

DOD Aims to Boost Small Business Involvement in Nation's Defense

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The Defense Department's Office of Small Business Programs has several efforts underway to make it easier for the nation's small business community to become more involved in providing goods, services, technology and research in support of the nation's defense.

Farooq A. Mitha, director of OSBP, spoke Wednesday at the Professional Services Council in Arlington, Virginia. He told representatives of small businesses about his office's most recent efforts including the Department's newly released Small Business Strategy.

In the past few months, Mitha said, the department's Procurement Technical Assistance Centers, about 96 of them across the country, have been rebranded as APEX Accelerators.



Those APEX Accelerators have an enhanced mission in helping existing and new businesses strengthen the defense industrial base by accelerating innovation, fostering ingenuity and establishing resilient and diverse supply chains.

"We're going to be doing a lot of market research using these entities," Mitha said. "We're going to connect them closer to our other prime contractors that are looking for subcontractors to be part of their supply chains."

The APEX Accelerators will also do more training with small businesses on issues related to cybersecurity and foreign ownership, control or influence that might affect their ability to work with the federal government, Mitha said.

Efforts are also underway to reinvigorate the Rapid Innovation Fund, Mitha said. That program was designed to help small businesses get their technology from the prototype stage to the production stage — a period of time when many businesses fail that's commonly called "the valley of death."

The RIF hasn't been funded since 2019, and Mitha said he aims to change that.

"We've gone four years without money into this program," he said. "That is a big, big problem at a time when we're spending more dollars doing prototyping. We need to support more companies to go into production and transition their technologies."

Mitha said he brought the RIF back into his office to support streamlining entry points into the defense marketplace for small companies and to enable better long-term planning for small business programs. Recently, Mitha advocated for permanency of the Mentor Protégé Program (MPP), which was a pilot for over thirty years. This led to Congress making MPP permanent in the Fiscal Year 2023 National Defense Authorization Act.

Another effort, Mitha said, is the creation of what he said is called the "Small Business Integration Group." Not every effort aimed at small business development lies in his own office, he said, but the new group will tie together the efforts happening outside his office.

"[It] will bring the services, the defense agencies, OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense], the industrial base and small business stakeholders to be part of an integrated integration group that I will oversee ... so we can collaborate better, work closer together, communicate with industry better, and really break down the silos between our programs," he said.

The Defense Acquisition University trains the acquisition workforce from across the department, and Mitha said a new credential for working with small businesses has been established within DAU.

"We've now established common courses, curriculum and training for all these professionals," he said. "But we've made it a credential not a career field. So, what that means is that anybody in the acquisition workforce can get the small business credential."

Mitha said he expects more instructors and capacity will be needed to help the thousands of acquisition professionals across the department who may want to get the small business credential.

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