

Shared Core — The Pursuit Pipeline (6 sessions)

The spine of the course. Every student — Strategic Initiative, MBA, or MPA — takes these six sessions first. They build the shared language of the pipeline, the gate, and the ORBITAL. After the core, each audience branches into its own accent track.

Audience: everyone. **Prerequisites:** none. **Readings:** doctrine/03, doctrine/04, doctrine/06, doctrine/07, doctrine/01, doctrine/02, plus the literacy maps as assigned.

Session 1 — Where the money lives

Learning objectives. By the end of this session, students can: (1) explain the three main kinds of federal money; (2) name the four identifiers a business needs to receive federal money; (3) find a solicitation on SAM.gov and a NOFO on Grants.gov.

Session plan (60 min). - Open (5 min): “How does a federal dollar get to a small business?” — capture guesses on the board. - Teach (20 min): doctrine/01. The three rivers (contracts, grants, other transactions), the identifiers, the bulletin boards, the small-business universe. - Apply (20 min): in pairs, pull up SAM.gov and Grants.gov. Find one contract opportunity and one grant opportunity. Note the identifiers visible in each. - Discuss (10 min): “What surprised you about how *published* this all is?” - Close (5 min): assignment and preview of the pipeline.

Discussion prompts. 1. If the money is this public, why do so few people know how to access it? 2. Why would Congress require set-asides for small business? Is that good policy?

Homework / reading. Read doctrine/01 and literacy/where-the-money-flows.md. Deliverable: a one-page “money map” of one agency’s published spending (USAspending.gov), showing an appropriation → a solicitation → a past award.

Comprehension check. What is the difference between a contract and a grant? What do UEI, CAGE, and NAICS do?

Session 2 — The pipeline shape

Learning objectives. By the end of this session, students can: (1) draw the pursuit pipeline from memory; (2) explain what a gate is and why gates need criteria written in advance; (3) place any activity they see in a news story somewhere in the pipeline.

Session plan (60 min). - Open (5 min): draw “how a company wins federal business” from instinct. Compare drawings. - Teach (20 min): doctrine/03. The nine stages, the gates between them, the repeat loop. - Apply (20 min): give teams a real solicitation and a fictional small company. Ask: *where in the pipeline is this? What would the next gate be?* (Teams sketch the pipeline with the opportunity placed on it.) - Discuss (10 min): “Where do most organizations waste effort — and which gate catches it?” - Close (5 min): connect to the GROWTH and DREAM accents.

Discussion prompts. 1. Defend: “pursuing everything is a fast way to go bankrupt.” 2. What would an organization look like if it had *no* qualify gate? *No* submit gate?

Homework / reading. Read doctrine/03 and doctrine/04. Deliverable: a one-page pipeline diagram for your own future career — where would “you” fit as a person in this pipeline?

Comprehension check. Name the nine stages in order. What are the four parts of a gate?

Session 3 — Reading the documents

Learning objectives. By the end of this session, students can: (1) locate the six questions every solicitation answers; (2) build a compliance matrix from a real RFP; (3) distinguish a compliance reading from a strategy reading.

Session plan (75 min). - Open (5 min): “What is the most important section of an RFP?” — no peeking. - Teach (25 min): doctrine/02 plus literacy/how-to-read-an-rfp.md. The six questions, Section L vs Section M, the two reading modes. - Apply (30 min): in teams, take one real RFP (a published, closed one). Find the SOW, the deadline, Section M. Start a compliance matrix — every “shall” you can find in 20 minutes. - Discuss (10 min): “What does Section M tell you that the rest of the RFP does not?” - Close (5 min): assignment.

Discussion prompts. 1. Why would a perfect technical approach not save a response that ignored Section L? 2. How would you price a pursuit where the agency announced lowest-price-technically-acceptable?

Homework / reading. Read doctrine/02 and literacy/how-to-read-a-nofo.md. Deliverable: complete a compliance matrix for the RFP you started in class, plus a one-page strategy reading of what the agency really cares about.

Comprehension check. What are the six questions every solicitation answers? What is the difference between a compliance reading and a strategy reading?

Session 4 — The ORBITAL skeleton

Learning objectives. By the end of this session, students can: (1) name the seven axes of the ORBITAL; (2) explain why structured pursuits survive better than unstructured ones; (3) sketch an ORBITAL for a real opportunity from scratch.

Session plan (60 min). - Open (5 min): “What does a pursuit need to be true before it deserves money and attention?” - Teach (20 min): doctrine/06. The seven axes as seven practical questions. Structure-first, document-second. - Apply (20 min): in pairs, take the opportunity you found in Session 1 and build a one-page ORBITAL on paper — all seven axes, one line each minimum. - Discuss (10 min): “Which axis was hardest to fill? What does that tell you about the pursuit?” - Close (5 min): connect ORBITAL to the lifecycle.

Discussion prompts. 1. Which two ORBITAL axes would you argue about most in a real pursuit? 2. How is an ORBITAL like a business plan in miniature?

Homework / reading. Read doctrine/06. Deliverable: a clean, one-page ORBITAL for your chosen opportunity, with the budget axis showing estimated value and cost.

Comprehension check. What are the seven axes? What does “structure first, document second” mean?

Session 5 — Scoring, gates, and the bid/no-bid call

Learning objectives. By the end of this session, students can: (1) compute a pursuit score from pWin and value; (2) explain what a threshold does; (3) make and defend a bid/no-bid recommendation for a real opportunity.

Session plan (75 min). - Open (5 min): “Would you rather chase a \$200k pursuit you can likely win, or a \$2M pursuit you can likely lose?” - Teach (25 min): doctrine/05. The score as $pWin \times value$, the threshold gate, price-to-win as position. - Apply (30 min): the scoring exercise. Give teams three real (closed) opportunities. Score each: pWin factors, value estimate, composite score, threshold call. Teams present their bid/no-bid recommendation and defend it. - Discuss (10 min): “Where does arithmetic end and judgment begin in a gate?” - Close (5 min): assignment.

Discussion prompts. 1. Defend a bid you would decline on score alone, against a teammate who wants to chase it. 2. Why is a too-low bid sometimes worse than a too-high bid?

Homework / reading. Read doctrine/05. Deliverable: a scored-and-decided pursuit sheet for one real opportunity — pWin factors, value, composite, and a one-paragraph bid/no-bid recommendation.

Comprehension check. What two numbers make a score? What is price-to-win?

Session 6 — The lifecycle and the loop

Learning objectives. By the end of this session, students can: (1) explain the Dream → ORBITAL → World lifecycle; (2) explain the cosmology loop and why it compounds; (3) connect delivery and past performance to the next pursuit.

Session plan (60 min). - Open (5 min): “Where do the winners come from?” - Teach (20 min): doctrine/07. The three states, the lifecycle at two altitudes, the compounding loop. - Apply (20 min): use the Ravonics case (case-study/ravonics.md). Where is Ravonics in the lifecycle? What would move it forward? What does its HUBZone status and research partnership mean for its ORBITALS? - Discuss (10 min): “Which is more valuable to a firm — winning, or learning from losing?” - Close (5 min): preview the audience tracks and the capstone.

Discussion prompts. 1. How does a World produce the seeds of new Dreams?
2. What would break the cosmology loop in a real firm?

Homework / reading. Read doctrine/07 and doctrine/08. Deliverable: a one-page reflection — “what the loop means for the kind of organization I want to build or serve.”

Comprehension check. What moves a Dream to an ORBITAL, and an ORBITAL to a World? What is the cosmology loop?