

Choosing the Right NAICS Codes: How Buyers Find You

How to pick codes that describe what you actually deliver, why they decide whether you show up in a buyer's search, and how they set your small-business status. Part of getting ready for contracting and The Business In Development (B.I.D.) Academy.

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Prepared by Chelsé Lilly, EA-PV-CED

Community and Economic Development Agent, Prairie View A&M University Extension, Tarrant County
cblilly@pvamu.edu | (817) 884-1945 ext. 6822 | linktr.ee/cedtarrantcountyextension

NAICS edition and size-standard details were verified against official federal sources at the time of writing. Codes and size standards change. Confirm current details at census.gov and sba.gov before you rely on them.

1 What a NAICS Code Is and Why It Matters

A NAICS code, from the North American Industry Classification System, is a six-digit number that classifies your business by what it primarily does. Procurement officers use it to filter their vendor lists and to tag every contract opportunity.

Why it decides whether you are seen

When an agency posts a contract, they attach a primary NAICS code to it. If your registration does not carry that code, you do not appear in their search. It does not matter how well you could do the work. The filter runs first.

2 The Current NAICS Edition

NAICS is maintained by the U.S. Census Bureau and revised every five years, in years ending in two and seven. The current edition is 2022 NAICS, which is what you use through 2026. The next revision is scheduled for 2027.

If you registered before 2022

The 2022 revision added, changed, and retired some codes. If your SAM.gov registration predates it, check that your codes still exist and still describe your work, and update any that were replaced.

3 How to Choose Your Codes

- 1 Start with your primary code. Pick the single six-digit code that best describes your core deliverable, the main thing you sell. This is the code you list first on SAM.gov and on your capability statement.
- 2 Look up candidates at census.gov using the NAICS search. Read the full description, not just the title, to confirm it fits.
- 3 Add secondary codes only for work you have actually done or are genuinely resourced to do. More codes can mean more visibility, but only honest ones.
- 4 For each code, check the SBA size standard so you know where you count as a small business.

Describe what you deliver, not everything you can imagine

The temptation is to add every code that might apply. Resist it. A buyer who finds you under a code you cannot actually perform wastes their time and yours, and it costs you credibility. List what you do.

4 NAICS and Your Size Status

Every NAICS code carries an SBA size standard, the ceiling under which you count as a small business for that kind of work. Some are set in average annual revenue, others in number of employees.

- Revenue-based standards are the most common. Your size is based on your average receipts over your most recent years.
- Employee-based standards apply to manufacturing and some other industries, based on your average employee count over a recent period.
- You can be small under one code and not another. Your status is per code, not one label for your whole company.

Size standards change

The SBA reviews and adjusts size standards periodically, separate from the NAICS revisions, and has proposed increases to many thresholds. Confirm the current standard for your codes at [sba.gov](https://www.sba.gov) before you rely on your status for a set-aside.

5 Common Mistakes

- A primary code that does not match what buyers are actually purchasing, so you never surface in their search.
- Codes you cannot perform, added just to appear in more searches.
- Old codes left in place after the 2022 revision replaced them.
- Assuming one size status for the whole company instead of checking it per code.

6 Where to Find Codes and Get Help

Resource	What you do there	Where
U.S. Census Bureau	Search and confirm NAICS codes and descriptions	census.gov
SBA	Check the size standard for each code	sba.gov
SAM.gov	List your primary and secondary codes on your registration	sam.gov
PV Extension	Help matching your codes to real buyers	cblilly@pvamu.edu

Choosing codes is one piece of getting found. The Business In Development (B.I.D.) Academy helps you connect your codes to the buyers actually purchasing that work, and fit them into your capability statement and your registrations.

This guide is general educational information from Prairie View A&M University Extension, Community and Economic Development. It is not legal, tax, or procurement advice. For your specific situation, consult the appropriate licensed professional or contracting officer. For more help, contact PV Extension.

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