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Learn How to Win Federal Contracts

The Give Me 5 program helps women entrepreneurs navigate a complex process that can lead to lucrative rewards.

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URL: <http://www.womenentrepreneur.com/2009/03/learn-how-to-win-federal-contracts-1.html>

Navigating your way through the federal contracting process is a difficult, complex endeavor, says Barbara Kasoff, executive director of [Women Impacting Public Policy](#). It takes time, lots of research and plenty of persistence.

The rewards can be lucrative, however. That's why WIPP and [American Express OPEN](#) have created Give Me 5, a series of online classes designed to provide women business owners with the information, tools and resources they need to start the process, as well as the support they need to become successful.

"Today with the economy as stressful as it is and business contracting for many of us, we need to have other opportunities, other marketplaces," Kasoff says. "The federal government is a great marketplace. Women who may not have considered it before are considering it now."

The Give Me 5 program gets its name from a law Congress passed in 2000 that aimed to set aside 5 percent of federal contracts for women-owned businesses. That law has still not been implemented; today, only 3.4 percent of federal contracts go to women-owned businesses.

WIPP discovered while working on the law that about half a million companies were registered on the government's Central Contract Registry, but only 55,000 were women-owned companies. "So we, together with American Express OPEN, have set out to change that," Kasoff says.

Give Me 5 offers five levels of classes, starting with why it's important to get registered. "We're encouraging women to get on the CCR registry," Kasoff says, "and to do it whether you want to pursue federal contracting right now or are even thinking about it for the future." WIPP provides a cheat sheet that makes it easy to register. "You need your bank account, your DUNS number [a nine-digit business identification number] and your North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS) code--it takes about half an hour to [register] online," Kasoff says. But she warns: "After a year, your registration needs to be renewed. If you don't renew it, you're not in the database. And if you're not in the database, you can't get paid."

Kasoff credits American Express OPEN for jumping wholeheartedly into the Give Me 5 program. "I have never seen a group that is active and engaged and cares so much," she says.

Kasoff has some tips of her own for entrepreneurs interested in federal contracting:

1. **Be patient.** Don't expect to register with the CCR and have your first contract in 30 days, she says. It could take a couple of years.
2. **Get to know the decision-makers.** "Find out who the decision-makers are," Kasoff says. "Who are the

contracting officers, the program managers? You have to make them your advocates. You have to meet them face-to-face." If you aren't in the Washington, D.C., area, she says, "make it part of your business to be there once a quarter. Spend a day or two meeting these decision makers. And once you meet them and you get to know them and what they look for, they become your advocates, too. And then they'll pick up the phone and say, 'Hey, there's a contract coming that I think you ought to look toward.'"

3. **Start as a subcontractor.** "Very often you can be part of a much bigger contract and have that piece that pertains to your product or service," Kasoff says, "and not have to worry about all the other pieces and putting together the team that can land that contract."
4. **Make alliances.** "Don't limit yourself from applying for a contract because you can only do one piece of it," Kasoff says. "Go out and find other small-business owners, and together you can land this contract."

"We had two members who met at a meeting, and then one of them came across a contract and she remembered that this other woman could do a piece of the contract that she couldn't do. They teamed together and landed a contract that was over a million dollars, and now, a year later, they're bidding on their third contract."

"There are lots of great ways that you can jump in," she says.

The courses are archived on the [WIPP website](#), so entrepreneurs can listen to the podcasts and follow the PowerPoint presentations at their convenience. A guide to federal contracting, prepared jointly by WIPP and American Express OPEN, is also available: [Open Book: A Practical Guide to Government Contracting](#).

Read what women who've won federal contracts have to say about the process and [find out their suggestions](#) if you plan to seek a contract of your own.

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