

## Interview With Scott Jensen, CEO of National Veteran Small Business Coalition (NVSBC)

**“Our Veteran-Owned VBSuinesses should be focused on providing the best, most innovative product for the lowest price. Veteran-owned business set-asides won’t look the same in two years.”**

**Set-Aside Alert:** How are programs such as the Mentor-Cohort or the VETS Conference preparing veteran-owned businesses to be “contract-ready”?

**Scott Jensen:** Our programs are designed to provide service disabled and veteran-owned small businesses (SD/VOSBs) the help they need, regardless of where they are in their lifecycle.

NVSBC is a nationally oriented organization with deep ties to hundreds of subject matter experts (SMEs) across all critical aspects of their business. We will walk with them from the first step to their solution.

We don’t just work with owners and CEOs. Our services are available to anyone within the company. We want to emphasize the importance of education and training that we all learned from our military careers. Our resources are stacked with hundreds of hours of business and federal procurement readiness content interwoven with SMEs.

Everything is intertwined for us at NVSBC. I can’t talk about our training programs without talking about our mentoring and consulting programs. We are recognized for our engagement and putting the right people in the right rooms to make business happen.

The SD/VOSB community is such a giving community in a business where you don’t want to share your homework. It’s often dog-eat-dog, but that’s not what we see working with veterans – they are willing to create their own competition by supporting those who come up behind them. That col-

laborative approach will be essential as the broader environment for veteran-owned businesses evolves.

**Set-Aside Alert:** What’s changed now that SBA oversees the SD/VOSB certification process? How has the transition been moving from the VA to SBA?

**Scott Jensen:** Many folks who were involved with the VA’s certification process came over to the SBA to ease the transition. The SBA did a great job of lowering the barriers. It is a lot easier to get certified now. Formerly, the VA’s program had excessive requirements that, in many cases, exceeded what the law required, which extended the process dramatically.

SBA has reduced the process down to the minimum requirements. Certifications are happening within 30 to 45 days from application to completion. The SD/VOSB certification process is now required for all 24 federal agencies that fall under the CFO Act, not just the VA. That was a good thing for SD/VOSBs because it ensured those who claimed the benefit across all agencies were verified. It ensured everyone was operating on the same sheet of music.

NVSBC is working to advocate and close all loopholes to confirm that federal subcontracts and prime contracts are being awarded to certified SD/VOSBs, which in the past wasn’t always the case.

**Set-Aside Alert:** How have funding shifts and DOGE reforms changed

things for SD/VOSBs? What should they be doing to stay competitive?

**Scott Jensen:** President Trump’s executive orders have led to significant deregulation already. One of which is the federal acquisitions regulations (FAR) rewrite. I understand why they’re doing this, but it does disrupt small businesses who are not sure what the new regulations will say until they are enacted via a rather limiting process

As an example, we recently saw some changes to Subpart 10 impacting the Rule of Two. GSA leveraged its authority to use class deviation to immediately start executing on those edits as they were rolled out from the committee. That approach is disruptive, but it’s legal and follows the current administration’s objectives as outlined in various executive orders. There is little to no opportunity to influence the process and very little visibility until changes are announced and implemented, so there will be disruptions and folks will need to learn to adapt quickly as changes happen.

**Set-Aside Alert:** How can SD/VOSBs remain competitive with all of this?

**Scott Jensen:** Conventional wisdom says there will be a lot of new opportunities moving forward. The federal government is one of the biggest buy

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ers in the world. They will need to continue to buy. The messaging from SBA, GSA, and the VA has indicated respect and continued support for veterans and SD/VOSBs. I believe there will be plenty of opportunities if you are able to adapt and adjust to a fluid environment.

The truth is that the vast majority of work the federal government executes never actually makes it to an RFP before a decision has been made. If you're waiting for a SAM or DSBS publication, you're probably already ar behind.

Those who are successful at winning contracts are reading tea leaves, engaging with federal clients, and anticipating the needs of their clients. The goal is to present a solution to a client before they realize they have a problem.

The most important aspects to consider are understanding the needs of the client and offering them innovation and efficiency. Understand how the government is using and be ready to leverage technology like AI. This is what the government is talking about in terms of new approaches and efficiencies. No one wants the government to be inefficient. No one wants to waste money. Winners will present innovative, cost-effective, and efficient solutions that are not available from anyone else.

The GSA's 'OneGov' strategy emphasizes how important it is to understand who is already working in the one government environment. Under GSA, there will be an established list

of BICS contract vehicles that are the coin of the realm.

Right now, if you're a small business that isn't introducing yourself to the prime contractors on vehicles like OASIS and learning how to deliver for the government through those who may already sit on large contract vehicles and GSA Schedules, you're going to be in trouble much sooner rather than later.

I believe joint ventures and teaming will be a hot zone for small businesses over the next couple of years. As we go through these changes, it's best to build new relationships with folks who have access to what the government will be using to pay for services. These changes aren't just tactical shifts; they are reflecting a permanent change in the small business landscape.

**Set-Aside Alert:** What can you tell us about the greater impact all this change is having on small businesses?

**Scott Jensen:** There has been a significant reduction in the number of small businesses that receive prime awards over the last 10 years, which represents a corresponding 40% reduction in the total number of small businesses. That is alarming.

NVSBC represents roughly 35000 veteran-owned small businesses in the federal market. Of those, 12,000 are sitting on contracts with the government. We want to help those 12,000 secure their next contract win and help the remaining get their first win.

The truth is that often the pathway to starting out is through subcontracting or finding the right mentor. Category management, bundling, and consolidation will continue to drive the future of federal procurement. Some may say, 'This or that isn't fair.' They may be right and we want to ensure as much access as possible for veteran-owned businesses while understanding the need to prevent waste and operate efficiently and effectively.

I still believe there will be plenty of opportunities for anyone to develop a product or service that the government needs. They may have to deliver it differently than in the past, but the opportunities will still be there.

Over the long haul, I'm nervous about overlooking small businesses. If we lose our small business base and a handful of large companies are given the keys, are they going to start selling \$800 hammers and \$20,000 toilet seats again?

To me, no one is more dedicated than a veteran who owns a small business. They've dedicated their lives to a mission. Tell them it's going to be chaotic; give them constraints. They are used to that! Just tell them what the rules are and they will successfully execute. That's the truth! But they must be prepared for chaos because the old way of doing things is gone.

#### **About NVSBC CEO Scott Jensen**

Scott Jensen is an executive leader with a 30-plus-year career. He is the President of Alpine Global Solutions and served as COO for Team RWB, CEO for Protect Our Defenders, and supported leadership development at the American Council on Education.

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