

Literacy — The Capability Statement

The small company's one-page front door to government. Before anyone reads your proposal — before anyone invites you to an industry day — someone reads this page, and it decides whether you get into the room at all.

What a capability statement is

A capability statement is a one-page (occasionally two-page) document that tells a government customer or a potential prime exactly who you are, what you can do, and what you are asking for. It is not a proposal. It is not a brochure. It is the standard artifact of the **marketing stage** of the business-development lifecycle — the *marketing* → *capture* → *proposal* → *negotiate* → *award* ladder (Doctrine 03, stage *sense* → *qualify*). It is the document that opens a conversation before any solicitation exists.

Think of it as the front door to your firm. A proposal is the house; the capability statement is the door — and if the door does not open, no one tours the house.

The small-business truth it exists for: **in the federal market, no one knows you exist until you are in front of them, and the capability statement is the expected, standard way to get in front of them.** Primes, agencies, and matchmakers all ask for it, because it is a cheap, honest way to screen a firm in thirty seconds.

When it is used

The capability statement shows up at every point in the business-development lifecycle where a firm must be *seen* before it can be *considered*:

Moment	What happens	What the statement does
Industry days and matchmaking events	Agencies host events to meet industry; primes scout potential teammates	Gets you into the matchmaking system and into the conversations
SAM.gov profile	Your entity registration carries a capabilities narrative and past-performance fields	Provides the ready-made text for the record that agencies and primes search
Prime outreach / teaming	A prime deciding who to bring onto a bid asks candidates for capability statements	Screens you as a teammate in minutes

Moment	What happens	What the statement does
Capture opening	The first cold introduction to an agency, program office, or small-business office	Establishes that you are credible and worth a meeting
Registration and portals	Programs and vehicles routinely ask for a capability statement as a standard attachment	Gives you a reusable document instead of a scramble

The through-line is what matters: the capability statement is the *marketing-stage* document that opens capture. A good one gets you the meeting; the meeting gets you the engagement; the engagement gets you the customer intelligence and the win position (Doctrine 09). In this course’s shorthand, the marketing/sales organization is the **blue team** and the capture organization is the **green team** — the blue team feeds the green. (This is a different “blue” from the Blue Team color review in *How Color Teams Work*, which is a proposal-phase solution review. Same word, different job.)

The anatomy

A standard capability statement is built from six parts. They appear in roughly this order, and a reviewer should be able to find any one of them in seconds:

1. **Who you are** — the identity block: company name, logo, UEI, CAGE, point of contact, socio-economic status. This is the part that lets a contracting officer file you correctly.
2. **Core competencies** — the two to six things you actually do, stated as outcomes rather than labels.
3. **Differentiators** — what makes you different from every other firm that could say the same thing. This is the discriminator discipline of Doctrine 09, applied at one-page scale.
4. **Past performance** — the delivered work that proves the competencies: named customers, named contracts, quantified outcomes.
5. **Certifications and codes** — NAICS codes, set-aside certifications (HUB-Zone, 8(a), WOSB, VOSB, SDVOSB), clearances, and any registrations that matter.
6. **The ask** — what you are seeking: prime contracting opportunities, sub-contracting or teaming with primes, a specific vehicle, a specific agency.

The order matters less than the presence of all six. A statement missing *the ask* is a brochure; one missing *past performance* is a claim without evidence; one missing *who you are* is an anonymous flyer no one can file or call.

The one-page discipline

The one-page limit is not a suggestion — it is the entire point. The people who read capability statements read dozens of them, often in a single sitting, often to screen firms out. A statement that cannot make its case on one page has already failed the test it was written to pass.

Three hard rules:

1. **One page, hard limit.** If it does not fit, it is not done — you have not decided what matters. Two pages is sometimes tolerated; one is the professional standard.
2. **Scannable in thirty seconds.** A reader should find your competencies, your proof, and your ask in a single glance. Headings, short lines, no dense paragraphs.
3. **One claim per line.** Every bullet states one claim, and every claim carries one piece of evidence. If a line cannot carry its own weight, cut it.

Writing craft: claim + evidence

The single most important writing move is **claim + evidence**. Every statement of what you can do is paired with a proof point of where you did it:

Claim — *what you do, stated as an outcome* + **Evidence** — *where you did it, named and quantified.*

- **Weak claim:** “We provide comprehensive IT solutions.” A label, not an outcome; no evidence; every firm in the directory says it.
- **Strong claim + evidence:** “Migrated a 4,000-user agency from legacy servers to a zero-trust environment in 14 months, on schedule and under budget.” An outcome, a scale, a timeframe, a customer implied — in one line.

Notice what the strong version does: it lets the reader draw the conclusion — *this firm actually does this work* — instead of asserting it. That is the same persuasion mechanic as the ghost theme in Doctrine 09: a conclusion a reader reaches on their own is far stronger than one asserted to them.

Two more craft rules:

- **The win-theme connection.** The capability statement is where the win theme is born. If your one-page statement is built around the same customer outcome you will claim in your proposals, then every industry-day conversation and every capture meeting is already rehearsing the theme your proposals will later use. Marketing and capture speak the same language, because they are the same story at two stages.
- **No acronym soup.** Government readers love acronyms; a capability statement written in them reads as a wall of noise. Spell out, define, and keep the jargon to the terms the reader needs to file you correctly — your NAICS codes, CAGE, UEI, and your certifications.

Examples

Weak (generic). “XYZ Consulting is a full-service information technology firm with more than twenty years of experience. We provide innovative, cost-effective solutions to meet our clients’ needs. Our team of certified professionals delivers excellence across a wide range of services, including network engineering, cybersecurity, and cloud computing.”

What is wrong: no outcome, no scale, no evidence, no differentiator, no ask. Every firm in the SAM directory could publish this paragraph, and none of them would be distinguishable. It tells the reader nothing they can act on.

Strong (generic). “ABC Engineering is a veteran-owned small business in Columbus, Ohio. UEI: A1B2C3D4E5F6 · CAGE: 9X7Y2. Core competencies: mission-critical facilities engineering, energy-resilience audits, and construction management. We kept a 1,200-person federal facility fully operational through an 11-month electrical modernization — zero unplanned outages, delivered under budget. Differentiators: 100% in-house engineers, \$15M bonding capacity, and past performance on federal and state facilities. We hold NAICS 541330 and 236220 and an 8(a) certification. Seeking: prime contracting opportunities in facilities and energy programs with the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, and teaming and subcontracting with primes pursuing those vehicles.”

What it does right: identity, outcome-led competencies with a quantified proof point, differentiators that are actually different, codes and certification, and a clear, specific ask. A contracting officer or prime can file it, understand it, and act on it in thirty seconds.

A template skeleton

Fill in the blanks; keep it to one page.

[Company name] - [one-line, outcome-oriented tagline]
Point of contact: [name, title, email, phone] | UEI: [____] | CAGE: [____]
Socio-economic status: [HUBZone / 8(a) / WOSB / VOSB / SDVOSB / small business]

WHO WE ARE

One or two lines: who you are, where you are, what you are built to do.

CORE COMPETENCIES

- [Competency, stated as an outcome] - [evidence: where you did it, what resulted]
- [Competency, stated as an outcome] - [evidence]
- [Competency, stated as an outcome] - [evidence]

DIFFERENTIATORS

- [A claim your competitors cannot credibly copy] - [why it is defensible]
- [A claim your competitors cannot credibly copy] - [why it is defensible]

PAST PERFORMANCE

- [Customer / contract] - [what you delivered] - [quantified outcome]
- [Customer / contract] - [what you delivered] - [quantified outcome]

CERTIFICATIONS & CODES

NAICS: [codes] | Certifications: [list] | Clearances / registrations: [if relevant]

THE ASK

What we are seeking: [specific agencies, vehicles, or teaming arrangements]

The checklist

Before a capability statement leaves your desk, run this checklist:

- ☐ Fits on one page (hard limit).
- ☐ Identity block complete: name, UEI, CAGE, point of contact, socio-economic status.
- ☐ Core competencies stated as outcomes, not labels.
- ☐ Every claim carries evidence (claim + evidence, all the way down).
- ☐ At least two differentiators competitors could not credibly copy.
- ☐ Past performance named with quantified outcomes.
- ☐ NAICS codes and certifications listed accurately.
- ☐ A clear, specific ask.
- ☐ Scannable in thirty seconds: headings, bullets, no dense paragraphs.
- ☐ No acronym soup; every necessary term spelled out.
- ☐ One company, one message, one page.

One practice loop

1. Take a real agency or program you want to pursue, and the Ravonics case-study facts: its HUBZone certification, its four NAICS codes, its STTR partner, its small-town story.
2. In one page, draft Ravonics's capability statement using the template skeleton.
3. Trade with a partner and run the thirty-second test: can they find the competencies, the proof, and the ask in a single glance? What did the writer assume the reader would know?
4. Rewrite once, cutting anything that does not fit on one page.

You will discover the past-performance box is the hardest to fill from the published facts — and that is the point. A firm with no delivered record must decide what stands in for evidence (related experience, the partner's record, team qualifications) and how that shapes the statement. Delivery creates past performance (Doctrine 07); the capability statement is where its absence is most honestly felt.

You have now written the front door. The next conversation is the one that

opens capture.