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National Women's Business Council Initial Findings Report

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**76 Years of
Fee-Based
Research
Services to
the Federal
Government
1948–2024**



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1. INTRODUCTION

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, the National Women's Business Council (NWBC) contracted the Library of Congress Federal Research Division (FRD) to examine the experiences of women-owned businesses (WOBs) as potential vendors and study whether the Women-Owned Small Business (WOSB) Federal Contract Program has increased WOB and WOSB participation in government contracting.

This document provides preliminary findings on WOSB federal contracting trends. These findings include the federal contracting world in general, existing complications within the WOSB Federal Contract Program, and available data sources related to WOBS' and WOSBs' federal contracts. This Initial Findings Report is composed of two main sections: the Literature Review and Data Review. Findings from this report will inform the creation of the mixed-methods study on the experience of participating in and the effectiveness of the WOSB Federal Contract Program (hereafter also referred to as the WOSB Program within this report).

1.1. Research Questions

In examining the literature, FRD sought to answer the following questions:

- What does the literature say specifically about how the WOSB Program operates as compared to other similar programs that purport to offer access to government contracts?
- How does the process of finding, competing for, and fulfilling government contract awards differ for WOSB vendors when compared to non-WOSB vendors?
- What does the literature say about structural and interpersonal WOBS may encounter when seeking government contracts?

In exploring available datasets related to federal contracting, FRD endeavored to find sources that could help answer the following questions:

- Has WOSBs' share of non-set-aside contracts increased as the share of set-aside contracts has increased?
- Do firms that win set-aside contracts tend to go on to do increasing volumes of government business and/or win non-set-aside contracts?
- Are there meaningfully different trends in subsequent survival and growth between businesses that do and do not secure certification/win set-aside contracts?

1.2. Methodology

FRD reviewed academic journal articles, government reports, and other grey literature for the literature review portion of this document. The scholarly journals FRD reviewed focused on topics related to WOSBs and federal contracting. Among the databases that FRD consulted were SageJournals, JSTOR, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, and the Library of Congress's Primo database. Government agencies from which FRD reviewed grey literature included the Government Accountability Office (GAO), Congressional Research Service (CRS), Small Business Administration (SBA), and the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA). Keyword searches included a combination of the words listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Search Terms

Business or Program Type	Solicitation Type or Action	Outcomes
Economically disadvantaged women-owned small business (EDWOSB)	Contract*	Barriers
Minority-owned small business (MOB)	(Full and open) Competition	Disparity
Women-owned business (WOB)	Set-aside	Five percent
Women-owned small business (WOSB)	Solicit*	
WOSB Federal Contract Program	Subcontract*	In/equity
Small Business Association (SBA)	Prime contract*	Obstacles
	Procur*	

* An asterisk (*) serves as a wildcard symbol, which returns searches that include the root word and a mix of characters following the root word. For instance, "procur*" would yield a search for results including procure, procuring, and procurement.

To extend the search beyond using keyword searches in databases, FRD also utilized the "snowballing" method, which involves reviewing relevant sources located in the reference section of a source. To search for potential data sources for use in the following phase of this study, FRD snowballed sources from relevant studies discovered from the review of the literature.

1.3. Key Terminology

FRD compiled a list of key terms and their respective definitions in this subsection. These terms are frequently used within federal contracting and throughout this report. **Vendors** refer to the businesses (also known as firms or contractors) that supply goods and services to the federal government. A **Contracting Officer** (CO) is an individual from a federal agency that oversees the solicitation, awarding, and management of the contract.¹ This report considers prime contracts and subcontracts.

- **Prime contracts** exist when a contract is made directly between the federal agency and the vendor. The vendor would be known as a prime contractor.²
- **Subcontracts** occur when the prime contractor subcontracts out some portion of the contract to another vendor. The vendor would be known as a subcontractor.³

The three types of contract solicitations (or request for offers from businesses) this report considered are listed below.

- Solicitation occurs through **full and open competition** when the CO is certain that no restrictions to the award apply.* The award is open for competition between all eligible federal vendors.⁴
- Solicitation through a **set-aside** occurs when the CO restricts competition to a limited group of business types.⁵ For example, a CO can set-aside a contract to just WOSB vendors if at least two WOSB vendors can fulfill the contract. All eligible WOSB vendors then compete for the contract, thereby restricting but not eliminating all competition.
- Solicitation through **sole-source** or **sole-source authority** occurs when the CO determines that only one specific vendor can fulfill a contract.⁶ For example, a CO can use sole-source authority to award a contract to a WOSB if they are able to determine that no other WOSB vendor is able to fulfill the award, regardless of whether non-WOSB vendors are available to fulfill the award. This award would then no longer be competitive.

* Restrictions can include contracts that are sensitive in nature (i.e., national security risks) or require brand-name services.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents findings from a review of existing literature on the WOSB Federal Contract Program and other similar federal contracting programs. The literature review explores the typical process for federal contracting, a history of the introduction of the WOSB Program, what the program and similar programs entail, WOSB contracting rates, and potential complications preventing WOSBs from federal contracting.

2.1. Federal Contracting Programs

This subsection begins by establishing the federal solicitation process, as well as that of programs similar to the WOSB Federal Contract Program and administered by SBA. The subsection goes into further detail on the WOSB Federal Contract Program and how agencies can restrict competition to fulfill federal obligations.

2.1.1. Full and Open Competition

Under 15 U.S.C. § 644, the federal government is required to award at least 23 percent of the total dollar value of all prime contract awards to small businesses within each fiscal year. More specific goals also exist for small businesses owned by service-disabled veterans, socially and economically disadvantaged individuals, and women, along with businesses located in historically underutilized business zones (HUBZones). Service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses (SDVOSBs), small disadvantaged businesses (SDBs), and WOSBs each have a government-wide goal of at least five percent of the total dollar value of all prime contracts and subcontracts awarded annually. SDB programs include the 8(a) Business Development Program, which also trains and provides technical assistance on federal contracting.* The HUBZone government-wide goal consists of at least three percent of the total dollar value of all prime contract and subcontract awards. Each goal comprises the sum of federally awarded dollars to both prime and subcontracts.⁷ SBA oversees certifying and providing resources to each of these business groups. The agency serves consults for each federal agency to help establish and negotiate individual agency goals. SBA also tracks and administers the government-wide contracting rate goals for each business type.⁸⁺

While there are many ways of soliciting contracts, "full and open competition" is typically the preferred and standard form of federal contract solicitation.⁹ Full and open competitive contracts comprise awards open to all qualified federal vendors. Of all the bidders a contract solicitation

* SBA counts of SDB totals include awarded dollars from the 8(a) program and other SDB initiatives.

⁺ Given that some federal contracts cannot be feasibly procured by a small business, percentages calculated by SBA do not include such contracts.

may receive, the federal agency can choose a vendor that best fulfills its needs based on technical and monetary aspects.¹⁰ The introduction of WOSB, SDVOSB, SDB, and HUBZone programs ensured that competition can be restricted to specific vendor types rather than through a full and open competition between all eligible vendors.¹¹

2.1.2. WOSB Federal Contract Program

In 1994, Congress enacted the Federal Acquisition Streamlining Act (FASA) to minimize federal contracting requirements and simplify the federal acquisition process.¹² FASA increased the award goal for WOSBs to at least five percent of all federal government contracting dollars from the original goal of one percent, which was set in the 1970s.¹³ Congress also introduced the Small Business Reauthorization Act of 2000 with the hopes of clearly defining and establishing the WOSB Program. To meet the government-wide goal of five percent and permit an agency's CO the ability to easily award WOSBs contracts, the act proposed providing COs with the power to restrict competition for the solicitation of federal goods to small businesses owned and controlled by women.¹⁴

The WOSB Federal Contract Program was officially created after the issuance of an SBA final rule that became active on February 4, 2011. This final rule granted SBA oversight over the program. Through this final rule, COs were granted the power to restrict competition to WOSB vendors—including EDWOSBs, a subset of WOSBs—using set-asides.¹⁵ In other words, rather than allowing full and open competition with all eligible vendors, COs can "set aside" the contract to restrict competition to only WOSB vendors as long as more than one WOSB vendor was able to compete for the contract. In addition to WOSB set-asides, SBA introduced a 2015 final rule that permitted COs the ability to call upon sole-source authority. Sole-source authority allow COs to award a contract to a single WOSB vendor, given that no other WOSBs can fulfill the contract requirements and needs.¹⁶ Therefore, regardless of whether non-WOSBs vendors can fulfill a contract, a CO can use set-asides or sole-source authority to restrict the competition to exclusively WOSBs.

SBA issued another rule in 2020 implementing the requirement of SBA certification of WOSB and EDWOSB potential vendors. Previously, vendors were not required to go through an official certification process to ensure eligibility for the WOSB Program. With this rule in place, WOSBs and EDWOSBs must either be certified through SBA's official certification program or through an SBA-approved Third-Party Certifier.¹⁷ Implementing this process ensures that the WOSB Program is restricted to just WOSBs and EDWOSBs, thereby strengthening the integrity and SBA oversight of the program.¹⁸

2.2. WOSB Contracting Trends

The government-wide goal of five percent has only ever been attained twice since the inception of the WOSB Program—once in 2015 with 5.05 percent and a second time in 2019 with 5.19 percent of all federally awarded contract dollars.¹⁹ Even though the government consistently fails to meet the five percent goal, WOSB percentages tend to be higher when compared to SDVOSB, HubZone, and SDB programs. Section 3.2 provides detailed statistics on the percentages of federal dollars awarded to different SBA programs and the proportion of WOSB awarded dollars based on solicitation type.

Since the introduction of WOSB set-asides in 2015, the use of set-asides increased from 0.62 percent in 2014 to 1.13 percent of all awarded WOSB contract dollars the following year. The percentage of contract dollars awarded through the WOSB set-aside program has steadily increased, reaching 5.65 percent of all WOSB awarded dollars in FY 2023. WOSB contract dollars awarded through sole-source authority remained at an average of about 0.35 percent of all federal contract dollars from its introduction in FY 2016 to FY 2023.²⁰ Even then, set-asides and sole-source contracts only make up a small portion of all WOSB awarded contracts. In FY 2018, 63 percent of all contract dollars awarded to WOSBs were solicited through full and open competition rather than through the procurement vehicles offered by the WOSB Federal Contract Program. Furthermore, 33 percent of award contract dollars were through other programs such as the 8(a) and HUBZone programs. Only four percent of contract dollars were awarded directly through the WOSB Program. As determined from the General Services Administration (GSA) Federal Procurement Data System Report (FPDS), a majority of WOSB awards come from full and open competition or through small business preferences.²¹

Statistics show that the Department of Defense (DOD) is one of the few federal departments that almost consistently meet the annual five percent WOSB contracting goal.²² In FY 2023, six of the top ten agencies that awarded contract dollars to WOSBs fell under the DOD. Three of the other top agencies fell under the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and one under the Department of the Treasury.²³ Overall, studies have found that large federal departments or agencies, such as the DOD, are more likely to award contracts to WOSBs over other vendor types.²⁴

Studies show that disparities exist between the proportion of awarded federal dollars and the proportion of small businesses available. For instance, in FY 2020, minority-owned businesses received 9.4 percent of federal contract dollars while making up 18.4 percent of all U.S. businesses in 2019. WOSBs were awarded 4.9 percent of federal contract dollars in 2020 while making up 20.9 percent of all businesses in 2019. More generally, WOBs received a little over five percent of contract dollars while making up 23 percent of all businesses.²⁵

While these numbers may seem low, actual dollar amounts awarded through a specific program may be even lower. Agencies can award a WOSB vendor under a different program that they qualify for, yet still include that contract amount as a part of its goal for the WOSB Program. For example, a WOSB eligible vendor may win a contract under an 8(a) set-aside. The federal agency may “double count” the contract value under both their 8(a) and WOSB goals. However, this practice results in the conflation of the percentage of dollar value of contracts that were actually awarded through the WOSB Program. Double counting allows for percentages to seem higher than they actually were.²⁶ This caveat further contributes to the disparity between the percentage of dollars federally awarded WOSBs and portion of businesses owned and operated by women.

2.3. Structural and Interpersonal Choices that Inhibit WOSB Contracting

MBDA performed a regression analysis in 2022 to study the probability of different small businesses winning federal contracts. Daniel Chow, MBDA’s Senior Economist, found that “woman-owned, minority-owned, and other veteran-owned firms have lower odds than other firms to win a contract, all else being equal.” Chow also found that the odds of these firms winning a contract without participating in the 8(a) program is 37 percent lower than firms who are in the 8(a) program.²⁷ MBDA also found that firm size, age, and security clearance were associated with higher odds of winning a contract, along with a number of other factors.²⁸ These findings are echoed in the RAND Corporation’s 2007 paper, “The Utilization of Women-Owned Small Businesses in Federal Contracting,” which utilized data from the GSA’s FPDS and the 2002 Census.²⁹ The authors found that “the conclusion that WOSBs are underrepresented in some industries is not dependent on the possible error in the definition of small firms in the FPDS” and that WOSBs were found to be either underrepresented or substantially underrepresented in the data.³⁰ Business that are under the HUBZone program, are socially disadvantaged, or have serviced-disabled veteran owners are also more likely than other small and minority-owned business to receive federal contracts.³¹ These findings indicate that WOBs, in general, are less likely to be awarded federal contracts without participation in certain programs.

Studies also show that small and diverse businesses are more likely to receive contracts of less complexity. Mikaella Polyviou, Leopold Ried, and Robert Wiedmer, procurement and supply chain management scholars at Arizona State University and the University of Melbourne, performed a study in 2024 on the effectiveness of set-asides for small and diverse vendors. The authors found that SDB and other minority businesses were less likely to win science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) related contracts. At the same time, the use of set-aside solicitations has shown to increase the likelihood of SDBs receiving complex or STEM-heavy contracts.³² Similarly, Chris Parker and Dwaipayyan Roy, professors at the Darden School of Business at the University of Virginia, found that the “prevalence of gender and racial disparities in the awarding of federal

contracts is well-acknowledged.” The authors also found that, in addition to the lower probability of being awarded, MOB’s federal contracts are “characterized by lower average median pay levels.” However, Parker and Roy believe that the lack of granular data makes it difficult to address potential structural barriers.³³

Other studies have attempted to understand structural barriers by performing surveys and case studies of WOSB vendors and their experiences. The low percentage of contract dollars awarded to small and minority-owned businesses and inability to consistently meet government-wide goals can be attributed to systemic and discriminatory barriers. SBA’s 2023 study on equity within federal contracting found that small businesses, especially those owned by socially disadvantaged or historically marginalized groups, face more obstacles than others. These obstacles prevented these businesses from pursuing federal contracts.³⁴ Barriers affecting the vendors include:

- Disproportionate lack of access to capital, often provided at elevated interest rates;
- Discriminatory attitudes among and manipulation by actors in the contracting process;
- Time and burden required for certification and to access small business programs;
- Complicated and time-consuming procurement processes, and demanding bonding, prior experience, and other technical pre-requisites, that new and small businesses can’t navigate or meet as well as incumbent providers can;
- Exclusion from professional networks and communications channels where business opportunities are promoted;
- The practices of delayed payment for services and lengthy negotiation over contracts that are untenable for small businesses without significant cash reserves; and
- Other practices that demand capabilities small and disadvantaged businesses disproportionately lack, like ability to accept government credit cards.³⁵

In addition to the listed obstacles above, other studies—such as a 2022 study by Florida State College business professors, Justin Bateh, and Shawna Coram, and a 2012 study by professors of public service and policy, Sergio Fernandez, Deanna Malatesta, and Craig R. Smith—also studied and attributed psychological aspects of gender bias to explain the disparities within federal contracting.³⁶

SBA also found that federal agency procurement operations are organized in ways that limit opportunities for WOSBs and other business types. Barriers on the federal agency side include:

- Limited agency capacity and capability for procurement;

- Negative agency staff perceptions of the complexity of procurement programs; and
- Declining availability of qualified vendors.³⁷

Given that a multitude of small business programs exist, federal agencies may lack the resources to support each one. This phenomenon may contribute to procurement and program staff overlooking the WOSB program, especially if federal agencies are not held accountable for failing to meet the procurement goals. Furthermore, agencies have difficulty discovering vendors due to the lack of gender-disaggregated vendor data and due to the shrinking pool of WOB vendors.³⁸ Based on a 2023 report from the Bipartisan Policy Center, the number of small businesses available for government contracting decreased by 38 percent from 2010 to 2019.³⁹ In general, federal agencies are unfamiliar with the WOSB Program and what it entails.⁴⁰ All of these complications appear to impact federal agencies' award decisions, and impede the WOSB Program and beneficial competition for government business.

3. DATA

This section explores potential data sources related to federal contracting that may be useful in the design and implementation of a study analyzing the effectiveness of the WOSB Program. FRD identified four data sources that can help examine and explain disparities between WOSBs and other businesses within federal contracting. This section also discusses the preliminary trends found based on aggregated data provided in the Small Business Data HUB, a database compiled by SBA to track government agencies' achievements of SBA program goals.

3.1. Data Sources and Methodologies

FRD identified several data sources that can explain or quantify disparities in government contracting between WOSBs and other businesses. These data sources include USASpending and SBA's System for Award Management (SAM) database. USASpending tracks the lifecycle of federal funds after they are awarded. This database contains the amount, type, and period of performance for each contract, along with details about the recipients and subcontractors fulfilling each obligation.⁴¹ The database also encompasses several relevant variables for identifying trends in contracting, including details about the business involved in each contract. USASpending provides a total of 127 variables that describe the characteristics of each company involved in a federal contract. These include ownership characteristics such as the sex and race, along with the firm's size, location, whether the business is considered economically disadvantaged, and many other considerations.

The USASpending database also provides variables for identifying WOBs and WOSBs. These include true/false variables like "WomanOwnedBusiness" and "WomenOwnedSmallBusiness," which define whether the selected contractor is a WOB or WOSB. These variables can also be derived from the SAM data variable "Business Types."⁴² Not only can these categorical variables be used to distinguish broad trends in contracting across different categories of WOBs, but also across other types of businesses to provide a basis of comparison. In addition to firm attributes, USASpending provides information at the award level, including whether a contract is a "Fair Opportunity" or "Limited Source," which explains the level of competitiveness of a contract. There are also variables that indicate whether a contractor is an 8(a)-program recipient among other specifications, many of which come from GSA's FPDS.⁴³

While USASpending focuses on individual awards and transactions over time, the SAM database focuses on contractors who are eligible to win federal funds. The database "unifies the government-wide award management systems" and allows users to view vendors that are eligible to do business with the federal government.⁴⁴ The SAM data could be used to distinguish what

portion of eligible federal contractors are WOSBs or WOBs compared to the general population. FRD hopes to use this database to contextualize which vendors ultimately win contracts in USASpending compared to the group of vendors that are eligible to compete. This data could further explain differences in contracting outcomes by not only comparing which entities received federal funding, but also what portion of the total eligible entities are WOSBs. This would provide a basis of comparison between the portion of funding that WOSBs receive compared to the portion of total federally eligible entities that WOSBs represent. These findings would quantify disparities, if any, between different business types within federal contracting.

The final data sources that FRD identified are the Census Bureau's ABS (Annual Business Survey) and ACS (American Community Survey) databases. The ACS is updated on a yearly basis and is freely accessible. The ABS is also updated yearly and includes statistics related to all "nonfarm employer businesses filing the 941, 944, or 1120 tax forms." The ABS also provides information about business owner characteristics, including sex, race, ethnicity, veteran status, and public holding.⁴⁵ The data in the ABS could be used to establish a baseline for the portion of businesses that are WOBs and WOSBs based on the portion they represent in tax filings. This would further contextualize the portion of federal award recipients that are WOSBs, as it allows FRD to account for the portion of WOSBs that receive contracts, the portion of firms that are eligible to receive federal contracts under the WOSB Program, and the portion of WOSBs compared to all firms eligible to receive federal contracts.

The ACS could provide context on WOSBs by estimating what portion of the workforce consist of women.⁴⁶ The ACS data includes tables of broad employment characteristics at the aggregate level, which can be used to explain the relative portion of WOSBs in the economy by identifying what portion of workers are women. The ACS data could allow FRD to establish a baseline understanding of women's employment to determine if WOBs make up a lower portion compared to the portion of women employed. ACS data could also reveal portions of federally eligible businesses and businesses that received federal funding.

3.2. Preliminary Trends

Based on the Small Business Data HUB, the proportion of federal dollars awarded to WOSBs tends to be higher than that of SDVOSB, 8(a), and HUBZone vendors, despite failing to consistently meet the five percent goal. The percentage of federal dollars awarded to SDB-owned contracts consistently remains higher than that of all other SBA federal contract programs. As seen in the table below, the government only met the WOSB Program goal in FY 2015 and FY 2019. The SDVOSB, HUBZone, and 8(a) contract programs have similarly failed to meet their respective goals, excepting SDVOSB in FY 2023 (at 5.07 percent of all federally awarded contracts).

Table 2. Percentage of Federal Contract Program Dollars Awarded from FY 2010 to 2023

Fiscal Year	Small Business	SDB	WOSB*	SDVOSB	HUBZone	8(a) Contract
2010	22.66%	7.95%	4.04%	2.50%	2.77%	4.20%
2011	21.65%	7.67%	3.98%	2.65%	2.35%	3.95%
2012	22.25%	8.00%	4.00%	3.03%	2.01%	3.92%
2013	23.39%	8.61%	4.32%	3.38%	1.76%	3.94%
2014	24.99%	9.46%	4.68%	3.68%	1.82%	4.45%
2015	25.75%	10.06%	5.05%	3.93%	1.82%	4.54%
2016	24.34%	9.53%	4.79%	3.98%	1.67%	4.14%
2017	23.88%	9.10%	4.71%	4.05%	1.65%	3.67%
2018	25.05%	9.65%	4.75%	4.27%	2.05%	3.66%
2019	26.51%	10.29%	5.19%	4.39%	2.28%	3.62%
2020	26.02%	10.54%	4.85%	4.28%	2.44%	3.52%
2021	27.23%	11.01%	4.63%	4.41%	2.53%	3.44%
2022	26.50%	11.38%	4.57%	4.57%	2.65%	3.46%
2023	28.35%	12.10%	4.91%	5.07%	2.78%	3.88%

* WOSB percentages include awarded EDWOSB contract dollars.

Source: "Small Business Data Hub," U.S. SBA, accessed December 2, 2024, <https://datahub.certify.sba.gov/>.

Even with the introduction of set-asides for WOSBs in 2011 and sole-source authority in 2015, the use of set-asides and sole-source as solicitation methods remain strikingly low compared to other WOSB solicitation methods (see Table 3). The percent of federally awarded dollars to WOSBs through other SBA programs makes up an average of about 60 percent, from FY 2010 to FY 2023. The second highest solicitation method by dollar amount comprise WOSBs awarded through other means (which includes non-SBA programs and full and open competition), with an average of about 35 percent of all WOSB awarded dollars. In comparison, WOSB contracts awarded through set-aside solicitation reach up to five percent of all WOSB awarded dollars, while sole-source solicitation remains below 0.5 percent of all WOSB awarded dollars.

Table 3. Percentage of Federal Dollars Awarded to WOSBs

Fiscal Year	WOSB Set-Aside Percent*	WOSB Sole-Source Percent*	Percent of WOSBs Dollars awarded through SBA Programs Other than the WOSB Program*†	Percent of WOSBs Dollars awarded Through Other Means*‡
2010	0.00%	0.00%	58.98%	41.02%
2011	0.12%	0.00%	60.15%	39.73%
2012	0.44%	0.00%	61.67%	37.89%
2013	0.65%	0.00%	62.75%	36.60%
2014	1.04%	0.00%	63.18%	35.78%
2015	1.61%	0.00%	62.18%	36.21%

Fiscal Year	WOSB Set-Aside Percent*	WOSB Sole-Source Percent*	Percent of WOSBs Dollars awarded through SBA Programs Other than the WOSB Program**†	Percent of WOSBs Dollars awarded Through Other Means**‡
2016	2.05%	0.23%	64.70%	33.02%
2017	3.08%	0.37%	63.84%	32.71%
2018	3.70%	0.45%	63.95%	31.90%
2019	4.07%	0.42%	62.36%	33.16%
2020	4.57%	0.41%	61.39%	33.63%
2021	4.75%	0.42%	60.54%	34.29%
2022	5.30%	0.44%	60.98%	33.28%
2023	5.84%	0.43%	59.26%	34.47%

* WOSB percentages include awarded EDWOSB contract dollars.

† Other SBA programs included in these percentages include 8(a) set-asides, 8(a) sole-source, HUBZone Price Evaluation Preference, HUBZone set-asides, HUBZone sole-source, SDVOSB set-asides, SDVOSB sole-source, and Small Business set-asides.

‡ These percentages include full and open competition and other forms of solicitations, such as non-SBA set-asides and non-SBA sole-sources.

Source: "Small Business Data Hub," U.S. SBA, accessed December 2, 2024, <https://datahub.certify.sba.gov/>.

Federal agencies are electing to use other programs or methods of solicitation over the WOSB Program's set-asides and sole-source methods. As previously discussed, this could be due to a lack of accountability or familiarity with the WOSB Program on the federal agency side. The practice of double counting may also make these percentages appear higher than they actually are.

4. NEXT STEPS

In this Initial Findings Report, FRD examined existing literature on the WOSB Federal Contract Program and WOSB experiences to gain an understanding of existing disparities within government contracting. FRD also ventured to understand the process of federal contracting and how a firm or vendor under SBA contracting programs may differ in award competition. This background research provides a basis for the creation of a study that explores WOB and WOSB experiences as government vendors and the effectiveness of the WOSB Program. The preliminary findings from this report will inform the design of the study. In its next steps, FRD will present the findings gathered from the review of the literature and data and draft a Study Design, which will propose the methodology for the qualitative and quantitative analysis portion of the study.

5. NOTES

¹ Responsibilities, 48 C.F.R. § 1602-2 (November 25, 2024), <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-48/chapter-1/subchapter-A/part-1/subpart-1.6/section-1.602-2>.

² Definitions, 48 C.F.R. § 3.502-1 (November 25, 2024), <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-48/chapter-1/subchapter-A/part-3/subpart-3.5/section-3.502-1>.

³ Definitions, 48 C.F.R. § 3.502-1 (November 25, 2024), <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-48/chapter-1/subchapter-A/part-3/subpart-3.5/section-3.502-1>.

⁴ Full and Open Competition, 48 C.F.R. § 6.1 (December 1, 2022), <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-48/chapter-1/subchapter-B/part-6/subpart-6.1>.

⁵ General, 48 C.F.R. § 19.501 (November 25, 2024), <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-48/chapter-1/subchapter-D/part-19/subpart-19.5/section-19.501>.

⁶ Sole Source, 48 C.F.R. § 19.811-1 (November 25, 2024), <https://www.acquisition.gov/far/19.811-1>.

⁷ Awards or contracts, 15 U.S.C. § 644 (2008).

⁸ "Agency Contracting Goals," U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), last updated March 18, 2024, <https://www.sba.gov/document/support-agency-contracting-goals>; "Small Business Data Hub," U.S. SBA, accessed December 2, 2024, <https://datahub.certify.sba.gov/>.

⁹ "14 FAH-2 Contracting Officer's Representative Handbook," U.S. Department of State, accessed December 2, 2024, <https://fam.state.gov/fam/14fah02/14fah020220.html>.

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