

# SELLING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

*A Guide for Government & Industry Professionals*

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## Executive Summary

The Department of Defense (DoD) is the largest and most structured customer in the world. Selling to the DoD requires understanding mission needs, acquisition pathways, competition, compliance requirements, and the expectations of government program and contracting officials.

This guide provides a clear, practical overview for companies seeking to work with the DoD, offering insight into buyer behavior, early engagement practices, capture strategy, and how industry can communicate value effectively.

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## Understanding the DoD Customer

DoD buyers do not evaluate offerings the same way commercial customers do. They assess solutions based on:

- Mission relevance
- Operational effectiveness
- Long-term sustainment considerations
- Risk reduction
- Compliance with federal acquisition rules

## Key Buyer Groups

Each decision maker plays a unique role in shaping or selecting solutions:

- **End Users / Warfighters:** Identify operational gaps and capability needs.
- **Requirements Officers:** Develop formal requirement documents (ICD, CDD, CPD).
- **Program Managers (PMs):** Lead acquisition activities and balance cost, schedule, and performance.
- **Contracting Officers (KOs):** Possess the legal authority to solicit, negotiate, and award contracts.

Understanding where each group fits into the decision process helps industry tailor messaging and engagement.

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## **Ethical and Effective Engagement**

DoD operates under strict transparency and fairness laws. Industry must follow clear boundaries to maintain integrity and competitive equity.

### **Appropriate Engagement**

- Responding to RFIs and Sources Sought
- Participating in industry days and capability briefings
- Providing technical clarification or white papers upon request
- Sharing cost and schedule realism when appropriate

### **Inappropriate Engagement**

- Requesting or using non-public evaluation information
- Attempting to influence acquisition strategies improperly
- Drafting government-exclusive specifications
- Pressuring government personnel regarding procurement decisions

Professional conduct builds credibility and improves long-term opportunity.

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## **Modern Capture Strategy**

A strong capture plan aligns a company's capabilities with the DoD's mission needs and acquisition timelines.

### **Capture Stages**

1. Opportunity Identification
2. Customer Outreach and Relationship Development
3. Requirements Insight and Market Research
4. Solution Development and Teaming
5. Competitive Analysis and Win Strategy
6. Proposal Preparation
7. Post-Submission Debrief and Lessons Learned

## Effective Capture Behaviors

- Engage early—before the RFP is released
  - Demonstrate technical maturity and relevance
  - Build strong, compliant teaming relationships
  - Develop mission-focused win themes
  - Monitor budget signals and acquisition pathways
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## Selling-to-DoD Checklist

- Does our solution directly support a validated mission requirement?
  - Have we mapped the decision makers and influencers?
  - Have we participated in early engagement activities (RFIs, TIMs, industry days)?
  - Do we understand the incumbent and competitive landscape?
  - Are we compliant with cybersecurity expectations (CMMC)?
  - Do we have relevant past performance?
  - Is our pricing approach defensible and realistic?
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## Appendix A — Acronyms & References

### Acronyms

- PM – Program Manager
- KO – Contracting Officer
- ICD – Initial Capabilities Document
- CDD – Capability Development Document
- CPD – Capability Production Document
- CMMC – Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification

### References

- DoD Small Business Programs: <https://business.defense.gov>
- SAM Registration: <https://sam.gov>
- Federal Procurement Data: <https://www.acquisition.gov>
- Defense Budget Materials: <https://comptroller.defense.gov>