Doctrine 01 — Where the Money Lives

One durable concept: the federal government is a market, and markets have addresses.

Every pursuit in this curriculum begins with the same question: **where is the money, and how do I get in the room where it is spent?**

The answer is more orderly than most people expect. The United States federal government buys roughly **hundreds of billions of dollars** of goods, services, and research every year, and it publishes nearly all of it. There is no secret handshake. There is a system of record, a set of identifiers, and a handful of websites where opportunities are announced. Learn those, and you can watch the market move from your dorm room.

Three kinds of money

It helps to think of federal money as three different rivers with three different banks:

1. **Contracts** — the government buys something it needs: a cloud migration, a training curriculum, a laboratory instrument. Governed by acquisition rules (the FAR), announced on **SAM.gov**, awarded to a company or team.
2. **Grants** — the government funds a mission it shares with you: a community health study, an educational program, a rural broadband pilot. Governed by grants policy, announced on **Grants.gov** (and SAM.gov for most federal grants), awarded to organizations that propose the best approach.
3. **Other transactions and cooperative agreements** — the in-between shapes: partnerships, prototypes, research. These matter most for advanced research (like **SBIR/STTR** programs) and for agencies that move fast.

Most students arrive thinking "grants" and "contracts" are the same thing. They are cousins, not twins. A contract buys *you*; a grant funds *your mission.* The pipeline doctrine you are learning applies to both — the language of "the pursuit" is the same even though the paperwork differs.

The four identifiers that unlock everything

Before any money can reach you, the government needs to know who you are. Four identifiers come up in every pursuit:

Identifier	What it is	Why it matters
UEI	Unique Entity ID — a 12-character code (e.g. `YCBDVKN1A9G7`)	Your universal identity in SAM.gov since 2022 (replaced DUNS). Free to obtain.
CAGE code	Commercial and Government Entity — 5 characters (e.g. `20DS8`)	Your identity in Department of Defense and NATO systems.
NAICS code	North American Industry Classification System — 6 digits (e.g. `541512`)	The industry bucket that decides size standards and who competes.
SAM.gov registration	The System for Award Management record	The master record that says you are eligible to receive federal money.

One sentence to memorize: **you register once in SAM.gov, get a UEI, get a CAGE code, and choose the NAICS codes that describe your business.** Every pursuit after that starts with "is our SAM record active?"

Where the opportunities are announced

The market has three main bulletin boards:

- **SAM.gov** — the master place for contract opportunities, contract awards, and assistance listings. If it is a federal contract worth over a threshold, it will show up here.
- **Grants.gov** — the central portal for federal grant opportunities, including the **Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)** documents you will learn to read in this course.
- **Agency forecast sites** — each large agency publishes a forecast of what it plans to buy. These let you see the market *before* the solicitation drops.

There is also a whole landscape of **vehicles** — standing agreements that let agencies buy repeatedly without a new full competition each time. You will meet **GSA Schedules**, **IDIQ** contracts, and **task orders** in this course. For now, know that a *vehicle* is a pre-negotiated doorway, and a *task order* is the purchase that comes through the doorway.

Small business: the government is required to notice you

Here is the part that surprises students: the government does not merely tolerate small businesses — it is **required by law** to set aside a portion of federal dollars for them. The Small Business Administration (**SBA**) administers programs that give small firms a seat at the table:

- **Small business set-asides** — competitions restricted to small businesses.
- **HUBZone** — for businesses in Historically Underutilized Business Zones (the canonical teaching case in this course, Ravonics, is HUBZone-certified).
- **8(a) Business Development** — for socially and economically disadvantaged small businesses.
- **SBIR / STTR** — the small business innovation research programs: a structured path for research and development, with SBIR open to small businesses and **STTR requiring a research institution partner** (a university or nonprofit lab).
- **WOSB / VOSB** — woman-owned and veteran-owned preferences.

These programs are *structural*. They are not charity; they are a deliberate policy choice that the federal market should not be a private club. For a student, they are also a career insight: a small company with the right certifications competes in a smaller, friendlier pool.

The shape of the market

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Congress ──> appropriations ──> agencies ──> solicitations ──> you (the pursuer)
                                              (SAM.gov / Grants.gov)
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Money enters at the top as law, becomes agency budgets, gets turned into solicitations, and flows to whoever wins the pursuit. The identifiers, the bulletin boards, and the small-business programs are the plumbing that makes that flow legible.

What this means for your career

If you leave this course remembering one thing, remember this: **federal spending is published, structured, and accessible.** “Government contracting” is not a mysterious club — it is a market with an address. Anyone who can read an RFP, keep a SAM registration current, and describe their capability in the language of the agency can participate. That skill — the ability to find, read, and evaluate where government money lives — is the foundation of an entire career in business development, grants management, or public policy.

For the MBA student, this is a market-entry question: which NAICS codes describe us, which vehicles should we pursue, and what is the competitive landscape? For the MPA student, this is a governance question: how does the money move, who is accountable, and what do the rules protect? Both start at the same place: the map of where the money lives.

Self-check

1. What are the three main kinds of federal money, and what is the difference between a contract and a grant?

2. What four identifiers does a business need to be able to receive federal money, and where do you obtain them?
3. Why do small-business programs like HUBZone and SBIR exist, and how do they change the competitive landscape for a small company?