Company-Building Module — Standing Up a GovCon Business (6 sessions)

For MBA and Strategic Initiative students, for founders, and for anyone who wants to understand what it actually takes to stand a federal contracting company up from zero. The core gave you the pipeline and the pursuit. This module is the business that runs the pipeline: the registration sequence, the compliance skeleton, the capture function, the cash, and the first win.

Audience: MBA / Strategic Initiative students; founders and would-be founders; fellowship participants on the Launchpad ladder. **Prerequisites:** shared-core (or the doctrine 01–08). **Readings:** doctrine/01, doctrine/03, doctrine/04, doctrine/05, doctrine/07, the case study, and the launch sprint.

> **The one sentence that frames the module.** *A GovCon company is not a business that wins contracts; it is a business that is built to be allowed to win them — registered, compliant, capitalized, and gated — and then wins its first one.*

Session CB-1 — From idea to eligible bidder: the registration sequence

Learning objectives. By the end of this session, students can: (1) explain the registration sequence and why order matters; (2) name the four identifiers and what each one unlocks; (3) decide a company's initial entity form and certification posture.

Session plan (75 min). - Open (5 min): "What is the difference between having a company and being allowed to sell to the government?" - Teach (25 min): doctrine/01. The sequence as a gate ladder of its own: entity → UEI → SAM registration → CAGE → NAICS → certifications. Why SAM must be current and why a lapse is a disqualifier. What each identifier actually unlocks (a UEI is your government identity; CAGE is your physical location's code; NAICS is your market segmentation; SAM is your storefront). - Apply (30 min): the registration-sequence exercise. Teams take a founding scenario (Ravonics from zero, or an invented company) and lay out the sequence in order, marking for each step: what it unlocks, what can delay it, and who inside the company owns it. Then add the certification posture: which set-aside programs does this company qualify for, and which should it pursue *first*? - Discuss (10 min): "If SAM registration takes weeks and costs nothing, why do so many firms get it wrong?" - Close (5 min): assignment.

Discussion prompts. 1. Which identifier is the one whose lapse quietly kills a pursuit — and why does it happen? 2. Defend the position that a firm should register for certifications *before* it has a single pursuit in the pipeline.

Homework / reading. Read doctrine/01 and the Ravonics case. Deliverable: a one-page registration plan for an invented company — the sequence, the owner of each step, and the certification posture with a reason for each choice. (This is launch-sprint Step 1–6, begun.)

Comprehension check. What is the order of the registration sequence, and why does order matter? What does each of the four identifiers unlock?

Session CB-2 — The compliance skeleton: accounting, DCAA-readiness, timekeeping

Learning objectives. By the end of this session, students can: (1) explain why compliance is a business asset, not paperwork; (2) describe the three pillars of the compliance skeleton; (3) assess a company's DCAA-readiness posture.

Session plan (75 min). - Open (5 min): "Why would a buyer who wants the cheapest service still refuse to buy from a firm with no accounting system?" - Teach (25 min): doctrine/04 (governance) + the compliance reality. The three pillars: (1) an **accounting system** that can segregate and allocate costs — the government needs to know what a service actually costs, and the firm needs to know it too; (2) **DCAA-readiness** — the audit posture that says the books can be audited and the rates are defensible, even if DCAA never comes; (3) **timekeeping** — the honest record of who spent time on what, because the government pays for labor and needs to trust the record. The concept that frames all three: *the compliance skeleton is what turns a firm's costs into credible prices.* - Apply (30 min): the compliance-posture exercise. Given the invented company from CB-1, teams design the skeleton: what the accounting system must be able to do, what DCAA-readiness means at year one vs. year three, and how timekeeping works in a five-person firm. Identify the two most common ways a small firm fails each pillar. - Discuss (10 min): "When does investing in compliance become a competitive advantage rather than an overhead cost?" - Close (5 min): assignment.

Discussion prompts. 1. Argue that timekeeping is a sales tool, not an administrative chore. 2. What does a firm lose, beyond the audit itself, when it cannot defend its own costs?

Homework / reading. Read doctrine/04. Deliverable: a one-page compliance-skeleton plan for the invented company — the three pillars, the year-one standard for each, and the cost of building it. (Launch-sprint Step 7.)

Comprehension check. What are the three pillars of the compliance skeleton, and what does each protect? What does DCAA-readiness mean for a firm DCAA has never audited?

Session CB-3 — Standing the capture function: pipeline, bid/no-bid, the first capture team

Learning objectives. By the end of this session, students can: (1) build a pipeline from zero; (2) write a gate charter for a young company; (3) staff a first capture team with five people.

Session plan (75 min). - Open (5 min): "A five-person firm has five possible pursuits and time for one. What decides which?" - Teach (25 min): doctrine/03 and doctrine/04. The capture function as a *function*, not a person: a pipeline that is always sensing, a bid/no-bid gate that protects scarce capacity, and a capture team that is assembled per pursuit rather than hired in advance. The gate charter (trigger, criteria, evidence, owner) is the first management artifact a young company writes. - Apply (30 min): the capture-function exercise. Teams write the bid/no-bid gate charter for the invented company: the trigger, three to five criteria answerable yes/no, the evidence for each, and the owner. Then staff the first capture team from a five-person bench — who plays capture lead, proposal, pricing, contracts, delivery, and who has to double up. Then fill a first pipeline of five real (or realistic) opportunities from SAM.gov / USAspending.gov and score them. - Discuss (10 min): "What is the first gate a young company should make *hard*, even at the cost of saying no?" - Close (5 min): assignment.

Discussion prompts. 1. Defend a gate charter that lets the founder be overruled by the process. 2. Where does the discipline break first in a firm that has no capture manager yet?

Homework / reading. Read doctrine/03, doctrine/04. Deliverable: the gate charter + first-capture-team staffing for the invented company. (Launch-sprint Steps 8–9.)

Comprehension check. What are the four parts of a gate, and why must criteria be written in advance? Why is the capture function a function rather than a headcount?

Session CB-4 — Funding and cash-flow reality: pursuit spend and the receivables clock

Learning objectives. By the end of this session, students can: (1) model pursuit spend (the BP — the bid-and-proposal budget); (2) explain the 60-90-120 day receivables reality; (3) plan the working capital a young firm needs before its first award.

Session plan (75 min). - Open (5 min): "A firm wins a $1M contract on day 100. Why might it still be out of money on day 150?" - Teach (25 min): doctrine/05 (the budget axis, pursuit cost as an investment) + the cash reality. Two clocks run against every young firm: the **spend clock** (BP — what it costs to pursue: labor, travel, graphics, consultants, the capture team's time) and the **receivables clock** (the gap between doing the work and getting paid — invoice submission, government processing, and the 60-90-120 day reality of federal payment, with progress payments and financing as the mitigations). A firm that wins but cannot fund its own receivables still dies. - Apply (30 min): the cash model. Teams model the invented company's first year: pursuit spend on its pipeline, the estimated cost of each pursuit, the working capital needed to survive until the first award pays, and the receivables lag after that first win. Compute the month the firm is most exposed — and the one number that would save it. - Discuss (10 min): "Which is the more common killer of young GovCon firms: failing to win, or winning and running out of cash?" - Close (5 min): assignment.

Discussion prompts. 1. Defend capping pursuit spend as a percentage of a pursuit's estimated value. 2. Why is a too-low bid a *cash* problem, not just a margin problem?

Homework / reading. Read doctrine/05 and the MBA flywheel exercise (`practice/exercises.md` MBA-E3). Deliverable: a one-year cash-and-spend model for the invented company, with the month of maximum exposure marked. (Launch-sprint Step 10's funding leg.)

Comprehension check. What are the two clocks every young GovCon firm runs on, and what does each one measure? Why does winning not solve a cash problem?

Session CB-5 — The first-win strategy: set-asides, sequencing, the first ORBITALS

Learning objectives. By the end of this session, students can: (1) explain why set-aside-rich first wins are the right opening move; (2) sequence the firm's first three ORBITALS; (3) defend the first-win target with the numbers.

Session plan (75 min). - Open (5 min): "Why is a small firm's first win more likely in a set-aside pool than in full-and-open competition?" - Teach (25 min): doctrine/01 (small-business programs as market design), doctrine/05 (pWin), doctrine/07 (lifecycle). The first-win strategy: a young firm's first win exists to create **past performance** — the asset that raises pWin on every later pursuit. So the first targets should be where the firm's pWin is highest and the competition is thinnest: set-aside pools its certifications open (HUBZone, 8(a), WOSB/VOSB, SDVOSB, SBIR/STTR), and opportunities sized to its capacity. Sequence the first three ORBITALS so win #1 creates the evidence for win #2. - Apply (30 min): the first-win case. Teams pick the invented company's first target from its pipeline (CB-3): score it factor by factor, argue the pWin, set the threshold, and make the bid/no-bid call. Then sequence three ORBITALS: target one (the likely first win), target two (what the first win's past performance unlocks), target three (the compounding move). Defend the sequence. - Discuss

(10 min): "What is the difference between a first win that launches a firm and a first win that just fills a few months?" - Close (5 min): assignment.

Discussion prompts. 1. Argue that a small firm should *prefer* set-aside pools even when it is technically eligible for open competition. 2. What is the strongest argument against chasing an 8(a) or HUBZone set-aside as a first win?

Homework / reading. Read doctrine/05, doctrine/07. Deliverable: a one-page first-win strategy for the invented company — target, score, bid/no-bid, and the three-ORBITAL sequence with the compounding logic. (Launch-sprint Step 10.)

Comprehension check. Why does a first win create the most valuable asset a young firm has, and what is it? How does a certification change a firm's pWin in a set-aside pool?

Session CB-6 — The launch sprint workshop: build the whole skeleton

Learning objectives. By the end of this session, students can: (1) assemble the full company skeleton from registration to first target; (2) present it as a coherent, defensible launch plan; (3) identify the two most likely failure points in their own plan.

Session plan (90 min). - Open (5 min): "What have we built, and what would break first?" - Teach (15 min): synthesis across the module. The skeleton as a system: registration unlocks eligibility, compliance makes prices credible, the capture function spends scarce capacity on the right bets, cash keeps the clocks from colliding, and the first-win strategy turns the whole thing into a compounding asset. Each part is a gate; the company is the portfolio. - Apply (60 min): the launch sprint workshop. Teams run the 10-step launch sprint end to end — entity → UEI → SAM → CAGE → NAICS → certification posture → compliance → capture function → first pipeline → first target — producing the skeleton they have been building in pieces all module. Then each team stress-tests another team's skeleton: find the two most likely failure points and recommend the fix. - Discuss (10 min): "If you could only protect one part of the skeleton in year one, which would you choose, and why?" - Close (5 min): assignment and bridge to the capstone and the first-30-days guide.

Discussion prompts. 1. Which failure point — cash, compliance, or capture discipline — is the most likely to kill an otherwise well-registered firm? 2. What does the doctrine predict about a firm that builds a great registration sequence and then runs its pipeline without gates?

Homework / reading. Complete the launch sprint. Deliverable: the full company skeleton, assembled and self-critiqued — presented to the room, with the two chosen failure points and their fixes stated explicitly.

Comprehension check. What are the seven parts of the company skeleton, and how does each one feed the next? What is the single most fragile part of your own skeleton, and what is your fix?

Module close

This module is the taught version of the launch sprint: the same skeleton, learned in the room. When it is done, you know what a GovCon company is *for* — not just how to win work, but how to build the business that is allowed to win it, funded well enough to survive winning it, and gated well enough to compound the wins. The first-30-days guide is the companion for the person joining such a company; the credential ladder is the map of the career that runs it.