Practice — The Company Launch Sprint (10 Steps)

The capstone exercise of the company-building module — and the fastest way to learn what it actually takes to stand a GovCon company up. In ten steps you build the complete skeleton of a federal contracting company: from the legal entity to the first target. You are not registering a real company; you are proving you understand the sequence, the compliance, the cash, and the capture discipline a real one requires.

> **How to use this sprint.** Work on paper, a whiteboard, or a plain document — no software required (the stack-agnostic rule applies to founding a company too). The company-building module teaches the concepts; the Ravonics case is your model of what a finished skeleton looks like. Work the steps in order — each one feeds the next.

Your company. You are founding a company. You may invent one (a name, a founding team, a place, a capability you can actually describe) or use Ravonics as the reference model and "what-if" it from zero. The sprint is the same either way; an invented company forces every decision onto you, which is the point. Give the company a name before step 1 — the discipline is harder on a named thing.

Step 1 — The entity

The concept. A government buyer contracts with a *legal entity*, not a founder. The entity form (an LLC, an S-corporation, a C-corporation) shapes taxes, ownership, and how the firm looks to a buyer and to capital. Choose a state of formation, a legal form, and a founding team, and be able to say why.

Deliverable. A one-page entity decision: legal form and why, state of formation and why, founding team (names and roles), and the entity's registered address. One paragraph on what this choice implies for who owns what and how the firm will raise money later.

Rubric note. Strong work states the *reason* for the form (not just the form), connects the form to how the founders will own and fund the firm, and shows awareness that the form can be changed later but at a cost. Weak work stops at "we'll be an LLC" with no reasoning.

Step 2 — The UEI

The concept. A **UEI** (Unique Entity ID) is the government's identifier for your company — issued by SAM.gov, free, and required for everything that follows.

It is the company's government identity, issued before the full SAM registration is complete.

Deliverable. A UEI record: the steps to request it, what information it requires (company name, physical address, ownership), and the expected timeline. Note where in the sequence a company that has not started this yet is silently blocked.

Rubric note. Strong work shows the UEI is a *prerequisite*, not a task — and that a UEI alone does not make a company bid-eligible. Weak work treats it as "a number we get" with no sense of what it unlocks or what information must be accurate.

Step 3 — The SAM registration

The concept. SAM.gov registration is the company's government storefront — the annual registration (renewed and kept current) that makes a firm *eligible* to receive a contract, grant, or other agreement. A registration that lapses mid-competition is a disqualifier no matter how good the proposal is. Registration includes **representations and certifications** — the firm's self-certifications that affect which pools it can claim.

Deliverable. A SAM profile skeleton: the core registration data fields, the reps-and-certs section, the annual renewal cadence, and a "who owns this in our company" box. Add a one-line note on the consequences of a lapse (this is the "third deadline" every capture team must track).

Rubric note. Strong work treats SAM as a *living obligation* with an owner and a renewal date, and connects it to bid eligibility. Weak work lists "register on SAM.gov" without the maintenance reality or the eligibility consequence.

Step 4 — The CAGE code

The concept. A **CAGE code** (Commercial and Government Entity code) is the five-character code tied to the physical location of the company, issued as part of the SAM registration. It is how the government references a specific facility — and it appears on solicitations, awards, and invoices.

Deliverable. A CAGE entry: what it is, how it is obtained (and the fact that it follows from the SAM registration), and a note on where the code shows up in a real transaction (a solicitation, a purchase order, an invoice). Note any second location that would need its own code.

Rubric note. Strong work shows CAGE is a *physical-location* identifier that comes *after* SAM and is referenced all the way through to payment. Weak work confuses it with the UEI or treats it as a separate standalone registration.

Step 5 — The NAICS codes

The concept. NAICS codes (North American Industry Classification System) are how the government segments the market — and how a firm claims which competitions it can enter. Choosing codes is a market decision, not a paperwork one: each code carries a size standard (the SBA's definition of "small" for that industry), and a firm must be small under the code *and* aligned to the work it actually does. A firm wins in the codes where it is eligible and capable.

Deliverable. A NAICS list for your company: three to five codes, each with the SBA size standard, a one-line statement of the work it matches, and a "why this code" note. Add a one-line caution about claiming a code without the capability to perform it.

Rubric note. Strong work shows the link between NAICS, size standard, and *competitive pool* (Ravonics's four codes in the case are the model) — and that a NAICS is a claim of eligibility, not just a category. Weak work lists codes with no size-standard check or capability rationale.

Step 6 — The certification posture

The concept. The small-business set-aside programs — **HUBZone, 8(a), WOSB/VOSB, SDVOSB, and the SBIR/STTR R&D programs** — are statutory market design: pools restricted to firms that qualify, where a small firm's pWin is structurally higher because the competition is smaller and the buyer is mandated to set work aside. Certification is entry into those pools. A young firm should decide its posture deliberately: which pools it qualifies for, which it will pursue first, and which it will deliberately skip.

Deliverable. A one-page certification strategy: for each program, qualify/no-qualify and why, the cost and time to certify, and a first-year posture (pursue / hold / skip) with a reason. Explicitly name at least one program the company *would not* pursue and why.

Rubric note. Strong work is a *strategy*, not a list — it sequences which pool to enter first, understands that certifications are assets with maintenance costs, and includes a deliberate "no." Weak work says "we should get them all" with no trade-off reasoning. (The case's HUBZone + STTR posture is a strong model of a deliberate two-pool strategy.)

Step 7 — The compliance skeleton

The concept. The compliance skeleton is the three-pillar system that makes a firm's costs *credible prices*: (1) an **accounting system** that can segregate and allocate costs, (2) **DCAA-readiness** — books that could be audited and rates that are defensible, and (3) **timekeeping** — the honest record of who spent time on what. It is a business asset, not overhead: without it, a firm cannot price credibly, and the government will not pay for costs it cannot verify.

Deliverable. A one-page compliance-skeleton plan: the three pillars, a year-one standard for each (what "good enough" looks like at five people), the cost of building it, and the two most common failure modes your company must guard against.

Rubric note. Strong work shows *why* each pillar exists (what failure it prevents) and sets an honest year-one bar that is not gold-plated. Weak work lists "accounting, DCAA, timekeeping" as buzzwords with no failure-mode analysis.

Step 8 — The capture function

The concept. The capture function is a *function*, not a headcount: a pipeline that is always sensing, a bid/no-bid gate that protects scarce capacity, and a capture team assembled per pursuit. The first management artifact a young company writes is its **gate charter** — trigger, criteria written in advance, evidence, and owner — because it is the mechanism that keeps a five-person firm from chasing everything and dying of attention.

Deliverable. Two artifacts: (1) a bid/no-bid **gate charter** for your company — trigger, three to five yes/no criteria, the evidence for each, and the decision owner; (2) a **first-capture-team staffing** — the five-person bench mapped to capture lead, proposal, pricing, contracts, delivery, and who doubles up.

Rubric note. Strong work writes criteria that can be answered yes/no with named evidence, and staffs honestly for a small firm (people double up; gaps are named). Weak work writes vague criteria ("is it a good opportunity?") or staffs a five-person firm like a fifty-person one.

Step 9 — The first pipeline

The concept. A pipeline is only useful if it is real: opportunities actually in the market, scored honestly against the firm's eligibility and capacity. A young firm's first pipeline should be small and honest — a handful of real, published opportunities the firm is genuinely eligible for and could staff. This is the register the capture function will run on.

Deliverable. A **10-row pipeline register**: for each opportunity — the solicitation source (a real, published opportunity from SAM.gov, Grants.gov, or an agency forecast), the NAICS code it falls under, the firm's eligibility, an estimated value, a pWin (argued factor by factor), and a computed score (pWin × value). Rank the rows. Mark at least one row **no-bid** and say why.

Rubric note. Strong work uses *real* opportunities, shows the score arithmetic, and includes a disciplined no-bid — the hardest row to write. Weak work fills the register with invented or marginal opportunities and scores every row "yes."

Step 10 — The first target

The concept. The first win is not the finish line; it is the seed of the flywheel. A young firm's first target should be the opportunity where pWin is highest and the win creates the most **past performance** — the asset that raises pWin on every later pursuit. The strategy is: pick the first target from the pipeline, set the threshold in advance, make the bid/no-bid call with evidence, and sequence the next two ORBITALS that the first win's past performance unlocks.

Deliverable. A one-page first-target plan: the chosen opportunity, the score (pWin argued factor by factor against the gate charter), the bid/no-bid recommendation with the evidence, and a three-ORBITAL sequence — target one (the first win), target two (what the first win's past performance unlocks), target three (the compounding move) — with one line of logic for each. Add the one number that would change the call.

Rubric note. Strong work makes a defensible call *against the gate charter* (not against a hunch), and shows the compounding logic — why this first win is the right one to spend the firm's scarce capacity on. Weak work picks the biggest opportunity with no pWin argument, or a set-aside with no reason.

The launch readiness checklist

Before you call the sprint done, walk the skeleton top to bottom:

- ☐ **Entity:** I can say why this form, this state, and this team — in one minute.
- ☐ **Identifiers:** I know the sequence (UEI → SAM → CAGE), what each unlocks, and who owns each in my company.
- ☐ **NAICS:** Every code I claim has a size-standard check and a capability rationale.
- ☐ **Certifications:** I have a posture, a sequence, and at least one deliberate "no."
- ☐ **Compliance:** All three pillars have a year-one standard and a named owner.

- ☐ **Capture:** My gate charter has yes/no criteria and a named owner; my five-person team has named double-ups.
- ☐ **Pipeline:** Ten real rows, scored, with a no-bid I can defend.
- ☐ **First target:** A bid/no-bid call made against the charter, with a three-ORBITAL sequence and the one number that changes it.

What a strong submission looks like

A finished sprint is a **coherent skeleton, not ten separate documents** — the entity decision feeds the SAM profile, the certifications feed the pipeline's eligibility column, the gate charter governs the first-target call, and the compliance and cash legs keep the whole thing honest. Grade yourself against the practice layer's three questions (practice/exercises.md):

1. **Did I use the doctrine?** Are the identifiers, the pipeline, the gates, and the score visibly present in every step?
2. **Did I argue with evidence?** Are my NAICS choices, certification posture, pWin factors, and first-target call backed by stated reasons, not vibes?
3. **Could a skeptic change my mind with a fact?** If not, I have written a plan; if yes, I have written a *defensible* launch plan — which is exactly what a real founder, or a real employer, is buying.