FAQ — Questions Newcomers, Professionals, and Students Actually Ask

Short answers to the questions that come up at the door. Every answer points back to the doctrine or the literacy layer, so the FAQ is a map, not a replacement.

The basics

What is this place?

This is the **Launchpad Sandbox** — the one-stop learning space for the discipline of winning federal business. It has two layers: the **doctrine** (doctrine/, the durable concepts that never change) and the **tools** (which are mentioned conceptually only and never taught as a dependency). The core rule is in doctrine/08: *concepts are durable, tools are swappable.*

What is an ORBITAL?

The ORBITAL is the **seven-axis business structure for a pursuit**: **O**bjective, **R**esources, **B**udget, **I**ndicators, **T**ransport, **A**ctivities, **L**ogistics (doctrine/06). It is the skeleton every serious pursuit needs — the single place where the facts, decisions, and money live so the pursuit survives the week-to-week chaos. In the lifecycle (doctrine/07), a **Dream** is a seed idea; an **ORBITAL** is a pursuit with structure, a budget, and momentum; a **World** is a fully realized enterprise.

Is the federal market really this open?

Yes — more than most people believe. Congress appropriates, agencies publish their needs and rules in advance, and winners are chosen on published criteria. The market has addresses: **SAM.gov** for contracts, **Grants.gov** for grants, **USAspending.gov** for the published record of who got what (doctrine/01, literacy/where-the-money-flows). There is no secret handshake — there is a system of record.

Do I need to know software to do this?

No. This course is deliberately **stack-agnostic**: you are never tested on a product, and no lesson requires one (doctrine/08). The capstone is explicitly stack-free — paper, a whiteboard, a spreadsheet, or a word processor all work. The concepts (the pipeline, the gates, the score, the ORBITAL) are portable; the tools are swappable.

Do I need a degree?

No. The college course is built for three degree programs (Strategic Initiative, MBA, MPA), but the doctrine is taught to *anyone* — fellows, professionals, curious readers. The Launchpad fellowship ladder (L1 Explorer → L5 Leader) is a levels-based path, not a degree path. If you're a professional 50+, the Ignition

Legacy Track maps the same doctrine to your experience. See the onboarding guide for where to start.

How is this different from Shipley training?

Shipley Associates is the famous commercial capture/proposal training — the doctrine's gate vocabulary (bid/no-bid, color teams) is in fact *Shipley-aligned* (the align map's gates section shows the `shipley-capture-gates.yaml` and `shipley` pWin formula on the machine side). The difference is posture: this curriculum is **concept-first and stack-agnostic** — it teaches the durable ideas and only mentions any product, including Shipley's methodology, as an accent. It is built to be taught as a course, practiced solo, and encoded in an AI layer, all from the same doctrine.

The federal market

What are UEI, CAGE, NAICS, and SAM — and do I need them?

They are the four identifiers that unlock federal money (doctrine/01):

- **UEI** — your 12-character identity in federal systems (free from SAM.gov).
- **CAGE** — your 5-character DoD/NATO identity.
- **NAICS** — the 6-digit code that puts you in an industry bucket and decides size standards and many set-asides.
- **SAM.gov registration** — the master record that says you're eligible to receive federal money.

You register once in SAM.gov, get a UEI and CAGE, and choose the NAICS codes that describe your business. Every pursuit after that starts with "is our SAM record active?"

What is a compliance matrix?

Your own tool (not the agency's): a table of every requirement ("shall") in a solicitation, the section it came from, and where your response satisfies it (literacy/how-to-read-an-rfp). It is built during the compliance reading and is the backbone of the review gates — the pink team starts here. The worked exemplar shows one fully built.

What is pWin, and how do I score a pursuit?

pWin is your **probability of win** — an honest, factor-weighted estimate, not a gut feel. The score is **pWin × value** (doctrine/05). You argue each factor with evidence, weight it, add it up, multiply by the expected value, and compare the result to a **threshold** you set in advance. That's the arithmetic of the bid/no-bid call.

How do I get "certified"?

Two different things get called "certification" in this world:

1. **SBA certifications** (HUBZone, 8(a), WOSB/VOSB) — obtained from the SBA, not from any course. The registrations (UEI, CAGE, SAM) come from SAM.gov. This curriculum teaches you *what they are, why they matter, and how to use them* — see the further reading.
2. **The Launchpad ladder** (L1–L5) — a progression through the doctrine, not a government status. See onboarding and placement to find your level.

Is this only for small businesses?

No — the doctrine applies to anyone competing for federal work, from a one-person firm to a large prime. But small-business programs (HUBZone, 8(a), WOSB/VOSB, SBIR/STTR) are a deliberate, statutory part of the market, and a certified small firm competes in a smaller, friendlier pool (doctrine/01). The teaching case, Ravonics, is a HUBZone small business with an STTR research partner.

Learning path

Where do I start?

Read the ten doctrine chapters in order (each is short and ends with a self-check — the answers are in the practice bank), keep the literacy folder open, and read the worked exemplar to see the whole discipline done once. Then follow the study plan that matches who you are, or the onboarding guide to get placed on the Launchpad ladder.

How long does it take?

Reading the doctrine takes a few hours. The study plans are paced for the serious learner: ~6 weeks full-time, ~8 weeks at 3–4 hours a week as a professional, ~5 weeks to readiness as a coach. The full college semester is 14 weeks (syllabus).

How is the Launchpad fellowship different from the college course?

Two doors into the same building. The **college course** is the semester, graded version with three audience tracks (Strategic Initiative, MBA, MPA). The **Launchpad fellowship** is the levels-based, cohort version (L1–L5, the Ignition Legacy Track for professionals 50+, The Ascension for executives). Both teach the same doctrine, through the same case (Ravonics) and the same practice layer. The crosswalk is in the align map.

What's the capstone?

The final assessment: you take a real, *published and closed* solicitation from SAM.gov or Grants.gov and produce the full pursuit package — compliance matrix, strategy reading, ORBITAL, score, gate charter, and a bid/no-bid recommendation — then present and defend it (capstone brief). It's stack-free. The worked exemplar is a complete worked answer to it.

What if I get stuck?

The practice layer is built for solo learning: every exercise has an answer key, and the worked exemplar shows the reasoning at every step. If you're in a cohort, your facilitator uses the facilitator playbook. If you're truly stuck on a concept, re-read the relevant doctrine chapter and use the glossary (literacy/glossary).

Careers

What jobs does this lead to?

The doctrine is the foundation of careers in **business development and capture management** (finding and qualifying federal work), **proposal management** (designing and producing compliant proposals), **grants management** (the public side of the same transaction), and **public policy / program administration** (running the competitions and oversight). The three audience tracks map to those accents: the MBA track is the business analysis, the MPA track is the public side, the Strategic Initiative track is the systems/portfolio view (modules/).

Is this worth it if I'm not planning to work in government?

Yes. The core skills — reading a solicitation, building a compliance matrix, scoring a decision with pWin × value, structuring a venture with the ORBITAL, running gates — are the same skills used in commercial proposals, foundation grants, sales pipelines, and any serious venture (doctrine/03, doctrine/05, doctrine/06). The pattern — *estimate the probability, estimate the value, set a threshold, argue with evidence* — is a general-purpose decision machine.

Still curious? The further reading page lists the official federal sources; the onboarding guide places you; the study plans get you moving.