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## The GovCon Report



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## GOVCON PROFILE 2005

### Department of Homeland Security: Open For Business

#### *An interview with Kevin Boshears, Director of DHS's Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business*

By [Kelly Harman](#), [The Harman Group](#)

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was created to provide the unifying core for the vast national network of organizations and institutions involved in efforts to secure our nation. When it was formed in 2002, it united 22 agencies and over 180,000 men and women. DHS is the largest department within the federal government.

When Kevin Boshears accepted the position of Director of the DHS OSDBU office in May 2003, he was tasked with starting this office from scratch – and since then, has been responsible for the overall implementation of the department's small business procurement program. We recently interviewed Kevin to learn more about his department and how a government contractor should best approach DHS for business opportunities.

Could you tell us a little about the culture within your department?

When I came to the department in May 2003, we didn't have an OSDBU office. It was me. And so we were able to start several initiatives at that time which ultimately became part of our culture. What we have done at DHS is make the Small Business Program a shared sense of responsibility among everyone involved in the acquisition phase. I mean the senior leaders, the acquisition team, the contracting officers, program managers, internal customers and the various individuals who make up our small business team. By implementing this shared sense of responsibility we've helped develop and later reinforce the idea that small business is important to our department.

It seems like everyone wants to do business with DHS these days. How many inquiries do you and your team receive every day?

It varies but it is numerous calls and emails. In my office we have eight people, and then in each of our major buying activities throughout the department we have another eight individuals. And all of those people receive inquiries every day. So it is safe to say that there are hundreds on a daily basis.

With that much volume, and demand for attention, it is hard to stand out. What are some of the best practices that you've seen at small businesses that have been successful in working with DHS?

Over the years that I've been doing this type of work, I have asked small business owners that have been successful in the federal space to share some of their best practices. And there have consistently been four themes they followed:

The first theme is that they have done their homework. For example, if a small business is interested in working with a federal agency, the successful ones have already studied up on that agency. They know what the agency's mission is, how the organization is set up, their historical purchases, things along that nature. All of this information is usually available on the agency's

website. For DHS, the URL is [www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov).

The second theme is that successful companies have an understanding of the various contract vehicles that are available today. For example, sometimes a Contracting Officer may use a contract already in place and execute and order against that existing contract. Or the CO may choose to go to the open market through the FedBizOps process. It is important to understand how the different vehicles work.

The third theme is an understanding of the concept of teaming. By teaming I mean a variety of things. It can be subcontracting to a larger prime contractor. In other cases, the small business might be the prime, and team with a larger company for its resources. Some are involved in a mentor/protégé program. DHS has one, and information can be found at [www.dhs.gov/openforbusiness](http://www.dhs.gov/openforbusiness). There are a wide variety of teaming options.

The final theme is that successful businesses participate in various small business outreach and networking activities. There are many illustrations. For example, when the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce holds a federal government day, small businesses should attend with two purposes in mind. The first is to meet the various representatives of the different government agencies. And the second is to be sure and meet with other potential teaming partners, whether that is other small businesses like themselves or larger, prime contractors.

When I talk to firms that are successful in the federal market, these are the four themes that they respond with on a regular basis.

You mentioned FedBizOps a moment ago. A common refrain in the industry is that once an opportunity is published in FedBizOps, it is too late to bid. The purchasing decision has already been made. What is your response to a statement like that?

I think that's a good question and I've heard it many times before. I honestly don't believe that is the case. Let me tell you what my experience has been. Like most federal agencies, DHS publishes a forecast of contract opportunities at the beginning of each fiscal year. We also make this available on our website. This is a preliminary listing with a basic description of what we plan to buy along with contact information. The small business owner can reach out to the point of contact and get more information on the procurement. That is how the initial marketing gets started. If that contract is going to be used, via FedBizOps, like we discussed a moment ago, there can be companies that are already tracking it. I don't mean by getting information that isn't available to everyone, I'm talking about making an effort to understand the government's needs and why they are buying a product or service to begin with.

If it hits FedBizOps, certainly there are companies that have already started their marketing plans and strategies and expressed an interest to the contracting officer or small business office. So those firms, by doing as much advance work as possible, have an opportunity when the FedBizOps announcement hits, because they have seen the information in a forecast of opportunities. This is an excellent example of one of the themes I just mentioned – doing your homework.

You mentioned the DHS Mentor Protégé program earlier. Can you tell us a little more about that program?

All the details on the DHS Mentor Protégé program are available at [www.dhs.gov/openforbusiness](http://www.dhs.gov/openforbusiness). At DHS, we identify large, experienced businesses in the federal market place and connect them with protégés. These are small businesses offering a niche skill or service that is targeted to homeland security. All small businesses meeting this qualification are eligible to participate. The mentor then provides guidance and business development assistance. At DHS we have received very favorable feedback from the industry on our mentor protégé program, with about 60 of these relationships now in place.

We have a wide variety of firms participating and offer incentives for those who support the program. These details are also on our website.

What would you like people to know about DHS?

For those that have an interest in working with us, I have several concrete recommendations:

- Visit our website at [www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov).
- Make the effort to do your homework.
- Contact us for personal assistance. Contact information can be found at [www.dhs.gov/openforbusiness](http://www.dhs.gov/openforbusiness).
- If your schedule permits, come visit us in person at one of our outreach programs. For those companies that are local to Washington DC, we hold a monthly vendor outreach program in Oxon Hill, MD where companies can come meet us in person for pre-arranged 15 minutes appointments. These are an introductory session to come and get acquainted, and they are very popular.

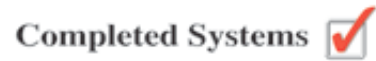
Most importantly, I would like to say that DHS is open for business. And that we are, on an ongoing basis, seeking small businesses that can help us meet our acquisition objectives and our mission in a wide variety of industries.

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The GovCon Report is produced by the Northern Virginia GovCon Council's communications committee: Co- chairs: Anne Crossman ([Completed Systems](#)) and Dave Lundsten ([Cherry Bekaert & Holland LLP.](#)) If you wish to submit an article for consideration by the communications committee, send them to [govconarticle@fcc.org](mailto:govconarticle@fcc.org).



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Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce  
8230 Old Courthouse Road Suite 350  
Vienna, VA 22182  
P: (703) 749-0400 • F: (703) 749-9075  
[www.fairfaxchamber.org](http://www.fairfaxchamber.org)