

Registering on SAM.gov: The Federal Vendor Front Door

What SAM.gov is, what to have ready before you start, how to move through the steps, and how long it really takes. Part of getting ready for federal contracting and The Business In Development (B.I.D.) Academy.

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Requirements and processes were verified against official federal sources at the time of writing. Government rules change. Confirm current details at sam.gov and fsd.gov before you rely on them.

1 What SAM.gov Is and Who Needs It

SAM.gov, the System for Award Management, is the single free registration every federal buyer expects to see before they can pay you for a contract or grant. If you want federal work, this is the front door.

In plain terms

Think of SAM.gov as the government's master vendor list. Until your registration is active, a contracting officer cannot legally obligate money to you, no matter how strong your bid is.

It is free. Registration, your Unique Entity ID, and your annual renewal all cost nothing at sam.gov.

Watch out for paid look-alikes

If a website or an email asks you to pay to register or renew on SAM.gov, stop. The government never charges for this. Paid services are selling help you can get for free, and some are outright scams. Start only from sam.gov.

Who needs it: any business pursuing federal contracts or grants. State and local work in Texas runs through a different system, the Centralized Master Bidders List, but federal work runs through SAM.gov.

2 What to Gather Before You Start

Getting these right before you begin prevents the delays that trip up most first-timers.

- Your legal business name and physical address, exactly as they appear on your IRS records. A one-letter or one-line difference will fail validation.
- Your EIN. If your EIN is less than about two weeks old, wait, because the IRS may not have shared it with SAM.gov's validation system yet.
- Your bank routing and account numbers for electronic payment. This is how the government pays you, so double-check them.
- The NAICS codes that describe your work. See the companion guide on choosing NAICS codes.
- A login.gov account, which SAM.gov uses to sign you in.

The name and address match is everything

SAM.gov checks your legal name and EIN against IRS records, and your name and address against a separate validation service. The most common delay, by far, is a mismatch here. Before you start, confirm exactly how your name and address read on your IRS documents, your CP 575 EIN letter or a recent return, and enter them that way, character for character.

3 The Registration, Step by Step

- 1 Create your login.gov account and sign in at sam.gov. Only use sam.gov.
- 2 In your Workspace, open Entities and start a new registration. Choose Register Entity for full contract eligibility, not Get a Unique Entity ID only, if you plan to bid.
- 3 Choose your purpose. All Awards covers federal contracts and grants. Federal Assistance only is grants alone, and you would have to redo it to add contracts later.
- 4 Complete Entity Validation. Enter your legal name and physical address so they match your records. SAM.gov assigns your twelve-character Unique Entity ID here.
- 5 Enter your core data: business start date, fiscal year end, and your banking information for electronic funds transfer.
- 6 Work through the assertions and the Representations and Certifications, the compliance questions about your business size, ownership, and federal requirements. Answer honestly and completely.
- 7 Submit. Your CAGE code is assigned automatically by the Defense Logistics Agency during processing, so you do not apply for it separately.

About the notarized letter

Some registrations require a notarized Entity Administrator letter to confirm who controls your SAM.gov account. Whether you need one, and the current rules for notarizing it, are set and reviewed by the Federal Service Desk and have changed over time. If SAM.gov asks for one, follow the current instructions at fsd.gov exactly, since a missing or incorrect letter stops your registration cold.

4 What Slows People Down

Almost every delay comes from a handful of predictable issues.

- A name or address that does not match IRS records. Fix this first.
- A brand-new EIN the IRS has not yet shared with SAM.gov. Wait about two weeks after you receive your EIN before you start.
- Wrong bank routing or account numbers, which cause payment failures after you win work.
- Slow responses when SAM.gov requests a document. Watch the email on your account and reply quickly.

How long it really takes

Plan on about two to four weeks from a clean submission to an active registration, and longer if anything needs fixing. The online form itself takes an hour or two. The wait is the government's validation. Start well before any deadline you are chasing.

5 After You Are Active: Renew and Protect It

SAM.gov registration is valid for one year. An expired registration is invisible to buyers and blocks new awards, even when everything else is in order.

- Renew every 365 days. Start 60 to 90 days early, because renewal runs the same validation checks and the Representations and Certifications reset.
- Keep your points of contact current. Government notices about your status and renewal go to those email addresses.
- Save your Unique Entity ID and CAGE code with your other business records. You will use them constantly.

Set the reminder now

The easiest contract to lose is one you cannot bid on because your registration lapsed. Put your renewal date on a calendar the day you go active.

6 Where to Get Help

Start with the official, free sources, and with a real person at PV Extension.

Office	What you do there	How to reach it
SAM.gov	Register, get your UEI, and renew, all free	sam.gov
Federal Service Desk	Help with registration, entity validation, and the notarized letter	fsd.gov
IRS	Confirm your legal name and EIN on file	irs.gov
PV Extension	Free help getting ready for contracting, and the next B.I.D. Academy cohort	cblilly@pvamu.edu

SAM.gov gets you listed for federal work. The Business In Development (B.I.D.) Academy helps you build the rest of your vendor readiness file, from your capability statement to pricing, so that once buyers can find you, you are ready to bid.

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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