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Small Business Participation in Federal Set-Aside Contracting

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Steven R. King II

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Walden University
2017

Abstract

Small Business Participation in Federal Set-Aside Contracting

by

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MS, Troy State University, 1998

BS, Colorado Christian University, 2013

BS, Wayland Baptist University, 1992

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

August 2017

Abstract

In the United States, 99.9% of small businesses, which account for two-thirds of new jobs annually, do not participate in the federal set-aside program. Half of all small businesses will not survive their first 5 years. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies that U.S. small business leaders operating within the greater Colorado Springs metro area used to participate successfully in the federal contracting set-aside program. Von Bertalanffy's systems theory grounded the study. Data collection included semistructured interviews with an intensity purposeful sampling of 3 small business leaders participating successfully in the federal contracting set-aside program while operating within the greater Colorado Springs metropolitan area. Transcription of audio recordings from the interviews ensured data accuracy. Researcher interpretations were member checked to validate the credibility of the findings. Pattern matching and cross-case synthesis techniques facilitated data analysis and helped to identify emergent themes. The 3 themes from the study were (a) strategic management, (b) stakeholder recognition, and (c) value creation. Of these 3 themes, the most prolific was strategic management, as it began with a detailed strategy to target clients, create initiatives, and set priorities. This study may contribute to social change by promoting increased job creation through participation in the set-aside program. Expanded distribution of economic seeding to a broader representation of local communities may contribute to reducing social dependencies for the unemployed and the underemployed in a recovering economy. Small businesses contribute to local jobs, local revenue, and local taxes, all of which drive local economies.

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Dedication

I dedicate my efforts to the glory of God. To all U.S. veterans past, present, and future who provide the incredible gift of freedom through unrivaled, selfless service.

Freedom of expression allowed me to follow the facts, write the truth, and contribute in a small way to the continued greatness of our country.

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To my wonderful wife, Jackie, thank you for supporting me through this journey. We have walked this path together, and I am forever grateful for your unconditional love. You carried me through the most difficult challenges and encouraged me to continue through to completion.

To my family and friends, thank you for your patience and understanding while I put this project before spending time with you. Your willingness to accept my priorities without question is a testament to the quality of our relationship.

Dr. Matt, you guided me through the wickets to reach the final destination. You always made yourself available when I needed advice. You always addressed my questions and comments with strength, conviction, and compassion. I am profoundly appreciative of all your efforts.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Birch, in 1979 graduate research for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, reported that small businesses, which accounted for the majority of jobs created, were critical to the growth of the U.S. economy. This basic premise took hold, and it continues to shape public procurement policy (Snider, Halpern, Rendon, & Kidalov, 2013). Birch's assertions led to the passage of federal acquisition legislation allowing small businesses to receive preferential treatment (Competition in Contracting Act, 1984). Full and open competition after exclusion of sources authorized set-aside of contracts to small businesses (Federal Acquisition Regulation, 2016). The Small Business Act (2015) designated 23% of the federal procurement budget for small business. An analogous example would entitle a small business in a given industry to a monopoly similar to that of a local computer repair shop awarded an exclusive repair service contract for a metropolitan city. The objective measurement of the set-aside program reported as a percentage of federal spending is the standard to grade program performance (Small Business Act, 2013). An objective and quantifiable percentage of dollars spent was obtainable through data automation and was therefore used to assess achievement of statutory goals (Federal Procurement Data System—Next Generation, 2014). The more accurate qualified question of job creation and economic stimulation remained independent from the statistical measurement applied. The original objective of creating jobs was unmeasured and secondary to meeting percentage-of-spending goals without evidence of a proven nexus between what was measured and what was intended (Competition in Contracting Act, 1984).

Background of the Problem

The U.S. government has long been involved in advocating small business as a means to achieve economic growth and stability (Small Business Administration, 2016a). Beginning over 80 years ago, President Hoover initiated the Small Business Administration predecessor program, created public service jobs, and lifted the country out of the Great Depression (Small Business Administration, 2016a). The small business set-aside program has evolved over the past 30-plus years as a statutory program intended to spur job creation (Competition in Contracting Act, 1984).

The U.S. government enacted the Small Business Administration (SBA) in 1953 as a direct attempt to engage smaller companies and create jobs through increased capital availability (Small Business Act, 1953). In 1958, the SBA was empowered with additional scope to oversee education and training for small business as well as improve access to federal contracts (Small Business Act, 1958). Three principal programs for the SBA were as follows:

- *Capital*: Greater access to loans and guarantees;
- *Counseling*: Business training developed for small business leaders; and
- *Contracting*: Increased access to federal spending through contract set-asides.

(SBA, 2016b)

Procurement advocacy (contracting) was statistically the most underused among the three principal programs (SBA, 2016c). The SBA implemented advocacy via a percentage of contracted dollars set aside for small business. Each of the 24 federal agencies with procurement authority received and negotiated its respective percentage of

contracted requirements with the SBA on an annual basis (Chief Financial Officer Act, 1990). Through this study, I explored successful strategies that small business leaders used to participate in the federal contracting set-aside program.

Problem Statement

Small businesses account for two-thirds of new jobs in the United States annually; however, half of small businesses will not survive their first 5 years (Haltiwanger, Jarmin, & Miranda, 2013). In spite of a 50% success rate, small businesses received 23% of an estimated \$400 billion in federal contracts to promote job creation (Federal Procurement Data System—Next Generation, 2014). The general business problem was that 99.9% of U.S. small businesses did not participate in the SBA's set-aside program (Federal Procurement Data System—Next Generation, 2014). The specific business problem was that some U.S. small business leaders lacked strategies to participate successfully in the federal contracting set-aside program.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that U.S. small business leaders operating within the greater Colorado Springs metro area used to participate successfully in the federal contracting set-aside program. Participants selected for interviews included successful small business leaders operating in the federal contract set-aside program. Small businesses contribute to local jobs, local revenue, and local taxes, all of which drive local economies. This study may also contribute to social change by increasing participation in the set-aside program and job creation, as well as expanding distribution of economic seeding to a broader representation of local

communities, while reducing social benefits dependency for the unemployed and the underemployed in a recovering economy.

Nature of the Study

The three research methods considered for this study were qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). I selected the qualitative method because I sought to use open-ended questions. Qualitative researchers use open-ended questions to discover what is occurring or has occurred (Yin, 2014). In contrast, quantitative researchers use closed-ended questions to test hypotheses (Yilmaz, 2013). Mixed methods research includes both qualitative and quantitative elements (Venkatesh et al., 2013). To explore small business participation in the federal contract set-aside program, I did not test a hypothesis, which would have been needed for a quantitative study or the quantitative portion of a mixed methods study.

I considered three research designs that one could use for a qualitative study on small business set-asides: (a) phenomenology, (b) focus group, and (c) case study. Phenomenology provides practical guidance for researchers exploring how individuals make sense of their personal and social world (Gill, 2013). Business researchers use focus groups to facilitate discussion through a moderator to maximize participant input (Venkatesh et al., 2013). Case study researchers use open-ended questions to understand better the lived experiences affecting participants' decision-making processes (Yin, 2014). Case study research was optimal for this study because it allowed for exploration of small business leaders' rationale for choosing to pursue set-aside contracts or forego the opportunity.

Research Question

What strategies have small business leaders used to participate successfully in the federal contracting set-aside program?

Interview Questions

- Q1. Why did you chose to pursue the federal contract set-aside program?
- Q2. How mature was your company prior to pursuing set-aside opportunities?
- Q3. What are the benefits and or disadvantages of the set-aside program?
- Q4. What might prevent small businesses from participating in the set-aside program?
- Q5. What barrier(s) to entry of this market stood out as excessively challenging?
- Q6. How did you overcome the barrier(s)?
- Q7. What available resources did you use to navigate the set-aside program?
- Q8. What unavailable resources did you need to navigate the set-aside program?
- Q9. What strategy suggestions could you offer to small business leaders regarding their participation in the set-aside program?

Conceptual Framework

Some researchers have studied small business through a phenomenology lens (Bublak, 2013; Holloway, 2013; Miles, 2013). Shared experiences indicated predictable outcomes for similar situations (Yin, 2014). This study was designed to look at successful strategies through the lens of a multiple case study to access unfiltered business logic that led to proven models for success. Case studies allow investigation using one or a small number of entities and multiple sources of data (Tsang, 2014). The

conceptual framework selected for this study addressed themes identified during a preliminary literature review. In my review of existing literature, I found that authors in the literature had explored these issues of small business opportunities, barriers, policy, and legislation but did not sufficiently analyze barriers affecting low participation in the set-aside program. The state of existing literature stemmed from a widely accepted, myopic belief that small business is the key to U.S. economic development (Litwin & Phan, 2013).

I chose systems theory as the conceptual management theory to explore this multiple case study. Von Bertalanffy introduced systems theory in 1937 at the University of Chicago and later wrote an unpublished paper on this theory in 1945, followed by the first systems theory publication in 1950 (von Bertalanffy, 1950). However, systems theory did not gain wide acceptance until the 1970s (Adams, Hester, Bradley, Meyers, & Keating, 2013). Proponents of systems theory surmised that a complex system, such as the small business set-aside program, required study from a wholeness vantage point to understand it in its full context (von Bertalanffy, 1950). Systems theory was a solid framework for this multiple case study because it allowed study of dynamic interactions among multiple variants and recognized the perpetual change of components (von Bertalanffy, 1950). The set-aside program included a network of influential factors and stakeholders, which were not always congruent with one another. A hypothetical set-aside award to an SBA certified 8(a) company, one of many identified social or economic disadvantaged groups, supports the statutory small business goal (Small Business Act, 1953). However, the same set-aside award may be noncompetitive and frowned upon by

Congress as circumventing acquisition regulations (Competition in Contracting Act, 1984). This anecdotal scenario pits one program against another, demonstrating a mutually exclusive set of statutory requirements. A systems theory analysis of the set-aside program helped in identifying and potentially mitigating competing interests.

Operational Definitions

Competition in Contracting Act (CICA): CICA established a policy, with only seven specific exceptions, stating that all government procurements must be conducted competitively, including solicitations that are set aside for various types of small businesses (Krivda & Bogart, 2014).

Concern: A concern is a U.S. business entity organized for profit and contributing to the U.S. economy by paying taxes and/or using American products, materials, and/or labor (Federal Acquisition Regulation, 2016).

High growth: High-growth firms are a very small subset of all firms but contribute substantially and disproportionately to job creation over a sustained period (Clayton, Sadeghi, Spletzer, & Talan, 2013).

Industry: An industry includes all concerns primarily engaged in similar lines of business activity, as listed and described in the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) Manual (Federal Acquisition Regulation, 2016).

Nonemployer: A nonemployer business is one with no paid employees and annual business receipts of \$1,000 or more (\$1 or more in the construction industry) that is subject to federal income taxes (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

Set-aside: A set-aside is a decision to reserve an acquisition exclusively for small business (Federal Acquisition Regulation, 2016).

Small business: A small business is a U.S. entity meeting the SBA size standards on an industry-by-industry basis. In general, small businesses have fewer than 500 employees and/or less than \$38.5 million in annual tax receipts (Federal Acquisition Regulation, 2016).

Small Business Administration: The U.S. Small Business Administration is an independent agency of the federal government that assists, counsels, aids, and protects the interests of small businesses (SBA, 2016b).

Small Business Innovative Research: The SBIR program supports scientific excellence and technological innovation through the investment of federal research funds focused on commercialization (SBA, 2016d).

Value: Value is the subjective judgment of a stakeholder, occurring at the individual level, of the total monetary and nonmonetary utility experienced as a result of some decision or action by an organization (Lankoski, Smith, & Van Wassenhove, 2016).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions refer to the relevant data within a study that the researcher cannot verify (Lips-Wiersma & Mills, 2013). Preconceived notions and beliefs that could, if not recognized and mitigated, prejudice results are also described as research assumptions (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The first assumption was that the SBA had successfully provided access to capital programs offering loans and guarantees. The second

assumption was the provision of business counseling services to small businesses at a reasonable rate of return on investment. The third assumption was that accepting failure to achieve job creation through the contract set-aside program was an unacceptable proposition for stakeholders.

Limitations

The factors capable of contributing to weaknesses in data collection and subsequent conclusions describe research limitations (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Some of the greatest limitations that affected this study were participants' sensitivities to political agendas. The perception that there were right and wrong responses during data collection, and the fallacy that there was an expectation to collect only right answers, created a limitation. The desire to avoid confrontation or politically sensitive discussion so as not to offend others was the final assumption; if realized, this could have degraded results. Elements of a study influencing the researcher's interpretation of data constitute research limitations (Brutus, Aguinis, & Wassmer, 2013).

Delimitations

Delimitations are self-imposed boundaries (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). They focus research in a manner that allows a reasonable opportunity to collect sufficient data to establish a representative sample size and concurrently achieve data saturation (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). This study focused on successful U.S. small business leaders operating in the federal contract set-aside program.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

A review of small business leaders' successful strategies identified opportunities to increase the number and diversity of small businesses benefitting from federal contract set-aside awards. Findings, conclusions, and recommendations from this study filled gaps in understanding and may increase effective business practices. The Small Business Act of 1953, and all subsequent amendments, specifically identified a percentage of dollars to be set aside for small businesses to spur economic development and create jobs. The perceived connection based on Birch's (1979) original research on economic theory dated back to the late 1970s. Birch created a longstanding presumption that small businesses are the largest job creators; therefore, federal contract set-asides have theoretically translated into new jobs.

The opposite argument, made by many researchers since the early 1980s, is that business age and size affect job growth (Anyadike-Danes et al., 2015). Birch surmised in the late 1970s that businesses tracked over time would mature through stages of growth and plateaus (as cited in Clayton et al., 2013). From start-up to maturity, life cycle phases of growth prove predictable (Tian, Han, & Zhang, 2015). New businesses receive credit for increased job creation, whether job growth derives from the employment of a single owner-operator or an initial number of employees and staff (Daunfeldt & Elert, 2013). The first 3 to 5 years is typically a life-cycle phase focused on survival; 50% of all new businesses will fail by their fourth year (Coad, 2014). Beyond the first 5 years, business leaders choose for their companies to remain flat organizations or begin

transforming into an expansion phase driven by product demand, market diversity, or acquisition of key suppliers (Anderson & Ullah, 2014).

A developing concept in the exploration of growth focuses on a very narrow group of businesses referred to as *gazelles*, which are defined by disproportionate growth rates over a set period (Clayton et al., 2013; Decker, Haltiwanger, Jarmin, & Miranda, 2014). The definition of this term is not universal. Birch (1979) first used the term *gazelles* to identify a small number of firms contributing disproportionately to the bulk of net new job creation.

The gazelle concept equates to roughly doubling revenue over a 3- to 4-year period (Haltiwanger et al., 2013). The misapplication of nonlinear functions, or growth curves, implies that growth is a function of age and predictable over time (Louzada, Ferreira, & Diniz, 2014). Albeit true for organic growth, it has no relevant application to inorganic entities as small business (Louzada et al., 2014). During phases of growth, job creation increases, whereas growth plateaus have marked signs of job stagnation regardless of business size (Daunfeldt & Elert, 2013).

Implications for Social Change

Small businesses make direct contributions to localized jobs, revenue, and taxes, all of which drive local economies (Ruane, 2014). Reviewing a sample size population of small business leaders' lived experiences through the conduct of a multiple case study may contribute to social change by providing the basis for a small business program review to maximize small business participation in the federal contracting set-aside program. Wider distribution of small business investment dollars might increase the

economic impact on a more diverse geographic population and create greater opportunities for increased numbers of jobs. Local communities might then build on an increased number of jobs once seeing an increased tax base resulting in infrastructure investments to attract new businesses needed to respond to greater community consumer demands. The economic momentum might be self-sustaining.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that U.S. small business leaders operating within the greater Colorado Springs metro area used to participate successfully in the federal contracting set-aside program. With 23% of the federal procurement budget reserved for small business, the amount of funding available to small businesses through this program exceeded \$100 billion per fiscal year (Federal Procurement Data System—Next Generation, 2014). Government agencies struggled to gain increased participation by incrementally increasing the percentage of dollars (supply), from 20% in 1984 to 23% as of fiscal year (FY) 2016 (Competition in Contracting Act, 1984) without an appreciation for (demand) factors that prevented small businesses from participating. The factors contributing to the flat volume of participants were complex and required a holistic systems-theory review and analysis to identify positive change opportunities while avoiding unintended consequences causing a potential overall negative impact.

In my search for existing literature, I queried articles for review using multiple databases, including ABI/INFORM, Google Scholar, ProQuest, Business Source Complete, and EBSCO Host. The keywords and phrases for searches included *contracts*,

legislation, procurement, public procurement, set-aside, small and medium enterprises (SME), and small business. The timeframe for a majority of searches focused on the most recent 5 years, 2013 to present. The historical context required a wider span to include the development of U.S. small business policies and practices.

Recurring searches helped to identify 141 sources related to small business over the previous 80 years. I screened each of the resources using Ulrich's Serial Analysis System for peer-review confirmation. Of the total sources, 132 of 141, or 94%, qualified as peer reviewed. Seven resources were textbooks. Thirty-two of the 141 came from government sources or dissertations. The preponderance of sources, 124 of 141, or 88%, fell within 5 years prior to my graduation date. Peer-reviewed sources cited in the literature review numbered 82.

Numerous government websites and databases helped to provide input for a thorough review. The SBA's postings contributed statistical resources to frame the scope of this endeavor. The Federal Procurement Data System—Next Generation (FPDS-NG) provided a record of spending from previous fiscal years. A caveat was required to address the reliability of FPDS-NG, as it is the official database used across the federal government and widely recognized as suboptimal. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported to Congress that the FPDS-NG data were between 2 and 7% accurate, with a 95% confidence (GAO, 2014). Reliability of any administrative system is dependent on the quality of data. The risk of inaccurate input due to human error, whether unintentional or otherwise, can discredit actionable information. The

government websites referenced herein allowed for a triangulation of data to verify the accuracy of conclusions.

Systems Theory

The development of the systems-theory concept began in the 1930s, when von Bertalanffy contemplated the effects and importance of dependencies on studying a dynamic research topic (as cited in Adams et al., 2013). Systems theory did not immediately gain acceptance. Von Bertalanffy presented the theory inside academic circles for nearly 10 years before writing the first known paper on the topic in the mid-1940s (as cited in Adams et al., 2013). The first publication of von Bertalanffy's systems theory or *wholeness* occurred in 1950 (von Bertalanffy, 1950). With time and continued pursuit, systems theory gained wider acceptance in the 1970s and has developed into a subcategory of numerous scientific disciplines (i.e., management, engineering, etc.; as cited in Adams et al., 2013).

Background. Interrelated dependencies can have degrees of direct and immediately noticeable effects, and they may cause indirect, long-term, latent effects based on the strength, space, and time of an event or variable (Morgeson, Mitchell, & Liu, 2015). Recognizing and accounting for both types of dependencies and their respective implications is the basis of systems theory (Morgeson et al., 2015). Systems theory expands on Newton's dynamic theory (Newton, 1846). Newton (1846) found that for every action, there is a corresponding reaction or set of reactions.

Applicability. Small business is a system of interrelated social science dependencies, including economics, finance, the industrial base, and politics at every

level of government from local to international (von Bertalanffy, 1950). Acknowledging and reckoning the factors for consideration and their combined effects can predict a reaction caused by an action (Newton, 1846). Failure to apply a systems theory approach to the confluent environment of small business ignores the Hayekian economic concept whereby buyers and sellers are equally motivated (Metcalf, 2014). Buyers and sellers are only two of an infinite number of variants affecting small business.

Economic Role of the Small Business Administration

The SBA gained a foothold on U.S. economic development as early as the 1940s through the Smaller War Plants Corporation (SBA, 2016a). A slow recovery from the Great Depression followed by events leading up to World War II set the stage for Roosevelt's New Deal programs putting Americans to work while generating the greatest industrial and economic mobilization in history (Duncan & Coyne, 2013). Some defense contractors emerged as industry leaders and provided the opportunity for jobs (SBA, 2016a).

Background. The Great Depression became the single most influential event shaping both the theory of capitalism and U.S. economic policy into a hybrid state-capitalism economy (Vieru, 2013). In 1932, President Hoover enacted the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) to extend lending to businesses at risk of failing due to the sudden loss of market equities (SBA, 2016a). President Roosevelt later offered a New Deal to lift the United States out of the Great Depression. President Roosevelt's plan put America back to work constructing a fledgling infrastructure of

public works projects, most notably the Civilian Conservation Corps (Duncan & Coyne, 2013).

As the United States responded to an attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, the country mobilized the industrial base to provide munitions and aviation war materials (Duncan & Coyne, 2013). The War Powers Act of 1941 authorized agencies involved in supporting the war effort to enter into contracts irrespective of statutory requirements (War Powers Act, 1941). Success from the New Deal created an overwhelming aura of confidence to establish and maximize wartime production. Small businesses could not compete with large businesses to provide supplies and services, thereby restricting the full capacity of national resources (SBA, 2016a). The Smaller War Plants Corporation of 1942 continued the same RFC lending practices and encouraged federal contracts and subcontracts to go to small businesses (SBA, 2016a).

Legislation. A series of iterative statutory requirements shaped the SBA into an agency responsible for capital, counseling, and contracting (SBA, 2016a). In 1953, the Small Business Act offered aid and assistance to provide greater access to capital through affordable lending programs leveraging the strength of commercial banking institutions (Small Business Act, 1953). The Small Business Act of 1958 supplemented roles and responsibilities of the SBA to include the provision of educational services and increased access to federal procurements (Small Business Act, 1958).

Table 1

Chronology of Legislation Leading to the Small Business Act

1941	War Powers Act waived formal advertising and authorized contracts “without regard to the provision of law...” Implementation policy later prohibited advertising without procurement specific authorization.
1942	Smaller War Plants Corporation (SWPC) promoted small businesses producing war materials.
1947	Armed Services Procurement Act (ASPA) relaxed formal advertising when exceptional circumstances applied. Seventeen exceptions allowed negotiated contracts when competition was “impracticable.”
1953	Small Business Act encouraged commercial lending to aid and assist small business access to capital.
1958	Small Business Act (as amended) included education programs and access to public procurements to further aid and assist small businesses.
1984	Competition in Contracting Act (CICA) mandated full and open competition, introduced full and open competition after exclusion of sources (a.k.a. set-asides for small business concerns), and reduced exceptions to competition from 17 to seven through other than full and open competition.

Note. The set-aside program began with the Competition in Contracting Act.

Intent. The original intent of small business programs, although not explicit before the Small Business Act (1953), was to create jobs and further economic development. The SBA's stated mission today is to maintain and strengthen the nation's economy by enabling the establishment and vitality of small businesses and assisting the economic recovery of communities after disasters (SBA, 2016b). The original economic objectives of the SBA predated recognition and legislation to address social inequalities (Competition in Contracting Act, 1984). SBA's mission statement is silent on social issues (SBA, 2016b). Disaster recovery appeared as an afterthought awkwardly associated with small business, given that the responsibility for recovery belonged to the Department of Homeland Security (Department of Homeland Security, 2015).

Job Creation

Myths and facts. The notion that small business is the engine of the economy is an overused axiom that may be traced back to Birch (1979). There is a lack of empirical evidence to support such a broad statement (Sahut & Peris-Ortiz, 2014). Large and small businesses grow and contract based on a myriad of factors (Gomes, Duncan, Weber, & Shlomo, 2013; Lopez-Garcia & Puente, 2012). Younger firms—those less than 5 years old—account for 67% of total job creation (Lawless, 2014).

Gibrat's law states that growth is purely random and independent of firm size (as cited in Daunfeldt & Elert, 2013). Gibrat's law is a moot point during start-up, when growth is absolute, regardless of the initial number of employees (Daunfeldt & Elert, 2013). Post start-up, small firms are the worst performers in terms of job creation (Rijkers, Arouri, Freund, & Nucifora, 2014). Growth equalizes once a business achieves

a minimum efficient scale (MES), or the fewest number of employees required to sustain operations (Daunfeldt & Elert, 2013). Although 29 million small businesses employed 50% of U.S. workers in 2013, 28.4 million had fewer than 20 employees (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). An estimated 27 million small businesses employed five or fewer employees (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Of the 27 million small businesses with 5 or fewer employees, 23 million had no employees (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

Contributing factors. The factors affecting job creation and contraction are dynamic and fluid (Lopez-Garcia & Puente, 2012). Any single dependency relationship can become a change driver or a reactor (Lopez-Garcia & Puente, 2012). The 2008 recession triggered a reactive change in U.S. economic policy, which then drove credit tightening that reduced supply and demand of loans and affected interest rates, thereby further slowing any possible recovery (Vermoesen, Deloof, & Laveren, 2013). In an ironic twist, the real culprit causing the economic slowdown was a lack of trust in public policy; small businesses assessed the risk associated with the unknown as too high without a reasonable probability of returns (Chow & Dunkelberg, 2013).

Costs associated with statutory compliance affect companies otherwise positioned to grow. If growth causes an employee threshold breach, the additional statutory requirements and associated costs will negatively influence growth decisions (Boubacar & Foster, 2014). Recent health care cost concerns are but one example of a real or perceived increased expense for companies (Boubacar & Foster, 2014).

Business cycles during economic up- and downturns garner an unconditional connection to jobs created or terminated (Vermoesen et al., 2013). Economic cycles are

real phenomena that happen at unknown times and to an unknown extent (Vermoesen et al., 2013). Van Ours (2015) found a high correlation of unemployment rates with the 1980 and 2008 recessions.

Other factors affecting companies considering potential growth include age and the potential for transfer of ownership (Lopez-Garcia & Puente, 2012). The age of a firm is more influential than its size (Lopez-Garcia & Puente, 2012). Failure is more common than success when small businesses attempt merger or acquisition transactions with large businesses (Gomes et al., 2013).

Quality. Job numbers alone cannot accurately reflect the health and sustainability of quality positions with minimum income and benefits to provide for family sustenance (Stephens, 2014). Labor supply is subject to manipulation by labor organizations and government policies creating the illusion of lower unemployment rates (Van Ours, 2015). The hand-to-mouth behavioral concept is consistent with Health and Retirement Survey findings indicating that household food consumption decreases in response to job displacement or even anticipated displacement and a subsequent fall in earnings (Stephens, 2014).

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act addressed health insurance concerns for uninsured and underinsured Americans (Boubacar & Foster, 2014). Some small businesses have opted out (Boubacar & Foster, 2014). Calculating eligibility for tax credits based on full-time-equivalents (FTEs) rather than the actual number of employees is complex, cumbersome, and not cost effective (Bernardi, 2014). The penalty

for not providing insurance is more attractive from a purely economic perspective (Bernardi, 2014).

Small businesses' increased job numbers may not be indicative of higher quality positions (Ayyagari, Demirguc-Kunt, & Maksimovic, 2014). Policy makers who are focused on job creation must also concern themselves with better quality positions (Ayyagari et al., 2014). Supporting policy will minimize small business barriers, including taxes, regulations, and corruption (Ayyagari et al., 2014).

Barriers. Public policy is the greatest barrier to small business job creation (Chow & Dunkelberg, 2013). A well-intended purpose may turn into an unintended consequence. Two examples illustrate the negative impact caused by policy without consideration of interrelated dependencies.

Following the U.S. 2008 financial collapse, the Department of the Treasury and the Federal Reserve evaluated slow recovery and identified restricted lending to small business as the culprit (Chow & Dunkelberg, 2013). Policy makers pushed for better access to capital (Chow & Dunkelberg, 2013). Chow and Dunkelberg (2013) reported that the recovery was slow due to mistrust of public policy while small businesses assessed the risk as too high without a reasonable probability of returns.

Some local governing bodies attempted to revive historic districts as a matter of public policy (Hyra, 2015). These districts were typically economically distressed areas created by years of suburban migration, whereas new neighborhood development plans incorporated housing and commercial improvements (Hyra, 2015). Displaced small businesses rarely enjoyed the same consideration as displaced residents (Hyra, 2015).

The result was the dismantling of existing small businesses that had stood the test of time, surviving economic cycles from boom to bust and back (Hyra, 2015).

Competition

Background. The Competition in Contracting Act (CICA) passed in 1984 required federal agencies to obtain full and open competition through competitive procedures unless otherwise authorized by law. CICA included verbiage authorizing the set-aside program (1984). The early 1990s post-Cold War era peace dividend drove a significant military drawdown (Warren 2014). In a series of fast-moving changes, the defense logistics system experienced deep cuts and reorganizations without a full analysis of impacts to the overall logistical support required for the department (Warren, 2014). The U.S. Army's ability to project power was limited during the 1991 Iraq War build up based on reductions in heavy equipment needed to conduct operations (Warren, 2014).

Legislation. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the conclusion of the Persian Gulf War, the Department of Defense pushed for bipartisan legislation to reduce the cost of doing business within the complex federal procurement system (Federal Acquisition Streamlining Act, 1994). One facet of cost reduction included shifting previously required government specifications of products to commercial items (Federal Acquisition Streamlining Act, 1994). Purchasing commercial products and services then received preference through the Federal Acquisition Streamlining Act (FASA) of 1994. The Federal Acquisition Reform Act (FARA) of 1996 relaxed CICA with the intention of allowing federal agencies to fulfill requirements in a more efficient manner.

The next major military operation, Operation Enduring Freedom, coincided with the Services Acquisition Reform Act (SARA) of 2003. SARA again relaxed procurement rules this time for sourcing commercial services (2003). Contracted services provided by contractor personnel deployed with uniformed service members filled another previously unrecognized shortfall in organic military support caused by the drawdown. The reactive approach to public procurement has influenced legislation based on national security events in recent history since the end of the Cold War. The Committee on Capital Markets Regulation argue over regulation is the main factor in the loss of competitiveness in U.S. public and private markets (as cited in Townsend, 2014).

Table 2

Procurement Legislation Related to Military Operations

1994	Federal Acquisition Streamlining Act responded to the Gulf War contingency logistics concept of operations by lifting military specifications and established a preference for commercially available items.
1996	Federal Acquisition Reform Act refined the mandate for full and open competition, to “efficiently fulfill” government requirements.
2003	Services Acquisition Reform Act relaxed procurement of commercially available services.
2008	National Defense Authorization Act clarified competition requirements through restricted use of single-award contract vehicles and fair opportunity consideration.

Note: Original product of this study

Cause and effect. In 2014, the Department of Defense (DOD) was the largest of 24 Chief Financial Officer Act (CFOA) agencies formally recognized in 1990 through legislation of the same name (Chief Financial Officer Act, 1990). DOD wielded the largest discretionary budget across the federal government spending approximately \$284 billion of \$406 billion in FY 2014 or roughly 70% of contract spending (Federal Procurement Data System – Next Generation, 2014). Military operations have historically had a profound effect on procurement legislation.

Table 3

Top 10 Chief Financial Officer Act Agencies and Contract Obligations

Agency	Rank	FY 2014 Contract Obligations
Department of Defense	1	\$284,526,436,790
Department of Energy	2	\$25,373,845,667
Health and Human Services	3	\$20,923,568,816
Veterans Affairs	4	\$19,026,701,090
National Aeronautical Space Administration	5	\$13,481,607,776
Department of Homeland Security	6	\$12,618,184,440
Department of State	7	\$9,074,055,708
General Services Administration	8	\$8,824,531,808
Department of Justice	9	\$6,819,372,016
Department of Transportation	10	\$5,918,379,184

Note. Excluded 14 agencies' cumulative profile that accounted for less than 10% of total federal contract spending. Adapted from *Annual Review of Government Contracting*, by the National Contract Management Association, 2015 (<http://www.ncmahq.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/pdfs/exec15---ncma-annual-review-of-government-contracting-2015-edition>).

When supply shortages hampered wartime operations, Congress responded legislating increased procurement efficiency (Federal Acquisition Streamlining Act, 1994). When support services were no longer available within the ranks due to downsizing, Congress relaxed policy to meet the requirements for service contractors necessary to support execution of the war-fighting effort (Services Acquisition Reform Act, 2003).

Small Business Set-Aside

Background. CICA (1984) included language authorizing implicit exclusions to full and open competition and explicit exceptions to competition. Full and open competition after exclusion of sources was an authorized deviation under specific circumstances (Competition in Contracting Act, 1984). This language established the basis for the set-aside program whereas contracting officers may, and in some cases shall, reserve contracts for small business only (Competition in Contracting Act, 1984). Exceptions to competition were outside the scope of this study. There was no further discussion of exceptions within the content or context of this literature review.

Public and Political Perceptions. Since the late 1970s, the accepted position that small business is the basic building block of capitalism stemmed from a paper written by a Massachusetts Institute of Technology graduate student (Litwin & Phan, 2013). Birch (1979) wrote that small business made up the majority of job creation and, therefore, the driving force behind the economic expansion and prosperity. The concept, accepted as fact in spite of research indicating otherwise, was recognized as oversimplified and unsubstantiated (Daunfeldt & Elert, 2013).

Small business was a uniquely uncontested bipartisan talking point enjoying full support from both political parties. Twenty nine million small businesses and their employees represented a core constituency for both major parties. The narrative implied federal programs were helping all 29 million small businesses create value equally. While programs were equally available to small business, the set-aside program was under-utilized with less than 1% of small businesses participating (Federal Procurement

Data System – Next Generation, 2014). Advocates, proponents, and audiences alike seldom understood the disproportionate impact of the set-aside program whereas 23% of the procurement budget went to less than 1% of U.S. small businesses (Federal Procurement Data System – Next Generation, 2014).

Evolution (economic to social program). Federal procurement has long been an economic tool influenced by political agendas, economic conditions, and more recently, social inequality (Small Business Administration, 2016a). The SBA continued to evolve from its original economic purpose to one of influence over facilitation of social programs (Competition in Contracting Act, 1984). Social policy has changed as evidenced by the recent addition of the Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Businesses category to the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) list of eligible contracting set-aside recipients (2016). The pursuit of social objectives overshadows economic utility (Lee, Walker, & Zeng, 2014).

The need for a long-term approach existed to change how social programs define small disadvantaged business. One suggestion was to make needs assessments based on economic classes rather than the set of considerations used today (Hyra, 2015). The import of economic contribution should influence small business investment equal or greater than social initiatives (Hyra, 2015).

Innovation

One of the biggest contributions small businesses claimed to make to the overall economy was the furthering of technological and process innovations (Small Business Administration, 2016d). The perception existed that process innovation was less

important compared to technology development (Uyarra, Edler, Garcia-Estevez, Georghiou, & Yeow, 2014). Unsolicited proposals for innovative concepts and technologies found more resistance than acceptance (Georghiou, Edler, Uyarra, & Yeow, 2014). Suppliers risked rejection of independent developments without a pre-existing requirement (Georghiou et al., 2014). In cases such as this, investments translated to losses and hindered future developments (Georghiou et al., 2014). In some cases, innovation can complicate the challenges faced by start-ups increasing the risk of failure (Hyytinen, Pajarinen, & Rouvinen, 2015). The opposing opinion translates innovative business opportunities to a high level of optimism and employment growth (Wood, Bradley, & Artz, 2014).

Small Business Innovative Research. The Small Business Innovative Research program required 3% of federal research and development dollars fund technological advancements through small business (Small Business Act, 2015). It was not, however, a program designed to create jobs or economic growth; the numbers stand as proof whereas empirical evidence revealed 40% of funded efforts retained zero employees, and 33% retained one or two employees (Link & Scott, 2012).

Small Business Technology Transfer. Open innovation required integration of internal and external technologies to advance commercialization and stimulate product development (Wynarczyk, Piperopoulos, & McAdam, 2013). Subsidized research and development, such as the Small Business Technology Transfer program, have had minimal impact in the short-term and no significant impact over the long-term (Koski & Pajarinen, 2013). In contrast to federally funded programs, industry contributed two-

thirds of annual research and development investments with jobs tied directly to the innovative outputs (National Science Board, 2016).

Entrepreneurs

Definition. Two definitions of entrepreneurs caused confusion and required clarity. The literature on the relationship between the terms, entrepreneurship and small business, erroneously used them interchangeably when the basis of their interrelationship was misinformation rather than empirical evidence (Sahut & Peris-Ortiz, 2014). The first definition only required a person to start up a business. The second definition focused on aggressive performance results (Henrekson & Sanandaji, 2014). The difference between the two was apparent in the attitude of the leader and the culture of the organization (Seawright, Smith, Mitchell, & McClendon, 2013).

A previous study compared characteristics of franchisees versus nonfranchisees owners (Seawright et al., 2013). The study's findings indicated the former was similar to a manager with the latter possessing characteristics of an entrepreneur (Seawright et al., 2013). Entrepreneurship involved innovation and the small business company that spurs economic development (Henrekson & Sanandaji, 2014).

Success. Numerous researchers have attempted to identify characteristics to operate a successful business (Mai & Zheng, 2013). Strong professional networking is an attribute indicating potential for future success among small businesses (Foley & O'Connor, 2013; Lipi, 2013). A successful start-up required opportunity, access to resources, and a capable leader (Mai & Zheng, 2013). Recognition of the positive effect

of managerial and technical counseling parlay a positive influence on success rates (Solomon, Bryant, May, & Perry, 2013).

Failure. While 50% of small businesses will not survive their first 5 years, 30% will fail within the first 2 years (Solomon et al., 2013). The single most important factor reported among small businesses related to high failure rates was the lack of external capital (Haron, Said, Jayaraman, & Ismail, 2013). Studying successful businesses to develop a theory regarding failed small business produced the Triple Bottom line, a concept captured through interviews with successful small business leaders and advocates for financial, social, and environmental disciplines in formal training (Holloway, 2013). Academia and practitioners disagree on the import of the dependency relationship between marketing and entrepreneurship (Lam & Harker, 2015). Over specialization among scholars artificially segregated the natural duality (Lam & Harker, 2015).

Virtually all stakeholders conceived a unique definition of failure. Some small business owners erroneously perceived external factors as the greatest indicators of success, or failure (Brown & Sefiani, 2013). Corner (2013) concluded in a quantitative methodology study that there was no relationship between a start-up company's success or failure and government intervention through subsidies. Similarly, Miles' (2013) study results were consistent; failure affects families, communities, and the economy.

High growth. High-performance organizations were the rare models capable of identifying an existing need and providing a unique solution (Koski & Pajarinen, 2013). The challenge in learning from high growth or gazelle organizations was identifying and

analyzing post performance (Koski & Pajarinen, 2013). The various definitions of high growth firms further complicated the challenge.

Efficacy

Management theory required a logical and repeatable process to set goals, measure achievement, and continually validate the results (Nita, 2015). Regarding small business programs, the certification and coding of business size standards allowed for easy data reporting, collection, and analysis (Bublak, 2013). However, individual small businesses may self-certify within a central data center (Small Business Administration, 2016e). The bottom line was that the data does not provide valid information capable of supporting policy changes for improved efficacy.

Statutory goals. Implementation and evaluation of small business procurement programs occurred through statutory goals represented a classic oxymoron; a mandate to give a best effort. Goals represent percentages of contract dollars awarded to small business. The statutory goal for fiscal year (FY) 2016 was 23% of federal spending set-aside for contract awards to small businesses (Small Business Administration, 2016f). The SBA reported reaching its goal for the first time in 8 years during FY 2014 (2016c). Reaching their goal was a great accomplishment; however, the number of jobs created by reaching the spending goal was absent.

Scope. The scope of the small business contracting principal program was significant with 23% of \$400 billion in annual spending set-aside for small businesses (Small Business Administration, 2016c). An estimated \$100 billion per year reserved exclusively for small businesses (Federal Procurement Data System – Next Generation,

2014). The average award amount of a single contract was \$1.5 million each year going to some 60,000 federal contractors representing roughly one of 500 U.S. small businesses (Federal Procurement Data System – Next Generation, 2014). The number of jobs created and attributed to set-aside contracts was conspicuously absent in performance metrics.

In comparison, the SBA's capital principal program in FY 2014 proffered 29 billion dollars to roughly 51,000 small businesses (Small Business Administration, 2016b). Average distribution of a single concern exceeded a half million dollars. The number of capital beneficiaries was 10% fewer than those accessing contracts while the pool of distributed funds equaled less than one-third. The most telling of SBA's 2014 published statistics was the credited 600,000 jobs created and attributed to the capital program.

The third leg of SBA's principal programs, counseling, included mentoring, business advice, and training to more than 1.2 million entrepreneurs and small businesses each year (Small Business Administration, 2016b). Seo, Perry, Tomczyk, & Solomon (2014) studied empirical evidence to assess these programs and found a relationship between an organization's financial performance and the effectiveness of outside managerial training. Lower financially performing firms benefitted from basic business skills; higher-performing firms responded better to secondary skill sets such as human resources and networking (Seo et al., 2014). The number of SBA reported beneficiary small businesses attributed to counseling services included 14,000 new businesses and 70,000 jobs created.

Demographics. Many of the 60,000 small business federal contractors had no reportable income from sources other than federal contracts. The largest of small businesses receiving government contracts brought in \$1.1 billion in fiscal year 2015 (National Contract Management Association, 2015). The Virginia-based company's website made no mention of customers outside of the federal government. The second largest small business was an Alaskan native company claiming over 10,000 employees and 2.5 billion dollars annually in government contracts during FY 2013 and 2014 (National Contract Management Association, 2015). The third small business started as a family business in Massachusetts and now sells gold to the U.S. mint at a rate of \$800 million per year (National Contract Management Association, 2015). These small businesses far exceed the statutory maximum small business size standards of 500 employees or \$38.5 million in annual receipts, yet they are overtly highlighted in the National Contract Management as the biggest contract awardees of FY2015 (NCMA, 2016).

The biggest risk to this business model was success by virtue of graduating from a protected status through growth or longevity and losing access to all or some categories of set-aside contracts. This phenomenon was in stark contrast to Skelton's (2015) analysis of statistical business turnover between 1997 and 2003 where firm closures outnumbered new firms more than two to one. Government contractors had the advantage of proven strategies for implementation in aiding their success as the integration of sustainable strategies evolved in support of successful practices insulating against the standard 50% failure rate (Williams, 2016).

Participation. Considering the \$1.5 million average annual contract award and virtually no business risk, participation in the set-aside program should be one of the easiest business decisions for a small business. One reason it might not be so simple was the institutionalization of contractors; low profit margins and high compliance requirements make the decision less attractive (Snider et al., 2013). Companies capable of filling unique government requirements, holding tightly controlled security credentials, or in pursuit of innovative technologies made up the preponderance of small business federal contractors (Koski & Pajarinen, 2013).

Built to accommodate public procurement, the SBA helped ease concerns of complexity, bureaucracy, and inefficiencies of processes (Small Business Administration, 2016b). Although the cost of doing business with the government was relatively high while the allowable profit margins were low, the risk of filling the requirement as written was unreasonable (Goure, 2015). Different customers had different transaction costs and resulted in different profit margins (Cespedes, Dougherty, & Skinner III, 2013). Cespedes et al. criticized how few companies define their ideal customer base let alone created their company for a single customer base.

Disproportionate representation. The small number of contractors sharing such a large percentage of contract dollars awarded from this single government program was astounding. Most of these contractors operated in close proximity to the highly concentrated geographic pockets of federal agencies (National Contract Management Association, 2015). In declining order, Virginia, California, Texas, and Maryland received 55% of federal spending (National Contract Management Association, 2015).

Very few local communities outside these concentrations received benefit from set-aside related job creation (Mitran, 2013). The typical small business perceived public procurement as too complex, costly, and time-consuming (Mitran, 2013).

Program Performance

Objectives, goals, and outcomes. Management theory espoused the importance of aligning objectives, goals, and desired outcomes (Rahman, 2012). When misaligned, predictable cause and effect was elusive at best and wrought with waste at worst (Snider et al., 2013). The objective of the set-aside program was to provide small businesses fair proportion of government contracts (Small Business Administration, 2016c). The 24 agencies identified by the CFOA received annual goals based on percentages of federal dollars spent (1990). Moreover, the desired outcome was job creation making alignment with objectives and goals suspect (Small Business Administration, 2016b).

Measurable criteria. Performance measurement results, from a systems theory perspective, are a set of quantity values attributed to a measurand, or the quantity intended for measurement, together with any other available relevant information (Grachanen, 2013). Across all levels of government, performance reforms produce no proven substantive impact largely because of a failure to develop robust performance measures (Oh & Bush, 2015). Ill-advised metrics in the hands of fools not only result in a misuse of financial resources they also squander the potential for actionable research (Lambert & Enz, 2015). Achieving the statutory goal in FY 2014 was a significant accomplishment for the SBA (2016c). There was no empirical evidence indicating a nexus between meeting the statutory goal and creating jobs. Policymakers should seek

empirical evidence leading to policy rather than attempting to assemble evidence to support policy (Nicholas & Fruhmann, 2014).

In choosing a single measurable objective, quantifiable results allowed for simple data collection and comparison against a performance standard (Rahman, 2012). It fell short, however, in meaningful information capable of predicting future results (Nicholas & Fruhmann, 2014). Meeting annual statutory goals for the small business program provided no scientific basis to deduce a validated, repeatable process (Rahman, 2012).

Management theory cautioned against fallacies derived from unsubstantiated relationships (Rahman, 2012). Fayol's four functions of management included planning, organizing, command, and control (Rahman, 2012). Control was the key to assessing process or product used to introduce change with predictable results (Rahman, 2012).

Closed-loop feedback. Using systems theory, forecasting future performance based on historical data required a complete understanding of interrelated dependencies affecting the outcome (Jun, Kim, & Lee, 2011). A comprehensive understanding of each variable allowed for the application of assumptions and qualification of results (Jun et al., 2011). Systems thinking represented cognitive relationships, cause and effect decision making, and predictable results (Jun et al., 2011).

System diagrams provided a visual mapping to grasp better relationships and how the system was organized (Jun et al., 2011). When properly framed into visual models, data became information worthy of analysis and improvement with an elevated level of probability (Jun et al., 2011). Implementing changes to variables can only then cause predictable and repeatable processes thereby becoming an effective control measure and

providing a closed feedback loop to enable continuous analysis and improvement (Jun et al., 2011).

Stakeholders

Stakeholders constituted groups and individuals who can affect or affected by actions in pursuit of objectives (Mayes, Pini, & McDonald, 2012). Systems theory acknowledged the contributions of stakeholder's influence whether positive or otherwise. Organizations should try to harmonize the interests of community members along with the interests of primary stakeholders (Snider et al., 2013). Stakeholders with a limited ability to affect influence are unlikely to receive much attention (Mayes et al., 2012).

Politicians. Among the myriad of small business stakeholders, lawmakers may arguably sit at the pinnacle of influence. Despite their heavy influence, less than one in five lawmakers, held a business education or related experience according to the Congressional Quarterly Roll Call of the 114th Congress, which lists 541 members, 94 members cited prior occupations in business related professions (i.e., accountants, bankers, car dealers, management consultants, corporate executives, realtors, stock brokers, and venture capitalist) (Manning, 2015). Politicians perceived their own job effectiveness in terms of money spent in their district rather than the effectiveness of spending (Van Ours, 2015). The small business constituency, 29 million, represented half of American workers and their votes (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Politicians might view an attempt to reevaluate the set-aside program effectiveness as a perceived threat to the program yielding exposure to unnecessary political risk.

Small Business Administration. The top SBA administrator was historically a political appointee owing homage to the appointing party. Since the inception of the administrator's position, 24 appointees have led the SBA (2016a). The administrator served in this capacity for an average of 2.5 years (SBA, 2016a).

Political appointees often do not have the management skills, policy expertise, agency experience, or working networks that facilitate public management (Gilmour & Lewis, 2006). Therefore, their contribution was limited to short-term vision and set of goals designed specifically to support the current administration's agenda and associated talking points (Snider et al., 2013). The office has effectively become an extension of the white house echo chamber (Pentland, 2013).

The SBA's organizational performance was a reflection of other organization's actions, thereby, created an institution of authority without accountability (Williams, 2016). The small business goaling process is broken whereas FY 2013, 2014, and 2015 met goals while the use of small business declined, even as the percentage of dollars awarded to small business increased (SBA, 2016). From FY 2011 to 2014, the number of small business contract actions fell by 60% while the average award amount increased by 230% indicating fewer businesses participating (FPDS-NG, 2014). The SBA must strengthen efforts to improve the quality and integrity of small business contracting data (National Small Business Association, 2016).

Small business. The constituency of 29 million small businesses accounted for more than half of all American workers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Based on the narrative espoused by multiple stakeholders, these small businesses perceived an

abundance of political and economic support. The same small businesses failed to realize less than 1 in 500 directly benefitted from the largest of the SBA's three principal programs with the single most economic potential (Federal Procurement Data System – Next Generation, 2014).

The U.S. Census Bureau (2013) reported 28.4 million small businesses employed fewer than 20 employees. An estimated 27 million employed five or fewer employees, while 23 million small businesses were nonemployers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Of the principal programs, capital and counseling were enablers while contracting had the greatest potential to propel a small business into a long-term sustainable business operation. All three principal programs offered from the SBA required no quid pro quo from their clients and, therefore, no reason for small business to challenge the effectiveness or availability of services.

Large business. Large business stakeholders had the most to lose from the small business program. They were not eligible to compete for one in four dollars of federal spending (Competition in Contracting Act, 1984). Of the remaining three of four dollars available, they cannot successfully compete without offering a small business plan to maximize use of small business subcontracts in accordance with requirements of FAR Part 19 (2016).

Subcontractors increased the cost of performance with additional layers of overhead and profit. Higher small business subcontract percentages create a favorable impression while concurrently causing the inverse effect of driving higher cost harkening back to policy creating bad business practices (Snider et al., 2013). Large businesses

cannot afford to risk public perception and the potential backlash from the appearance of a lack of support for the underlying principle of supporting the American small business owner.

Federal customers. Government organizations consisting of civilian employees, and uniformed service members were hostages to a process to which they had no perceived influence. The requiring organization requested supplies and services to accomplish their assigned duties and responsibilities. The general population of government employees, civilian and military, had little confidence they would receive quality goods and services promptly to perform their mission (Munson, 2015). The customers, requiring activity or end users, recognized the necessity for lip service while concurrently searching for the path of least resistance to accomplish their assigned duties (Snider et al., 2013). Political, economic, and social agendas had no bearing on the individual government employee trying to execute a mission without the necessary resources. When the Secretary of Defense abandoned the federal acquisition system to deliver a war fighting capability in a timely manner, it was safe to assume the system was broken (Munson, 2015).

Taxpayers. At the core of all stakeholders were the taxpayers paying the bill for the country's national debt. The perception of excessive government waste, inefficiencies, and lack of integrity fueled by media reports describing abuse of position and influence for personal or professional gain raised legitimate mistrust (Williams, 2016). The only influence taxpayers wield rested in the power of their vote.

Transition

The literature review synthesized and analyzed existing literature to include (a) history of federal programs leading to the current SBA, (b) competition requirements in federal contracts, (c) establishment of the set-aside program, (d) effectiveness of the set-aside program, (e) performance evaluation, and (f) stakeholders. Section 2 expounds upon on the problem statement by restating the purpose with a discussion of the role of the researcher and participants, research method and design, research population and sample size, and methods of data collection and analysis. Further, research bias and ethics discussed and explained allow transparency throughout the process. The section concludes with an explanation of qualified research regarding reliability and validity. Section 3 will then provide results of the study through the presentation of findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, reflections, summary, and study conclusions.

Section 2: The Project

The body of knowledge documented in Section 1 supported the presumption of the problem statement in regard to increasing participation in the SBA's set-aside program. A substantial number of small businesses fail, cease to operate, or reduce capacity every year (Haltiwanger et al., 2013). An opportunity existed to understand better successful strategies that small business leaders have used to participate in the federal contracting set-aside program. Higher demand might provide policy makers with feedback necessary to mitigate barriers and increase program participation. Incentivizing private participation by addressing concerns could increase demand for set-aside contracts. The result might return the small business program to the original intent of maximizing participation and creating jobs.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that U.S. small business leaders operating within the greater Colorado Springs metro area used to participate successfully in the federal contracting set-aside program. Participants selected for interviews included successful U.S. small business leaders operating in the federal contract set-aside program. The study may contribute to social change by increasing participation in the set-aside program and job creation, expanding distribution of economic seeding to a broader representation of local communities, and reducing social benefits dependency for the unemployed and the underemployed in a recovering economy.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is responsible for data collection as the primary collector when performing qualitative research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Researchers interpret data collected from direct contact with study participants while conducting qualitative research (Yin, 2014). Direct interactions create the potential to influence interpretations affecting the study results based on personal bias and/or ethical issues (Vanclay, Baines, & Taylor, 2013). To mitigate the potential for bias, I identified potential risks and planned to minimize any impact on the study. *Bracketing* is an appropriate tool to protect against researcher bias (Zenobia, Yuen-ling, & Wai-tong, 2013). Participants could review my resume and a short biography to bracket my experience (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Vanclay et al., 2013; Yin, 2014; Zenobia et al., 2013).

Researcher bias occurs predominantly in the data collection and analysis phases of a study (Yin, 2014). An interview protocol establishes procedures for ensuring a methodical and objective approach to data collection (Yin, 2014). The use of multiple sources of evidence and preservation of a strict chain of custody both contribute to constructing validity and reliability while handling and storing data (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Using methodical techniques and disciplined practices such as pattern matching, explanation building, and rival explanations of observed phenomena in the data analysis stage reduces bias and improves internal reliability (Fan & Sun, 2014). I used transcription services to eliminate data collection bias.

The researcher is responsible for understanding and using ethical practices (Vanclay et al., 2013), the basic principles of which include respect for persons,

beneficence, and justice as implemented using informed consent, assessment of risk versus benefit, and selection of subjects (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2015). The Belmont Report addressed the potential abuse of human subjects and provided for their protection. The university Institutional Review Board (IRB) ensured that the study followed ethical guidance.

Participants

Using the multiple case study design necessitates identifying a research context and selecting study participants aligned with the purpose of the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). If, however, the research objective is to gain insights or a deeper understanding of an event or setting, Yin (2014) suggested purposeful sampling as a suitable approach to maximize collection of contextually rich data. Seawright et al. (2013) used purposeful sampling to identify franchise owners and managers to research similarities or distinctions from entrepreneurs.

I used purposeful sampling to target participants qualified as U.S. small business leaders operating successfully in the federal contract set-aside program. Specifically, intensity purposeful sampling captures an information-rich case from an above average participant (Patton, 2015). An electronic mail invitation helped with dispersing the invitations. The invitation included my contact information for interested volunteers to respond (Appendix A).

Candidates received a copy of the informed consent form (Appendix B) before contributing to the study. I established trust and the rapport necessary for a working relationship at the onset of each communication and event by providing verbal

affirmation to accentuate participants' right to withdraw from the study as described in the informed consent form. Participants did not answer any question(s) that created an uncomfortable situation for them. Coding participant responses ensured anonymity and confidentiality. Data collected during the study did not include personally identifiable information to protect anonymity. The evidentiary documentation remained in locked storage during inactive use periods of the study. Limited access to the raw data, excluding participant identifying information, was available to third parties on request, subject to ethical and privacy guidelines.

Research Method and Design

This section covers the underlying principles and justification for selecting the research method, design, instruments, population, and sampling protocol used in this study.

Research Method

Exploring social issues or problems that researchers seek to understand but are difficult to measure numerically requires the use of qualitative research methods (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Qualitative research focuses on processes and meanings where difficulties occur in mathematical or statistical measurement, quantification, or examination (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). A research method based on some form of measurement is not suitable when a researcher's interest is in gaining insights, discovering new knowledge, or sensemaking in relation to complex situations (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Sensemaking involves following a process to understand ambiguous or confusing issues (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). It is typically a solitary or

interpersonal process to resolve an emotional response (Maitlis, Vogus, & Lawrence, 2013).

Direct contact with participants in their natural environment is preferred, although not always possible, to gain a thorough understanding of complex issues in qualitative studies (Yin, 2014). Research questions, as part of an interview protocol, were essential to gain a deeper understanding of the factors considered by small business leaders in decision making when choosing to participate in the set-aside program and to align the research method with the purpose of the study (Yin, 2014).

Early research planning included evaluation of several alternative qualitative research methodologies: narrative, phenomenology, and ethnography (Yin, 2014). Research related to life experiences supports narrative research, whereas the focus of phenomenological research is on describing an event or phenomenon experienced by all study participants (Bahn & Weatherill, 2013). Researchers using an ethnographic approach investigate topics pertaining to ethnic or cultural issues (Bahn & Weatherill, 2013). Although some overlap exists among narrative, phenomenological, and ethnographic research designs in the areas of data collection and analysis, each research method requires particular procedures for conducting scientific inquiries and has methodological limitations (Bahn & Weatherill, 2013). Narrative research requires the collection of wide-ranging evidence to understand how the participant's life fits the context of the story narrative (Gill, 2014). Ethnographic research requires researchers to be knowledgeable about the cultural anthropology of the group under study (Brown, 2014). A phenomenological study requires that all participants experience the same

phenomenon (Gill, 2013). I concluded that conducting this study using these qualitative research methodologies would result in misalignment with the problem statement and the purpose of this study (Bahn & Weatherill, 2013; Brown, 2014; Gill, 2014; Yin, 2014).

Research Design

I used a multiple case study research design to conduct this study. Case study research is suitable for researchers seeking to explore *how* and *why* questions, to understand events that have contextual factors, and to focus on contemporary phenomena occurring in natural settings (Yin, 2014). Case study research is appropriate when distinct business settings exist with clearly defined boundaries (Yin, 2014). The objective of this study was to explore strategies used by successful small business leaders operating in the federal contract set-aside program.

Case studies typically include multiple sources of data, such as interviews, observations, artifacts, and documentation, resulting in a situation where there may be more variables of significance than available data points (Yin, 2014). In complex scenarios, the inclusion of as many sources of data as possible to obtain a detailed understanding is critical (Jun et al., 2011). Yin (2014) noted that case study research is appropriate in situations where knowledge is minimal or limited.

Studies based on single cases are vulnerable to critique among professional colleagues in the research community (Gordon & Patterson, 2013). The strength of a case study is the ability to consider an array of evidence to validate results (Yin, 2014). Case studies using multiple sources of data may also increase the probability of replication and are thus considered more scientifically sound (Rodham, Fox, & Doran,

2013). In consideration of the benefits associated with case studies, the purpose of this study aligned well with the attributes of a multiple case study research design.

The design of this study conformed to the case study research methodology defined by Yin (2014). One of the challenges with the case study method is the perception of a lack of scientific rigor (Yin, 2014). Yin countered this notion with the point that evidence from multiple data sources in case study research improves credibility. The second complaint concerning case studies points to a lack of evidence that the results lead to scientific generalizations (Fan & Sun, 2014). Yin further opined that case study research establishes analytic generalizations leading to statistical relevance delivered through quantitative studies.

Data saturation is vital to ensure a valid qualitative study (Morse, Lowery, & Steury, 2014). There is no single, clear definition of data saturation, rather, a ubiquitous realization of its importance (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation is evident when no new data are discovered (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013).

Population and Sampling

Purposeful sampling supports exploratory research in pursuit of cause and effect (Seawright et al., 2013). However, it does not support theory development; therefore, statistical generalizations or inferences about the population are not appropriate (Yin, 2014). Purposeful sampling was appropriate for this study, as it allowed for identification and analysis of cause leading to successful participation in the set-aside program.

The total population of participants included successful small business leaders operating within the greater Colorado Springs metro area in the federal contract set-aside program. Each participant responded to three rounds of interviews to capture in-depth data, follow up with clarification of details after transcript reviews, and provide an opportunity for member checking (Campbell, 2015). Each participant and I conducted transcript reviews independently and compared results for accuracy. Member checking researcher interpretations of data is helpful in achieving saturation (Campbell, 2015). The size of the pool was a fraction of the number of successful U.S. small business leaders operating within the greater Colorado Springs metro area in the federal contract set-aside program.

Rich and thick data are an indication of data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation is evident when no new data emerge (Houghton et al., 2013). This case study included individual interviews with participants at a predetermined time and place conducive to the task. The sample size required to meet data saturation within qualitative research has been a topic of debate in the literature (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Within the professional research community, there is not a widely accepted, quantifiable standard applicable to all qualitative research (Gordon & Patterson, 2013). Those supporting a standard have claimed that it is necessary to contribute to increased confidence and wider acceptance of qualitative research (Gordon & Patterson, 2013). Opponents to a standard have argued for flexibility based on meeting qualitative objectives of adequacy and appropriateness rather than quantitative benchmarking (Gordon & Patterson, 2013).

The primary criterion for participant selection for this study was the SBA's definition of a small business. Preferred participants were existing government contractors operating in the set-aside market place. Participants' certification as small businesses was verifiable through the SBA. The planned interview settings were publicly available meeting rooms such as libraries or community centers selected based on availability, location, and participant convenience. Such a meeting space allowed for confidentiality during the interviews. Telephone interviews provided an alternative to facilitate participant availability.

Participants offered the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences in government processes, which influenced their decisions to participate in set-aside contracts. Government leaders recognized the benefits of commercial business practices, as evidenced in FAR Part 12 (2016). The disparity, however, between motives of a profit-driven organization and those of a metric-driven organization prevented the government from benefitting from commercial best practices.

Another example of differentiation between government and commercial organizations was that a high percentage of contractors had prior government experience, whereas very few government employees had experience in a profit-driven organization (Williams, 2016). The government was at a distinct disadvantage in business relations, communications, and overall comprehension of its service contractors' capabilities and capacities (Williams, 2016).

Ethical Research

Ethical safeguards in human subject research are essential to protect the participants and to establish the credibility of a study (Yin, 2014). The use of a multipronged process as well as following the procedures reviewed and approved by the IRB addressed the objective of establishing credibility (Yin, 2014). The IRB approval and associated number for this study was 11-15-16-0482806.

Each communication, written or spoken, began with an explanation of participants' right to withdraw from the study at any time and a reminder of withdrawal procedures. Participants could opt out of the study at any time by simply desisting from participation and notifying me verbally in person or by phone, or in writing through email or letter. I asked no further questions. Participants signed a consent form (Appendix B) before initiating interviews. Refusal to sign was cause for dismissal, with the individual removed from the pool of participants.

Each participant received a random alphanumeric code to assure adequate protection of privacy and confidentiality. The alphanumeric codes were cross-referenced to individual participants on a confidential spreadsheet. Participants did not receive incentives for taking part in this study. Participants had an opportunity during interviews to request an electronic copy of the published study.

All data collected during the study were confidential and subject to protection in a locked file cabinet immediately following data analysis. Data destruction will occur when the 5-year retention period expires. Limited access to raw data, excluding

participant identifying information, will be available to third parties upon request during the retention period and subject to ethical and privacy guidelines.

Data Collection Instruments

This multiple case study focused on successful strategies U.S. small business leaders operating within the greater Colorado Springs metro area have used to participate in the federal contracting set-aside program. Data analysis in case study methodology was flexible (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I acted as the primary data collection instrument.

Data triangulation may be used to confirm the data collected during the semistructured interview and document review were consistent and complementary (Yin, 2014). The focus of this research question concentrated on identifying strategies considered when successful U.S. small business leaders decided which business opportunities to pursue. Multiple sources of evidence enhanced the construct validity and reliability of this multiple case study (Yin, 2014).

The format of the interviews was semistructured with open-ended questions to collect data and gain insights (Appendix C). Semistructured interviews were appropriate when researchers sought a detailed understanding, the interview protocol contained open-ended questions without fixed responses, and where researchers needed the freedom to follow up on intriguing lines of inquiry (Yin, 2014). Due to the intangible nature of subjective decision-making processes, I employed a semistructured interview approach to collect data for exploring lived experiences and their impact on decision-making.

I continued to review publicly available documentation such as government news articles at www.federaltimes/acquisition and commercially available current events at

websites i.e., ncmahq.org, request for set-aside proposals posted on the Federal Business Opportunities website (FEDBIZOPS), and SBA news releases at sba.gov relevant to the subject of the study. This source of evidence provided insights into pending policy changes, business development strategies, business practices, and participants' priorities. The publically available information helped compare and contrast government small business goals with commercial service providers' capabilities. Focusing on the alignment of government and contractor interests contributes to increased participation in the set-aside program.

The interview protocol included nine open-ended questions covering the data needed to fulfill the purpose of the study. All questions in the instrument contributed to the central research question. Appendix C was the data collection instrument (Data Collection Instrument for Interviews) for the participant interviews.

Data Collection Technique

The sources of data collection included individual questionnaire responses and review of publicly available data (Yin, 2014). Using a semistructured interview questionnaire protocol my expectation included establishing general topics while providing wide latitude for participant responses (Doody & Noonan, 2013). A pilot study was an available method to develop, test, or refine research questions (Yin, 2014). The research questions allowed maximum flexibility in participant responses while maintaining relevancy. Questions established general topics of discussion. Participants' lived experiences determined the direction of responses to the questions. The benefits of

a pilot study were minimal in this case study and not utilized. Using the following interview protocol, I collected data from the identified sources:

1. Scheduled participant interviews.
2. Provided copies of all documents contained in the appendices.
3. Utilized open-ended questions to interview.
4. Recorded and captured interview responses as digital files.
5. Sourced a professional transcription service provider to transcribe recordings.
6. Conducted transcript review for accuracy.
7. Conducted member checking for accuracy of researcher interpretations.

The advantage of collecting responses using a prepared instrument was that an analysis of participant responses allowed for identification of themes. The disadvantage of this approach involved introducing difficulty in using member checking after the interview process and the requisite time had passed to complete transcription. The participants validated the accuracy of transcripts through transcript review and researcher interpretation through member checking.

Data Organization Technique

The sources of data included responses to interview questions, transcripts of electronic recordings from the interviews, and research notes created during data collection (Yin, 2014). Secondary sources of data were 122 archived articles and blogs posted on the companies' websites. All data collected received confidential handling to protect participants belonging to a relatively small community of professionals (Yin, 2014). A master list of all cataloged documents and audio files provided a

comprehensive methodology to store and account for all research material (Yin, 2014). The data retention period is five years with data stored in a locked file cabinet. I cataloged all data collected in database format using Microsoft Word® documents and Excel® spreadsheets to organize narrative and numeric data, treat as confidential, and destroy after five years.

Data Analysis

Yin's (2014) methodology for analyzing data in qualitative studies, including case study research designs, involved a systematic analysis of the data from general to specific. The analysis of interview data began by culling keywords from transcripts of interview recordings and coded as raw data (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). The coding process consisted of extracting keywords and grouping into themes supporting or contradicting the research question and purpose of the study (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Themes constituted patterns that were observable and identifiable through the analysis process (Yin, 2014). The data analysis process also included comparing and contrasting key themes that emerged during analysis with secondary data, and existing literature in context of the conceptual framework (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Openness to flexibility during the process allowed for shifting from early developing themes to those more clearly formulated after maturation of analysis (Yin, 2014). Inductive to deductive analysis allowed for continuous assessment of new data with an exponential perspective (Yin, 2014). I analyzed data using triangulating theories, conceptual frameworks, and techniques related to qualitative research using a logical and sequential approach progressing from general to specific, culled and coded key words into emerging themes,

and continuously assessed manifest and latent results (Vaismoradi et al., 2013; Yin, 2014).

I used Yin's (2014) techniques of pattern matching and cross-case synthesis for analyzing case studies. Another secondary method using NVivo® software was used to simplify the process and minimized the introduction of human error. Multiple iterations of analysis may provide confirmation of data saturation when no new themes emerge from the process (Morse et al., 2014). This approach reinforced an iterative and systematic methodology necessary to produce scientific results from a qualitative research study (Yin, 2014).

Reliability and Validity

The concepts of reliability and validity form the basis for evaluating the quality of research designs (Yin, 2014). The purpose of reliability was to ensure procedural consistency (Fan & Sun, 2014). Documentation of detailed procedures enabled repeatable results by future researchers interested in replicating the findings of a study (Yin, 2014). The ultimate goal was minimizing errors and bias (Yin, 2014). Dependability was the key to a reliable qualitative study and included member checking, transcript reviews, and triangulating sources (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013). Collecting and recording data accurately were critical to the reliability of a study (Doody & Noonan, 2013). I used direct questioning during tertiary interviews to conduct member checking to ensure accuracy of interpretations. I also used transcript reviews to validate consistency between recorded discussions and transcripts of said recordings (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Fan & Sun, 2014; Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013; Yin, 2014).

Research validity was a measure of credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Credibility was the process of verifying data collection products using member checking, transcript reviews, and triangulating secondary sources (Yin, 2014). Transferability represented the extent to which the results of a study were transferrable to different contexts or settings (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Case studies provided a heightened level of analytical transferability because the results corroborated or rejected initial concepts or identification of new concepts (Yin, 2014). Transferability depended on a chain of evidence, accurately recording observations, and documenting assumptions used in the study (Doody & Noonan, 2013). A properly validated study assured researchers, peers, and practitioners that the methods and findings accurately reflected the purpose of the study (Yin, 2014). Confirmability was the third criteria used to meet the requirements of validity (Lin, Han, & Pan, 2015). Confirmability addressed researcher objectivity to ensure trustworthiness of the process, methods, and procedures of a study (Lin et al., 2015). I strictly adhered to the interview protocol to ensure credibility, transferability, and confirmability using member checking to ensure accuracy of interpretations. Following the protocol also added strength to the validity of issues affecting small businesses' decisions to participate in the set-aside program, thereby adding depth and clarity to the overall understanding of identified phenomena (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Ilkay, 2013; Lin et al., 2015; Yin, 2014).

Threats to research validity typically related to one of three categories, internal, external, or construct (Yin, 2014). The strategies used to address internal validity, external validity, and construct validity in case studies required the use of different

methods and tests occurring at specific phases of the research process (Yin, 2014). Pattern matching, explanation building, exploring rival explanations, and using logical models were tactics available for use in the data analysis phase to ensure internal validity (Yin, 2014). The intent of external validity in case studies was to achieve analytical transferability as opposed to statistical generalization typically associated with quantitative research studies (Yin, 2014). Case study research design provided a means to support and enhance external validity (Yin, 2014). Construct validity relied on control measures such as chain of evidence, key informant review, and using multiple sources of information in the data collection or final review stages of the study to ensure measures used reflected the study concepts (Yin, 2014).

Data collection and analysis from a minimum of three sources and continuing until gathering sufficient data will ensure data saturation (Morse et al., 2014). Data saturation was evident when no new data emerged during collection (Houghton et al., 2013). I planned to achieve an adequate and appropriate sample size needed to reach data saturation while conducting a multiple case study.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 covered the (a) role of the researcher, (b) rationale for selecting a qualitative research design, (c) criteria for choosing participants, and (d) data collection and analysis techniques. The information supports an explanation of the linkage connecting the conceptual framework, research design, and use of multiple case study to support the research objective and question. Section 3 will present study findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for

action, and recommendations for further research, reflections, summary, and the study conclusions.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

This section starts with an introduction, which includes the purpose statement and the central research question. Next is a presentation of the findings of the study and the potential applications to professional practice, along with implications for social change. I offer recommendations for action and further research and conclude Section 3 with my reflections on conducting this study, a brief synopsis, and the study conclusion.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that U.S. small business leaders operating within the greater Colorado Springs metro area used to participate successfully in the federal contracting set-aside program. Small businesses provide job creation to improve the U.S. economy (Birch, 1979). Other researchers argue that the opposite is true, albeit with less frequency and more passion. The exaggerated economic impact of small business stems from faulty expectations based on hype rather than a critical analysis of current data (Summers, 2015). Government agencies have struggled to gain increased participation in the federal set-aside program among small businesses. The qualitative methodology and case study design were appropriate for this study because they allowed an exploration of small business leaders' rationale when choosing to pursue set-aside contracts or forego the opportunity (Yin, 2014).

My goal for the study was to answer the research question: What strategies have small business leaders used to participate successfully in the federal contracting set-aside

program? Three emergent themes evolved from the findings. The three themes were (a) strategic management, (b) stakeholder recognition, and (c) value creation.

Presentation of the Findings

The following central research question guided the study: What strategies have small business leaders used to participate successfully in the federal contracting set-aside program? I proposed a sample size of three to five participants beginning interviews in succession of receipt. Ten potential candidates received a letter of invitation. One of the 10 responded in affirmation. A second attempt yielded two responses from individuals choosing to pass on the opportunity. The third contact with the remaining seven invitees occurred via telephone call. During this round of contact, three potential contacts received a voicemail requesting a call back. None of the three returned their call. Three of the invitees accepted the call and agreed to review and consider the email requests. Two participants volunteered to participate. In light of this outcome, further investigation and support for a small sample size became a necessity. The use of purposeful sampling for case study research justifies a small sample size (Möller & Parvinen, 2015). Yin (2014) recommended using triangulation including in-depth interviews and other methods to convey a convergence of evidence necessary for a multiple case study design with a small sample population. In the extreme, qualitative research does not have a set number for sample size; meaningful case studies might even employ one participant (Patton, 2002). Recent studies demonstrate that data saturation can be achieved with a single participant interview when properly triangulated (Cooper, 2016).

The small business respondents met the criteria for a small business according to the definition provided in the FAR (2016). The definition of a small business is dependent on the individual stakeholder's interpretation. By statute, business size standards are determined based on NAICS codes, or market identifiers. For the purpose of this study, I used the widely accepted and simplified standard of fewer than 500 employees.

The volunteer participants agreed to a semistructured interview protocol to relay in-depth data. Incomplete or unclear data prompted a second round of inquiry, allowing further investigation of the in-depth data to establish richness of data. Finally, using member checking in a tertiary round of direct questioning, the participants verified my interpretations and ensured accuracy.

I interviewed three owners of a successful small business operating in the greater Colorado Springs metropolitan area. Each owner received an alphanumeric symbol to distinguish between respective responses. In order of volunteer status, the three participants received unique identifiers as P1, P2, and P3. The participants requested scheduling the interview at a place and time convenient for them. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, we refrained from using personally identifiable information during the interviews. The owners had participated successfully in federal procurements and the set-aside program. P1 had approximately 13 years of government contract experience and provided jobs for an average of 60 employees. P2 had over 17 years of similar experience and employed approximately 350 employees. P3 had been in business for 40 years, with 25 years participating in small business set-aside contracts and

an average of 40 to 50 employees. Based on the qualitative methodology and multiple case study design, nine open-ended interview questions (see Appendix A) provided the medium to collect data required to better understand the viewpoints and opinions of the participants (Yin, 2014). Additional data came from secondary sources: archived news articles and blogs posted on company websites, contract data collected from the USA Spending website (2017), and the federal procurement website (FPDS-NG, 2014).

The research questions I used to interview successful small business leaders facilitated the desired effect of gaining ideas and insights regarding the factors considered when choosing to participate in the set-aside program. Open-ended questions established general topics and allowed the participants to respond with wide latitude. The insights gained might further propagate the set-aside program to a wider swath of U.S. small businesses. The case study design and systems theory conceptual framework used during data collection and data analysis allowed for answering the *how* and *why* questions behind the numbers to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Yin, 2014).

The specific business problem explored in this study was that some U.S. small business leaders lacked strategies to participate successfully in the federal contracting set-aside program. I conducted the interviews while recording face-to-face and telephone conferences for the convenience of the participants. While not ideal, the telephone interviews potentially suggest a greater sense of control over the communication process for respondents (Vogl, 2013). A professional transcription service provider contributed to transcribing the recorded interviews. The service provider signed a nondisclosure agreement to protect the anonymity of the participants. Upon receipt of the transcripts

and after my initial review, the participants reviewed their respective transcripts to ensure accuracy.

During the initial round of interviews, I followed a prepared protocol and took notes to capture voice inflection and emphasis. Interview data generated new questions not anticipated in the protocol and required further exploration. Member checking ensured that any interpretations of the participants' comments during the interviews accurately reflected the intended messages. The transcribed interviews were coded using NVivo 11 and Microsoft Excel software. No new codes or themes emerged after the member checking process, indicating data saturation (Ando, Cousins, & Young, 2014).

Researchers use methodological triangulation to assess data gathered from interviews and secondary sources of documents (Yin, 2014). I used methodological triangulation to analyze the data sequentially and logically to identify findings and draw conclusions. In-depth data collected from the interviews, enriched data from follow-up questioning, and member-checked transcripts provided a baseline for triangulation. Comparison of company websites, publicly available contract documents from USAspending.gov, and relevant government acquisition websites enhanced the rigor of the research findings (Patton, 2015). My analysis of the participants' responses indicated alignment with the literature reviewed and provided the basis to confirm findings from previous studies cited in the literature review section.

The participants contributed rich and thick data through shared experiences, insights, and perceptions regarding small business opportunities in the federal

procurement marketplace. The small business owners responded to questions purposely designed to contribute to the central research question.

Von Bertalanffy's (1950) systems theory provided for the conceptual framework for this study. Systems theory supports the utility of considering multiple interrelated and dependent factors to develop and implement successful strategies. The participants' responses indicated strong support for using a systems theory approach for owning and operating a small business. Three main themes emerged from interview responses: (a) strategic management, (b) stakeholder recognition, and (c) value creation.

Themes

The application of NVivo 11 software helped me to sift through voluminous data collected and identify key themes. Exploring factors considered by small businesses when developing successful strategies to pursue federal set-aside contracts was critical to gaining a deeper understanding of issues that confront small business leaders attempting to navigate the set-aside program. Through a deliberate and methodological analysis of findings, the three themes related to the phenomenon surfaced. A description of each theme follows with a discussion of the relative significance of each in terms of the overall success of a small business through the comprehensive lens of systems theory.

Emergent Theme 1: Strategic Management

Strategic management was a deliberate and purposeful component of the owners' business strategies for success. All participants provided in-depth explanations of the development of their own strategic management plans to target federal contracts specifically. Few companies go to the length of defining their ideal customer base, let

alone creating their company for a single customer base (Cespedes et al., 2013). The emergence of strategic management as a theme confirms the literature reviewed. Strategic management was an emergent theme; however, existing literature disproportionately underrepresented its impact as a successful business practice.

Table 4

Number and Percentage of Sources Related to Theme 1—Strategic Management

	Number of references	Percentage of sources
Literature review	61	35
Interviews	85	49
Secondary sources	29	16

Interviewees P1 and P2 started their companies with previous business experience gained while serving as federal employees. The participants also had experience in and knowledge of the federal procurement process and understood the intricacies of the FAR and compliance requirements. Because of their previous experience, the owners were able to capitalize on their strengths and develop a corporate strategy to win small business set-aside contracts. Companies that placed a priority on learning the federal acquisition system and understanding the FAR increased their ability to win contracts (Cox & Moore, 2013). I compared participant responses to confirm findings from the literature indicating that experience has an influence on success (Mathias, Williams, & Smith, 2015).

One of the big challenges faced by P1, P2, and P3 was the business development process. These participants alluded to the complexity involved when responding to a government request for proposal (RFP). P1 found the proposal process much more extensive in comparison to the commercial market, “perhaps ten times harder.” P2 learned to submit successful proposals “through the school of hard knocks.” Small businesses often find RFP procedures too cumbersome and arduous (Reijonen, Tammi, & Saastamoinen, 2016). P3 mentioned the overly burdensome amount of paperwork and excessive safety compliance issues as a hindrance to bidding on government projects. A complicated and inflexible federal contracting process with costly administrative burdens deters many businesses from bidding on contracts (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2016).

P1 overcame the perceived barrier of business development through the employment of a detailed strategic management plan that included initiatives and priorities to address an array of challenges, such as determining where to go to market and what types of contract vehicles to pursue. The owner’s strategy emphasized the importance of ensuring quality controls to produce fully compliant proposals with the inclusion of all required sections, presented with proper grammar and representing the company in a positive light. Through the company website, the participant had chronicled 7 years of archived news articles and blogs published to ensure deliberate communication of a commitment to quality through a strategic vision. Of the 122 articles and blogs archived, all were strategic communications. Triangulation of the owner’s interview statements, website articles and blogs, and government contract documents provided evidence to support the utility of strategic management.

The P2 participant overcame the proposal development process by doing. Over time, the owner developed processes and experiences to prepare proposals and win contracts. P2 also commented on the changing federal procurement environment, saying that it had become much more difficult to compete. Although P3 had less concern about the proposal development process, he discussed the need to adjust proposed amounts to remain competitive and profitable.

Based on the findings, I confirmed that a strategic management plan could produce the desired positive result. Small business leaders considering participation in the set-aside program can benefit from developing a strategic management plan to organize and synthesize dependencies proactively from a systems theory approach. The findings were used to confirm previous research studies whereby government contractors had the advantage of proven strategies aiding their success and insulating against the standard 50% small business failure rate (Williams, 2016).

Emergent Theme 2: Stakeholder Recognition

Recognition of stakeholders emerged as a key component of the owners' effective strategy for success. Organizations should try to harmonize the interests of community members along with the interests of primary stakeholders (Snider et al., 2013). The emergence of stakeholder recognition as a theme confirmed the existing literature reviewed. Stakeholder recognition was an emergent theme; however, existing literature disproportionately underrepresented its impact as a successful business practice.

Table 5

Number and Percentage of Sources Related to Theme 2—Stakeholder Recognition

	Number of references	Percentage of sources
Literature review	42	26
Interviews	57	36
Secondary sources	60	38

Stakeholders are groups and individuals that can affect actions in pursuit of objectives (Mayes, Pini, & McDonald, 2012). P1 recognized two of the most important stakeholders of the small business in pursuit of set-aside contracts as company employees and government procurement officials. P2 was more precise, focusing on the single most important stakeholder category: government procurement officials. P1 gave credit to staff and customers by stating, “I owe success to the employees that decided to pursue this journey with us ... and the clients that took a chance on us.” P2 made the point that establishing relationships with procurement professionals built on trust and respect was an absolute imperative.

A procurement official is a contracting officer who holds warranted authority to obligate the government through an awarded contract action (Federal Acquisition Regulation, 2016). The contracting officer’s authority explicitly allows wide latitude to exercise business judgement. The latitude afforded allows unilateral decision authority to set aside an acquisition; therefore, the contracting officer is extremely influential among

the federal contractor and small business community (Federal Acquisition Regulation, 2016).

The primary stakeholders identified by the P3 leader were their contemporaries and the government representatives responsible for performance oversight. Inconsistent enforcement of standards has a direct effect on the bottom line. Shifting focus from one priority to another on such a regular basis creates unpredictable working conditions and again lowers already slim profit margins.

The P1, P2 and P3 owners' statements related to recognition of stakeholders, as a key component to the success of the business was consistent with company websites. Of the 122 articles archived on the P1 company website, half of them concerned employee's wellbeing and development. Annual "Teammate of the Year" awards go to an employee selected based on overall performance and demonstrated leadership qualities. The P1 company owner contributes to a charity chosen by and in honor of the award winner. A business owner operating from a systems theory perspective will understand the importance of stakeholder recognition within the complex small business network of many diverse stakeholders. A holistic view of the larger procurement system allows focus on select strategic stakeholders such as the contracting officer; this indicates alignment with the systems theory conceptual framework. Small businesses considering participation in the set-aside program can benefit from recognizing the various stakeholders involved in the overall program.

Emergent Theme 3: Value Creation

The third theme to emerge as a key component of the owners' effective strategy for success was value creation. Value was the subjective judgment of a stakeholder, occurring at the individual level, of the total monetary and nonmonetary utility experienced as a result of some decision or action by an organization (Lankoski et al., 2016). The emergence of value creation as a theme confirms existing literature reviewed. Value creation was an emergent theme; however, existing literature was disproportionately over representing the impact as a successful business practice.

Table 6

Number and Percentage of Sources Related to Theme 3—Value Creation

	Number of references	Percentage of sources
Literature review	53	44
Interviews	33	28
Secondary sources	33	28

The P1, P2 and P3 owners identified value creation as a key strategy for success. Demonstrated performance in the execution of a contract provided value to the client. The P1 company's performance was well documented on their website and confirmed through USA Spending (2017) by the number of government customers, contracts, and diversity of capabilities provided. The owner stated, "What [*sic*] a business owner wants when they start a business is to be able to create something of value, the goal is to create value, to create something that someone else wants." P2 commented that success is

dependent on mutual value gained through the procurement process, “it does no one good to be contract rich and cash poor. A company cannot operate at a loss for an extended period”. P3 intimated value provided through the experience they bring to the government, “we know what we’re doing ... we do this every day.”

The P1 owner further expounded on value creation as a key strategy from a business life cycle and eventual exit strategy perspective commenting, “the procurement rules today have closed the door on companies that are small with set-aside contracts being able to sell.” Potential buyers interested in acquiring a small business are required to file for certification as a small business. Large businesses cannot conform to the eligibility requirements, therefore, they can only benefit from acquiring a small business for a limited amount of time. The potential short-term benefit is not advantageous, and that deters many large businesses interest in a potential acquisition. Small businesses have fewer resources and may not have access to capital to make a fair market offer. An established small business also has to recertify and the cumulative number of employees and or revenue may result in outgrowing the eligibility requirements to remain small (SBA, 2016).

The P2 owner explained how the procurement process is devoid of experienced mid-level professionals. The challenge in dealing with unexperienced procurement professionals is that contractors provide value by serving as continuity in a short life cycle of personnel. In the true sense of a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, (SWOT) analysis government inexperience creates an opportunity for contractors

to demonstrate willingness to give back by offering suggestions and recommendations for government consideration.

The strategic importance of value creation may result in a perceived double-edged sword with limited exit strategy alternatives for successful small businesses. Owners might have to look at selling to internal company management, employees, or family members, none of which is as attractive as selling on the open market. The organizational value created is somewhat diminished when policy implementation restricts the pool of potential buyers.

The participants viewed value creation related to the conceptual framework of systems theory as evidenced by varying comments regarding business life cycle planning, the inexperience of government procurement professionals, and the depth of experience proffered by contractors. I triangulated the interview comments by comparison to value creation comments on company websites. Value creation as an element of strategy contributes to participating successfully in set-aside contracts. This finding confirms existing literature as an effective business practice and aligns with systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1950). Small businesses considering participation in the set-aside program can benefit from value creation as a strategy.

Applications to Professional Practice

The U.S. government enacted the set-aside program to ensure small businesses compete exclusively for certain federal procurements. The results of this study provide essential knowledge for business owners developing strategies to obtain federal procurements through the set-aside program. Knowledge and experience contribute to

building and implementing a successful strategy (Batra, 2016). An owner who implements strategies to include: (a) strategic management, (b) stakeholder recognition, and (c) creating value will improve the likelihood of success.

Small business owners seeking effective strategies to participate in federal small business set-aside contracts could use the strategies identified in this study. Owners might implement a strategy to develop relationships with procurement officials to monitor set-aside opportunities. Small business owners implementing a strategy to obtain set-aside contracts should understand the set-aside program from a systems theory perspective to maximize opportunities. Learning the federal procurement system and understanding the FAR will increase their win percentage when competing for federal contracts (Cox & Moore, 2013).

Small business owners can win small business set-aside contracts implementing a strategy to produce high-quality proposals using past performance to ensure future excellence. The federal procurement process and the implementation of the set-aside program remains a daunting proposition for many small businesses. However, small business owners can implement strategies to participate successfully in set-aside contracts. The study findings and recommendations may add to the current body of knowledge regarding developing effective strategies to assist small businesses in obtaining federal set-aside contracts.

Implications for Social Change

The set-aside program incorporated socioeconomic goals to provide opportunity for disadvantaged social groups. By awarding contracts to an increased number of small

businesses participating in the set-aside program, small business owners might have an increased opportunity for growth, which can lead to job creation. Local small businesses tend to supply or service local commerce and might stand a better chance of competing and winning a local contract (Reijonen et al., 2016). Communities outside the immediate surroundings of federal agency facilities might benefit from the estimated \$100 billion set aside to stimulate economic growth. Small businesses receiving set-aside awards might contribute with an increased impact to their local economies and create jobs locally. Greater small business participation across a more diverse cross section of the country might create opportunity for local governments to build on the economic stimulation from federal seed money and prosper with greater independence. The lack of geographic diversity among the less than 1% of small businesses participating in the set-aside program was never the intention of previous generations responsible for establishing programs for small business. For over eight decades, small business programs have acted as an economic tool to provide social stability through national resources.

Recommendations for Action

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore strategies small business owners have used to participate successfully in the set-aside program. Interested small business owners should obtain information about the federal acquisition process, the set-aside program, and development of a detailed strategy to participate and succeed. The Small Business Administration should review the effectiveness of the set-aside program and ask the tough question whether the program is meeting the objective of job creation. More specifically, develop and implement a metric to measure job creation and predict

the impact of change within the program. Policy makers should also demand program metrics to justify a quarter of the federal procurement budget going to less than one percent of the small business community. Researchers should provide policy recommendations with predictable impacts rather than merely pointing out the gaps. Small business owners should seek a better understanding of the rhetorical representation they receive from their political representatives. The final important consideration is for federal agencies to demand credible and reliable data to assess and address the performance of the set-aside program. I will distribute an executive summary of these findings to small business offices within the federal government, small business assistance offices, small business communities, and the full study to scholarly publications.

Recommendations for Further Research

The requirement exists for continued research on the strategies owners need to develop to obtain federal contracts. Informational gaps exist in why small business leaders lack strategies and how they might develop strategies to participate successfully in the single largest socioeconomic program in the country. Additional study is required to bridge the gap between a federal agency pushing dollars rather than pulling suppliers and the 28 million plus small businesses who may not be aware of the set-aside program. Future studies should investigate the level of set-aside program awareness among small business owners. Researchers should continue to conduct further studies on implementation of the set-aside program and the barriers faced by the small business owner (Blount & Hill, 2015). The focus of this study was limited to small business

owners. Widening the aperture to view the set-aside program from the perspective of multiple stakeholders might contribute to a deeper understanding of the program dependencies and improvement of the overall efficacy. Last, I recommend further study into a shift from socioeconomic categories to socioeconomic impacts in disadvantaged geographic areas with measurable criteria to assess efficacy.

Reflections

This doctoral study helped to develop a focus on scholarly exploration as a professional practitioner. The research process allowed me to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for substantiated theory rather than opinion. The central research question was designed using a qualitative methodology and case study design to study the problem. My opinion towards small businesses participating in set-aside contracts evolved during the literature review and solidified during data collection and analysis. In-depth research transformed my perspective on the topic as well as a distinct approach forward for future studies. I discovered that small businesses might not seek assistance from available federal resources; rather, they might depend on their network of resources. The rationale to explain this phenomenon might be an area for future study. The basis for small business success in the set-aside program is a detailed strategy. Using systems theory as the conceptual framework allowed me to view the small business set-aside program as a system rather than an isolated part. The owners' willingness to participate and provide unfiltered responses during the interviews made data collection an enjoyable step in the process.

Summary and Study Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies small business owners need to develop to obtain federal contracts and to answer the research question: What strategies have small business leaders used to participate successfully in the federal contracting set-aside program? The specific business problem was small business owners lack strategies to obtain federal contracts. Three small business owners participated in a semistructured interview. I also collected and reviewed data from a review of the company websites, publicly available contract documents, and relevant government websites and databases. Three themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) strategic management, (b) stakeholder recognition, and (c) value creation. The findings indicated that leaders need to develop current strategies that include a detailed strategic management plan. The findings also reported that federal agencies might reconsider the set-aside program's measure of success, the data used to evaluate success, and a quantifiable impact on jobs created when the measure of success is achieved.

In conclusion, the purpose of this case study was to determine what strategies successful small business owners have used to participate in the set-aside program. There have been many studies and actions taken to increase opportunities for small business owners; this study was used to confirm that many of those actions were baseless and ineffective. It is time to make better use of the small business set-aside dollars based on current studies and data rather than a single study conducted nearly 40 years ago and an unreliable database.

Federal agencies had a statutory goal to spend 23% of the aggregate procurement budget to award contracts to small businesses with the objective of job creation; however, the government has rarely met their goal (SBA, 2016c). Goal achievement in recent years provided no data to assess number of jobs created. Worse yet, the impact of dollars awarded to small business, relative to job creation, lacked empirical evidence to support a nexus (Summers, 2015). The strategies that emerged in this study may help small business owners participate successfully in the set-aside program and create jobs.

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Appendix A: Email Invitation to Participants

Dear {insert small business representative name},

My name is Steven King. I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I invite you to participate in my research study. The purpose of this study is to identify successful strategies U.S. small business leaders within the greater Colorado Springs metro area have used to participate in federal set-aside contracts.

If you are interested in participating, please reply with your name and contact information to steven.kingii@waldenu.edu. Upon receipt of your confirmed interest, I will forward a consent form with additional instructions. I will follow up to schedule an interview with the first respondent. I will hold additional volunteers in reserve in case any volunteers withdraw from the study and notify you accordingly.

Thank you kindly in advance for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Steven R King II

Doctoral Candidate

Doctorate of Business Administration: Homeland Security

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Hello! I invite you to participate in my research study regarding strategies successful U.S. small business leaders within the greater Colorado Springs metro area have used to participate in federal set-aside contracts. My research study is open to successful U.S. small business leaders within the greater Colorado Springs metro area meeting the Small Business Administration's criteria. This form is part of a standardized process called "informed consent" explaining the study before you decide to take part. I, Steven R King II, am a doctoral student at Walden University conducting this study under the supervision of a full research committee.

If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the following:

- Review this informed consent. Volunteering indicates your permission to use your responses in the study. You will have an opportunity sign the informed consent during a private interview. You and I will keep a copy of the signed form. You may opt out of the study at any time by notifying me verbally, in person, by phone, or in writing through email or letter. I will ask no further questions of you.

- Respond indicating your interest to participate in this study with an email to steven.kingii@waldenu.edu. In turn, I will send a direct communication with further information regarding additional steps to completion.

- The first respondent will participate in an individual interview. I will hold additional volunteers in reserve in case any volunteers withdraw from the study and notify you accordingly. I will record the discussion, and transcribe using a transcription service provider. The estimated time to meet and complete the data collection process is

one hour. All communications are confidential. As a reminder, you may STOP and withdraw at any time.

This study is voluntary. The doctoral candidate and faculty will respect your decision whether you choose to participate or not. No one outside the research committee will know your affiliation with the study. If you decide to join the study, you can change your mind, STOP the interview, and withdraw at any time.

This type of study involves some minor risk of discomfort similar to that, encountered in daily life associated with stress. Participating in this study would not pose risk to your safety or well-being. There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. The small business community will benefit from your participation by virtue of collected data necessary to complete this doctoral study. You may request a copy of the published study.

The benefits of this study are twofold; a review of successful U.S. small business leader's strategies may identify opportunities to increase the number and diversity of small businesses benefitting from federal set-aside contracts. Small businesses make a direct contribution to localized jobs, revenue, and taxes, all of which drive local economies. Reviewing a sample size population of successful U.S. small business leaders' strategies through the conduct of a multiple case study might provide the basis for a small business program review to maximize participation in the federal set-aside contracting program. Wider distribution of small business investment dollars might increase the economic impact to a more diverse geographic population creating opportunities for increased numbers of jobs. Local communities might build on an

increased number of jobs by seeing an increased tax base resulting in infrastructure investments to attract new businesses needed to respond to community consumer demands. The economic momentum might be self-sustaining.

There is no compensation, monetary or otherwise, for participating in this study. All information you provide is confidential. I will not use your personal information for any purpose outside of this research study. I will not include your name or any other personally identifiable information attributed to you or your organization in the study reports. I will keep confidential data secure by password-protected external hard drive for a period of 5 years, as required by Walden University. I will lock documents collected in hard copy format in a filing cabinet for 5-years and destroy them afterward.

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me via electronic mail, steven.kingii@waldenu.edu. If you prefer to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 3121210. Walden University's approval number for this study is IRB {will enter approval number here} and it expires on {IRB will enter expiration date.}

Statement of Consent

I have read the informed consent form regarding the “Small Business Participation in Federal Set-Aside Contracting” study and I feel I understand the study well enough to make an informed decision regarding my participation. By signing the consent form, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

NOTE: Please keep a copy of this consent form for your personal records.

Printed Name of Participant _____

Date of consent _____

Participant’s Signature _____

Researcher’s Signature _____

Appendix C: Data Collection Instrument for Interviews

Interview Questions

Q1: Why did you choose to pursue the federal contract set-aside program?

Q2: How mature was your company prior to pursuing set-aside opportunities?

Q3: What are the benefits and or disadvantages of the set-aside program?

Q4: What might prevent small businesses from participating in the set-aside program?

Q5: What barrier(s) to entry of this market stood out as excessively challenging?

Q6: How did you overcome the barrier(s)?

Q7: What available resources did you use to navigate the set-aside program?

Q8: What unavailable resources did you need to navigate the set-aside program?

Q9: What strategy suggestions could you offer to small business leaders regarding their participation in the set-aside program?

Appendix D: Confidentiality Agreement

Name of Signer:

During the course of my activity in transcribing interviews for the research study: “Small Business Participation in Federal Set-Aside Contracting” I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant’s name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I’m officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature:**Date:**