
Working for the Man

If you have never, and will never, work for any branch of the federal government, you can stop reading this now. Otherwise, it may be of use.

CCR - TPIN - DUNS Number - ORCA - MPIN - (and, finally, my personal favorite) NAICS codes;

(what do they mean, why should you care, and how to navigate the system.) Please note: I do not claim expertise in the intricacies of government contracting. This summary is the result of some experience, a number of hours on the internet, and some phone conversations with helplines. Much of this was cut and pasted together from a number of websites.

To take things out of order, you should care because in order to get government contracts you need to have learned the secret handshake and gotten yourself into the system. Or to put it another way:

As of October 1, 2003 the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) requires contractor registration in the Central Contractor Registration (**CCR**) database prior to award of any contract, basic agreement, basic ordering agreement, or blanket purchase agreement. Note: Individuals are not required to register in CCR. However, all individuals functioning as businesses who desire to do business with the federal government are considered "Sole Proprietors" and are required to register in CCR.

Further, all federal vendors, suppliers, contractors, and grant recipients are also required to have a **DUNS number** issued to them. The Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number is a nine character identification number that identifies your organization. It is assigned and maintained solely by the commercial company Dun & Bradstreet as a means of identifying business entities on a location-specific basis. It is used by the federal government to track how federal money is distributed. Most large organizations, libraries, colleges, and research universities have DUNS numbers. (Obtaining a DUNS number places you on D&B's marketing list that is sold to other companies. You can request not to be added to this list during your application.)

The DUNS number provides to users all sorts of data associated with a business, including the business name, physical and mailing addresses, tradestyles ("doing business as"), principal names, payment experiences, industry classifications (NAICS), socio-economic status, government data, and more. (If you don't want quite so much exposure, you can always put only the minimum information in your listing.) A DUNS number remains with the company location to which it has been assigned even if it closes or goes out-of-business. It is recognized, recommended, and/or required by more than 50 global, industry, and trade associations, including the United Nations, the U.S. Federal Government, and the European Commission.

The next step in the process is to register with **ORCA**, the Online Representations and Certifications Application. (They actually have a whale on the website, more humor than one might have expected of the gov.)

Prior to ORCA, a vendor had to submit Reps and Certs, (approximately 25 pages of business information covering such areas as business size, cost accounting standards, past debarments, and company ownership) for each individual large purchase contract award. This process was cumbersome and bulky for both vendors and contracting officers. A vendor had to submit the same 25 pages with each proposal.

Now, using ORCA, a contractor can enter their Reps and Certs information once for use on all federal contracts. Contracting officers can view every record, including archives, with the click of a mouse, and any government office can access identical information. You must be registered in ORCA if the solicitation you are responding to requires that you have an active registration in CCR.

You might well ask what is the difference between CCR and ORCA and why must I register in both systems? The answer given is that CCR and ORCA are complementary systems. ORCA reuses data pulled from CCR and pre-populates many of the required Representations and Certifications. Then, the vendor completes the remaining Reps and Certs with the understanding that with each solicitation they are certifying to current, accurate, and complete information. (I am not sure that is an answer, but as you are working your way through the five page application, you will see that some of the boxes are already filled in.)

A note about ORCA registration: There are several questions about toxic chemicals. [Specifically page 1 of the application question number 4 asks “...does the percentage of recovered material content meet the applicable EPA guidelines? (FAR 52.223-4), (FAR 52.223-9),” and number 5 “Do *name of company* facilities manufacture/process/use toxic chemicals listed in 313(c) of Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know? (FAR 52.223-13)]” If you click links for a while to try to answer this, you end up at the EPA’s Toxic Release Inventory Program. I spoke with someone at TRI, and they assured me that the kinds and amounts of chemicals we use in normal practice are absurdly far below the minimal reporting levels. So I answered the above questions “yes” and “no” respectively. Also, on page 3 of the registration form there is a question that requires reading some fine print to determine whether we fit into certain kinds of activity. The answer is “no.” Otherwise, the answers just require common sense. Unless, of course, you are part of a multinational corporation or use forced child labor.

Along the way in this process, you will have to set up two passwords/personal codes, a TPIN and an MPIN.

A Trading Partner Identification Number (TPIN) is a confidential password provided to you upon activation in CCR. The TPIN, when used in conjunction with your DUNS number, gives you access to your entire CCR registration, and you need it in order to update or renew your CCR registration.

You create a Marketing Partner Identification Number (MPIN) as part of signing up for ORCA. It allows a CCR registrant to access other government applications such

as the Past Performance Information Retrieval System (PPIRS), FedTeDS, ORCA, and grants.gov.

And last of all, the NAICS codes. The North American Industry Classification System (NAICS pronounced Nakes), which replaced the U.S. Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) system, is an industry classification system used by the statistical agencies of the United States for classifying business establishments. Or, in other words: who are you and what do you do? The NAICS categories and definitions were not developed to meet the needs of procurement and/or regulatory applications (it’s for the Census Bureau). However, federal agencies, trade associations, and regulation boards have adopted NAICS to use for procurement and regulatory purposes even though it does not entirely fit their specific needs. The NAICS system is used to classify establishments according to their primary industrial activity rather than a system for classifying occupations.

You need to know your code to enter it in the “Goods” section of CCR registration. This is an important number because it’s part of how government agencies find us if they are doing a search.

And this, of course, is when it gets fun. There are 20 general categories of classification. Within these are usually 50 to 100 sub-categories. Sub-categories can have 30 to 100 entries. It’s not that the classifications aren’t more or less logical, it’s that there are SO many. After about five minutes of scrolling through listings like Inland Water Freight Transportation and Tortilla Manufacturing (I did not make that up), one gives up all desire to be precise and starts looking for that old stand-by “Other.”

However, should you persevere (or in my case, if the curator emails you the correct number), we can be found in Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation: 711510 Independent Artists, Writers, and Performers, under three listings, out a total of 75 entries: Art Restorers; Conservators (i.e., art, artifact restorers); and Painting Restorers. (Our sub-category also includes Magicians and Standup Comedians.)

CCR will accept up to 5 or 10 classification codes per establishment, so if you want to cover all possible descriptions, you might also look through Professional, Scientific, and Technical; Administrative; and naturally, Other Services.

The short version

To work for the government you need to be in CCR and ORCA, which requires a DUNS number. You will have to create two passwords, a TPIN and an MPIN. And you will have to know your NAICS code.

CCR, Duns number, and ORCA registrations take a while and are tedious. The passwords are quick. And I’ve given you the magic number for NAICS: 711510.

To register, just google DUNS, CCR, and ORCA, and register in that order.