracts as a small business. If implemented as written, the SBA estimates around 114,000 businesses would gain access to small business set-asides. The change increases the number of eligible small businesses by "lengthening the runway" for businesses that have grown to the upper limits of their respective size standard requirements and will soon grow out of small business status.

These changes aim to give the federal government access to the increased capabilities of small businesses that can still comfortably grow without risk of losing their small business status. Some companies could grow to tens or hundreds of millions of dollars in annual revenue while still being considered a small business. Currently, for example, a company providing facilities support services under NAICS 561210 can make up to $47M in revenue and still be considered small. Under the proposed change, companies earning $156M in revenue could qualify for all small business set-aside contracts under that NAICS.

These changes allow previously ineligible businesses access to federal small business set-asides as well as small business development capital and resources. This influx of potential demand could affect existing small businesses (under the former size standards) access to these contracts and resources. Ultimately, however, the SBA states its goal is to ensure the continued growth of American industry. If business owners or private individuals want to submit a comment on the proposed rule, they can access the rule information and Public comment section through the Federal Register link.

What are SCIFs (Sensitive Compartmented Information Facilities)?

The Pentagon recently announced plans to create 50 mobile units providing high-security environments for activities involving classified work. The goal is to be able to involve more defense contractors in classified work without the risk of unsecured networks or electronic spying. These rooms, also called SCIFs (Sensitive Compartmented Information Facilities), will be installed in to-be-determined U.S. locations, with military installations and APEX Accelerator locations being considered.

You can read more here about potential SCIF placement in the Pittsburgh area.

DOT Final Rule on DBE/ACDBE Certification Program

The revision of the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) and Airport Concession DBE (ACDBE) programs became effective on September 25, 2026. The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) published this final rule largely adopting its October 2025 interim final rule (IFR) that eliminated the race- and sex-based presumptions of social and economic disadvantage in the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) and Airport Concession DBE (ACDBE) programs. According to the USDOT, the programs have transitioned to a system of individualized determinations of social and economic disadvantage to ensure program constitutional compliance and address administrative changes. With the elimination of race- and sex-based presumptions, what remains for businesses and statewide DOTs to comply with?

Requirements

The final rule expands recipient uniform reporting requirements so that the USDOT gains greater knowledge of DBE/ACDBE statewide application rates and characterisitics (e.g. certifications, suspensions and decertificaiton status), bidding and solicitation practices and the overall program impact.

Statewide data compiled through reports will be published to USDOT through the Annual DBE Directory Report. Plus, a DBE Bidders Data System and ACDBE Active Participant List for opportunities will be established to improve bidder opportunities.

The Final Rule further clarifies and aligns ACDBE program definitions with the DBE program guidelines, which is expected to ease administrative rules and burdens for smaller Federal Transit Administration (FTA) recipients. These changes streamline interstate certification for both DBEs and certifiers.

Changes to DBE/ACDBE criteria include steps for unbundling contracts and submitting a plan to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) that comprises race-neutral strategies to support greater participation by smaller ACDBEs. Additionally, the criteria will strengthen monitoring on prime contractors and outline payment requirements, specifying these requirements to be flowed down to all lower tier subcontractors.

For more information on the DBE/ACDBE Final Rule changes go to the U.S. Department of Transportation DBE Final Rule FAQs 09-28-2026 | U.S. Department of Transportation.



Veteran-Owned Business Resources

APEX Accelerator offices continually help veteran-owned companies with VOSB and SDVOSB certifications. But were you aware of these other resources available to veteran-owned businesses?

- VBOCs (Veteran Business Outreach Centers): Provide resources to veterans, service members, and military spouses who are interested in starting or developing a small business.
- Veterans Business Development Officers: Help with training and technology support. Local contact: Kelly Hunt. Phone: 412-368-6714; Email: Kelly.Hunt@sba.gov
- Surplus Personal Property for Veteran-Owned Small Business: Certified SDVOSBs and VOSBs can access federal surplus property from various agencies in the state where the property will be primarily located and used.
- VA Office of Small & Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU): Veteran assistance in accessing economic opportunities.

SBA New 8(a) Program Rules / Prioritization of Defense-Critical Firms

Effective September 10, 2026, the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) implemented significant changes to the 8(a) Business Development Program, revising how individually owned businesses establish social disadvantage. Under the new rules, applicants can no longer rely on racial or ethnic presumptions or general personal narratives to establish social disadvantage. Businesses must provide individualized, evidence-based documentation showing that they experienced discrimination or bias and that the discrimination created economic harm. The harm may include reduced access to credit, employment, education, government contracting, or other economic opportunities. All 8(a) applications must establish a clear connection between the discriminatory policy and the resulting economic impact. These changes follow findings in the 2023 Ultima decision.

The revised eligibility requirements apply to new applications and pending applications from individually owned businesses that have not yet been certified, while current participants who have already established social disadvantage are not required to prove it again under the new standard. Businesses owned by Tribal entities, Alaska Native Corporations, Native Hawaiian Organizations, and Community Development Corporations are also unaffected by these changes. The program remains open to eligible U.S. citizens of all backgrounds, and the contracting opportunities available

(SBA NEW 8(a) Program rules continued from page 4)

through the 8(a) program remain in place. Applicants must continue to satisfy the program's other eligibility requirements, including small-business status, qualifying ownership and control, financial thresholds, good character, and potential for success. Additionally, the SBA is emphasizing the commercial viability of a company. They will make this determination when reviewing the financial documentation submitted. Therefore, it is essential to submit concise, consistent, and well-supported evidence of both eligibility and business readiness.

Finally, under the Smaller War Plants Commission's efforts, the SBA is prioritizing 8(a) applications from firms operating in 10 defense-critical industries identified by North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes. These industries include small-arms and other ammunition manufacturing, guided missiles and space vehicles, aircraft parts, navigation and detection systems, electronic components, iron and steel mills, machine shops, fabricated metal products, and shipbuilding and repair. Companies operating in these sectors should review their NAICS classifications and assess whether their business qualifies for expedited application processing. See this SBA article concerning the effort.

For prospective 8(a) participants, the new rules create both additional documentation requirements and a new potential opportunity to enter a program that supports federal contracting and business development. Businesses should evaluate their eligibility, prepare supporting evidence, and monitor SBA guidance as the agency implements the revised standards. For more information and additional 8(a) program guidance click here.

What You Missed - GACO Training Events Recap

Navigating Facility Clearance and Foreign Ownership, Control or Influence Webinar:
Our speaker guided us through facility clearance and FOCI processes and requirements.

Solutions Marketplace Webinar:
Representatives from the Applied Research Institute (ARI) gave an overview of different pathways into government markets for innovation.

SBIR/STTR Webinar:
This webinar reviewed the basic components of the SBIR/STTR programs, including Strategic Breakthrough, TABA and ART, as well as insight into Navy SBIR/STTR opportunities.

Upcoming Events

November

Society for American Military Engineers Small Business Conference 2026
Charlotte Convention Center | Charlotte, NC
November 4-6, 2026
REGISTER

Understanding Veteran-Owned Small Business Certification for Government Contracting
Virtual Training
November 9, 2026
REGISTER

SBA - Go Global: Export Marketing, Finding Foreign Distributors
Virtual Event
November 10, 2026
REGISTER

GACO Procurement Opportunities Fair
Monroeville Convention Center | Monroeville, PA
November 12, 2026
REGISTER

December

Tri-State APEX Accelerator Mega-Matchmaker
Virtual Event
December 1-2, 2026
REGISTER

Boots to Business Reboot
Virtual Training
December 7 - December 8, 2026
REGISTER

Tech Expo at Fort Meade
Club Meade | Fort Meade, MD
December 8, 2026
REGISTER

Suggested Govology Trainings

Communicating with Government Contracting Officials: What Can (and Should) Contractors Really Say and Do? (2026 Update)

Beyond the Micro-Purchase: Understanding Simplified Acquisitions

Advanced Teaming Strategies to Accelerate Small Business Government Revenue

(Contact GACO for the discount code.)

Further Reading



SBA ANNOUNCES $4.9M IN GRANT AWARDS TO EXPAND VBOC

SBA PLANS STRICTER SUBCONTRACTING LIMITS FOR CONSTRUCTION

SBA FY2026 SCORECARD METHODOLOGY UPDATE

FY2027 KICK OFF: WHAT AGENCIES ARE BUYING FIRST

SBA AND DOW ESTABLISH SMALLER WAR PLANTS COMMISSION

PENTAGON SEEKS NEW WAYS TO OPEN CLASSIFIED PROGRAMS TO INDUSTRY

PITTSBURGH TRIVIA

Q. A PROFESSOR AT WHAT PITTSBURGH UNIVERSITY IS CREDITED WITH INVENTING THE EMOTICON?

A. CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY

PennWest CALIFORNIA GACO, APEX Accelerator

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THIS APEX ACCELERATOR IS FUNDED IN PART THROUGH A COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF WAR.