

The Twenty-Year Arc — A Lifetime Roadmap

The federal market is not a lottery; it is a pipeline — and the pipeline is teachable. It is also worth a lifetime of study. This roadmap is the map for that lifetime: what to study, what to practice, and what to give back in every era from first encounter to corpus authorship.

Level: forever-learning · **Companions:** course/forever-learning-program.md, modules/forever-learning/README.md, guides/onboarding-and-placement.md.

This module is the **year-by-year roadmap** for the forever-learning promise. It draws on every tier of the curriculum — undergraduate, graduate, doctoral, and this one — and organizes them into a career’s worth of study. It is deliberately not a fixed contract: a learner enters at any era (a 50-year-old professional does not start in era one), and every era can be stretched or compressed. What it gives is the *shape* of a lifetime in the discipline.

The arc in one page

Era	Years	The identity	The relationship to the discipline
I — New entrant	1–2	Learning the territory	<i>Consume:</i> what the discipline is.
II — Apprentice	3–5	Learning the craft	<i>Apply:</i> how to do the discipline.
III — Journeyman	6–10	Running the pursuit	<i>Own:</i> leading real pursuits end to end.
IV — Master capture professional	11–15	Leading the organization	<i>Govern:</i> designing gates, portfolios, and posture.
V — Mentor	16–20	Raising the next cohort	<i>Give back:</i> coaching, peer review, committee service.
VI — Executive & corpus author	20+	Stewarding the field	<i>Steward:</i> executive leadership and research authorship.

Each era has four columns in the detailed roadmap below: **the identity**, **what to study**, **what to practice**, and **what to give back**. The Launchpad

mapping is noted per era (align/concept-to-system-map.md keeps the crosswalk current).

Era I — New entrant (years 1–2)

Identity: learning the territory. This era is where the discipline becomes a *shape* rather than a rumor.

What to study. The full doctrine in order (doctrine/01–10) — the curriculum’s intellectual spine. The literacy layer opens with it: the glossary, the acronym decoder, and the RFP/NOFO reading maps. The undergraduate tier is the structured path (course/undergraduate-program-overview.md): DL 101–102 (foundations and reading the solicitation), DL 210 (the pursuit pipeline), DL 220 (pricing and price-to-win fundamentals). The Ravonics case (case-study/ravonics.md) is worked alongside everything — the same canary company the machine side validates the doctrine on.

What to practice. Read real solicitations from week one — published-and-closed RFPs and NOFOs from SAM.gov and Grants.gov. Trace the money (literacy/where-the-money-flows.md) for a single award. Work the practice bank’s doctrine drills (practice/exercises.md). Build the first ORBITAL on a real, closed solicitation (course/capstone-build-an-orbital.md).

What to give back. Almost nothing yet — and that is correct. The era’s contribution is showing up: completing the self-checks, keeping the reading honest, and asking the questions the doctrine does not yet answer.

Launchpad mapping. L1 Explorer.

Era II — Apprentice (years 3–5)

Identity: learning the craft. The pipeline becomes something the apprentice can *run*, at least in simulation and under supervision.

What to study. The graduate tier (course/graduate-program-overview.md): GC 501 (microeconomics of procurement), GC 510 (competitive strategy and game theory), GC 520 (organizational theory and governance), GC 530 (research methods), GC 540 (advanced finance — FAR cost principles, DCAA, CAS, TINA). The graduate electives sharpen one craft at a time: negotiations and pricing posture (GE 610), teaming and joint ventures (GE 620), competitive intelligence (GE 630), proposal management and color teams (GE 640).

What to practice. The graduate capstone or thesis (GC 690 / GC 690T): a real, published-and-closed competition worked to a complete capture plan, a scored bid/no-bid, a pricing volume, and a defense before a panel. The apprentice

learns the color-team cadence by serving on reviews (literacy/how-color-teams-work.md). Where the learner works in industry, their own pursuit portfolio becomes the sandbox, under the curriculum's safe-exercise rules.

What to give back. The apprentice begins to teach: presenting a doctrine chapter to a study group, writing a case-library entry for the cross-cohort archive (alumni-community.md), and logging honest predictions on their own pursuits — the field's most undervalued research contribution.

Launchpad mapping. L2 Builder.

Era III — Journeyman (years 6–10)

Identity: running the pursuit. The journeyman owns real pursuits end to end — and the discipline stops being something studied and becomes something *practiced under pressure*.

What to study. The doctoral research posture begins here, even for the practitioner who will never take the degree: the research agenda (modules/doctoral/research-agenda.md) is read as *the map of what the field does not yet know*, and the research methods courses (DL 901–903) are read as *how to read the evidence*. The practitioner re-reads the doctrine chapters that their losses have now tested.

What to practice. Run captures, own bid/no-bid calls, sit at gates, lead color teams. This is the era of **repetition with reflection**: every pursuit gets a debrief, every loss gets mined, every prediction gets logged. The journeyman practices the current-event discipline (executive-education.md's roundtable format) on their own pipeline. Peer review begins — serving on another team's color team is the fastest way to sharpen judgment.

What to give back. The journeyman becomes a **practicum mentor** for an apprentice (alumni-community.md) — coaching one student through a full pursuit cycle. Mentoring is the first serious test of whether the journeyman actually understands the doctrine, because teaching exposes what experience had merely assumed.

Launchpad mapping. L3 Architect.

Era IV — Master capture professional (years 11–15)

Identity: leading the organization. The master no longer runs one pursuit; they design the *system* that runs many — the gates, the decision rights, the portfolio, the posture.

What to study. The executive tier (modules/forever-learning/executive-education.md): the executive master classes (the strategy of the portfolio, the economics of the win rate, gate governance at scale, the shape of the market, price-to-win as strategy, team/JV/solo). The regulatory-change watch becomes a standing discipline. The executive’s reading list deepens the canon: decision science, game theory at altitude, the debrief and protest record, and the machine corpus read as doctrine.

What to practice. The **pursuit-leadership studio** — bringing real organizational problems (a gate that keeps getting overridden, a portfolio that is not allocating capacity well) into a peer room and designing the fix. Peer review of *live captures* — the master serves as an independent reviewer for another organization’s work. And the master practices the hardest skill of all: **saying no** — building the no-bid discipline into an organization that used to chase everything.

What to give back. The master contributes at the organizational layer: designing gate charters, writing the firm’s pursuit doctrine, and serving as the senior reviewer in the studio. The master’s logged outcomes — years of honest predictions against realized awards — are now a body of evidence the research tier can use.

Launchpad mapping. L4 Networker → L5 Leader.

Era V — Mentor (years 16–20)

Identity: raising the next cohort. The mentor’s own pursuits matter less than the people they raise.

What to study. The doctoral and post-doctoral tiers deepen (modules/forever-learning/post-doctoral-fellowship.md): the advanced research seminar’s cross-disciplinary methods (decision science, game theory, behavioral economics, organizational learning), and the corpus-authoring discipline. The mentor studies *how the field is changing* as much as what is true.

What to practice. **Committee service:** the mentor sits on doctoral committees as a domain expert, and eventually chairs a dissertation. **Alumni-community leadership:** running a study group, presenting at the annual symposium, stewarding the cross-cohort case library. The mentor practices the discipline’s governance on the community itself — holding the case library to its integrity standards, gating the debrief-retrofits.

What to give back. This is the giving era. The mentor coaches multiple apprentices, reviews doctoral work, authors case-library entries, and proposes debrief-retrofits that ship into the curriculum. A mentor’s real legacy is measured the way the doctrine measures everything: *did the people they raised win more consistently?*

Launchpad mapping. L5 Leader; Ignition Legacy Track (M1–M9) for professionals who come to the discipline later in life.

Era VI — Executive & corpus author (years 20+)

Identity: stewarding the field. The corpus author and executive researcher take responsibility for the discipline itself — deciding which questions matter, writing the doctrine the next generation will learn, and holding the field’s integrity.

What to study. The post-doctoral fellowship’s full contract (post-doctoral-fellowship.md): owning a research thread on the agenda, cross-disciplinary research (pWin calibration, game theory, decision science), and the corpus authorship and curation discipline. The refresh-and-recertification cadence is now the author’s own calendar.

What to practice. Corpus authorship: writing and curating doctrine in the DNA corpus — concept first, then machine-side encoding — and keeping the human and machine renderings in lockstep. **Research:** designing and executing the studies the field’s open questions need. **Executive governance:** serving on the program’s editorial board, setting the research agenda, and chairing the annual symposium’s retrofit gate.

What to give back. Everything. The corpus author leaves the discipline better than they found it: authored doctrine, a curated corpus, a thread of the research agenda advanced, and a cohort of researchers and practitioners who will carry it forward. This is the cosmology loop made personal — a Won-World re-seeding Discovery, in the form of a career.

Launchpad mapping. The Ascension (executives); The Transcendence (stewardship).

Cross-era threads

Five threads run through every era, at rising altitude:

Thread	How it deepens
The pipeline (doctrine/03)	New entrant memorizes it → apprentice runs it → master designs it → steward extends it.
The score (doctrine/05)	New entrant computes it → apprentice defends it → master governs it → corpus author tests it.

Thread	How it deepens
The ORBITAL (doctrine/06)	New entrant builds one → apprentice structures a firm around them → master portfolios them → steward encodes the mapping.
The research agenda (modules/doctoral/research-agenda.md)	New entrant ignores it → apprentice reads it → journeyman contributes data → corpus author owns a thread.
The refresh (refresh-and-recertification.md)	Every era re-grounds annually; every era's debriefs feed the retrofits the next era learns from.

Reading the roadmap honestly

Three honest notes before a learner takes this roadmap too literally.

1. **Enter anywhere.** A 50-year-old professional does not start in Era I; they enter at the era that matches their experience, through the placement guide (guides/onboarding-and-placement.md) and the Ignition Legacy Track. The roadmap is a ladder of *identity*, not a calendar of *age*.
2. **Eras can be stretched or compressed.** A full-time student moves faster; a working professional may spend a decade in Era III. The roadmap's years are a reference shape, not a requirement.
3. **The eras are not doors that close.** A master may return to study the doctoral tier; a corpus author may re-enter the studio. The forever-learning promise is that the door always stays open — and the discipline always has a next thing worth studying.

Self-check

1. Which era are you in today, and what is the single most valuable thing to *practice* in that era?
2. What is the difference between the apprentice's contribution (honest predictions) and the mentor's contribution (raising people)?
3. Why must the corpus author write the *concept* before the machine-side *encoding* — and which thread makes that possible?