



## How to Write a Winning Proposal

**a collection of free online resources**

An electronic handbook  
compiled and edited by  
Asian Contractor Association  
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Asian Contractor Association  
4201 Ed Bluestein Blvd.  
Austin, TX 78729  
[www.acta-austin.com](http://www.acta-austin.com)  
[asiancontractor@gmail.com](mailto:asiancontractor@gmail.com)  
Tel: 512-926-5400



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## How to Win a Local Government Contract

When business owners hear the words "government contract," many think of landing colossal agreements with federal agencies. Local governments are often overlooked, even though they also provide reliable, lucrative growth opportunities. City officials issue requests for proposals, commonly known as RFPs, to solicit bids from businesses that want to supply products and services to local government. Businesses can submit proposals to respond to the RFPs and be awarded contracts to fulfill a range of needs, among them office supplies, transportation, security services, web design, food service and marketing. Business owners who can't secure federal contracts may find better odds winning local ones.

Understandably, many entrepreneurs worry that government contracts are already slated for big business. After all, when local officials score bid proposals, at least 25 percent of about 100 points is typically awarded on price. As a result, larger businesses that can compete on price have an advantage. But while a competitive price helps, a company need not offer the lowest price to win.

Decision makers consider additional factors, such as your execution plan, key personnel, work experience and references. Here, small and women-owned businesses can position themselves to compete and win.

**Demonstrate expertise.** Let's assume a procurement officer for an Office on Economic Development needs outside legal services to handle a construction dispute over a new retail development. If your firm specializes in construction litigation, then you offer a specialty service, while others only offer general law practices.

In another example, a procurement officer needs food and beverage concessions in a city-owned concert facility. While other bidders tout the breadth of their food-service capabilities, your company's proposal can explain how you've helped clients increase revenue through creative sales techniques. While the competition may have a slight edge on price, your proposal is value-added because you demonstrate results and expertise.

Local governments frequently lack internal expertise in specialized areas. So they contract for timely goods and services, but they also want your knowledge and professionalism. Make sure your proposal includes examples of strategies used to help past clients succeed.

**Establish reputation.** Another way to make your business stand out is to be involved in the community already. For example, two similarly situated businesses bid on a contract to provide office supplies to the Department of Public Works. The ink pens and dry-erase boards offered by both companies are

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identical, and the difference on price is negligible. Yet one business owner is active in the community and known for being a stand-up individual with reliable business practices. The other business owner is from a neighboring county and relatively unknown.

Many small and women-owned businesses bid on contracts before establishing a reputation, then grow discouraged when they fail. To become more competitive, cultivate relationships in the community and establish your individual and corporate reputation for being a government-friendly, responsive enterprise. Consider participating in political events or community meetings to network and learn how to anticipate the needs of local agencies.

**Show you can deliver.** A small catering operation isn't likely to be selected as a provider for stadium concessions, and a security company with five guards won't be picked to secure a sizable courthouse complex. Procurement officers must be able to weigh a business's instant capacity to deliver. While your business might not have enough employees by itself, you can demonstrate your capacity by teaming up with established businesses through joint ventures and subcontracting arrangements.

Many locales require a percentage of the work performed on sizable government contracts to be provided through small or local subcontractors. Other jurisdictions have small, minority or disadvantaged business statutes that require contracts under a certain value to be awarded to those businesses. Government-owned corporations, boards and commissions also present growth opportunities, particularly for smaller contracts that only require purchase orders rather than formal bid processes.

**Pay attention to details.** Check your local contracting and procurement office and the websites of government-owned corporations and boards to learn about bid opportunities. When presenting your proposal, be careful to include an official copy of any business certifications to receive preference points.

Make your proposal reader-friendly by investing in quality laser jet printing and binding if permitted. Include every item precisely as requested, and in the order requested, in the RFP. Incomplete submissions are regularly disqualified. Be certain which items are included or excluded from the request for proposal, and take into account taxes, cost of goods and any overhead when calculating your bid. A poorly organized proposal detracts from your business image and may trigger doubts about your ability to deliver.

(From Shai Littlejohn - General Counsel for the District of Columbia's Sports and Entertainment Commission)

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## **The 2015 Guide to Winning a Government Contract**

Finding a local government contract can be quite challenging, especially for small business owners in the U.S. The greatest challenge for many people is finding the resources that provide information on available government contract opportunities. Dealing with the local or federal government is the other challenge because it involves making contacts with people in different departments. However, taking certain steps can help you find and successfully bid for various local or federal government contracts.

### **Local Government Contracting**

It is important for business owners in the U.S. to understand that every location in the country has two types of authorities to deal with; local and federal.

Many business owners make the mistake of overlooking the fact that both municipal and county governments are local. Therefore, these local governments need resources to operate effectively. To win local government contracts, you need to maximize your marketing efforts by visiting key public officials in relevant offices.

It is important to know that there is no standardization in the procurement process between the federal government and the local government. Each state or local government has its own contracting procedure. Therefore, you should be psychologically prepared to visit different offices to get your paperwork in order.

Become familiar with departmental heads in various state and local government offices. For business owners bidding on different state and city contracts, having frequent meetings with department heads may lead to getting valuable information about available contract opportunities.

Network with the procurement officers in state and local government offices. Networking with procurement officers in local government offices allows you to get first hand information about contracts for products or services that you or your company can offer. Local governments' procurement offices are usually responsible for publishing requests for proposals and requests for quotes.

Frequently visit your local government's business opportunity website. Many cities and counties are increasingly beginning to use the Internet to announce contract opportunities. Some municipalities allow business owners to not only find contracting opportunities but also submit their bids online.

## **Writing a Proposal for Bidding on Federal Contracts**

Attention to detail separates the companies that win government contracts from the losers. When writing a proposal to bid for a government contract, it is important to examine every detail in the proposal to ensure that the proposal adheres to expectations and requirements. The main reason for writing a proposal when bidding for government contracts is to communicate how your company will fulfill the requirements of the contract. Therefore, the proposal should provide a keen understanding of expectations and requirements.

### **Instructions**

- The first step to take when writing a proposal for government contracts is to assess whether the proposal will meet the initial expectations of the contract. Before you start writing anything, identify the proposal deadline as well as language and format. In addition, find or request for past winning proposals and compile data about their strengths and weaknesses.
- Identify the type of proposal that you need to submit. There are three types of government proposals: Request for Proposal (RFP), Invitation for Bid (IFB), and Request for Quotation (RFQ). These proposals differ in the type of information required.
- Once you have done the necessary research, devise a plan for approaching each element in the proposal. List the priorities that could disqualify your proposal if not addressed. Consider designating a committee and assigning members with various strengths and competencies in certain issues to ensure different aspects of the proposal are addressed.
- Create a timeline for different aspects of the contract award process. List due dates for the project contract beginning with the current day, two weeks before the deadline, a week before the deadline, the submission day, the due date, and the day when the contract winner is announced. Creating a timeline will keep your proposal committee on track and motivate you and your employees towards your goals.
- Develop the contract proposal. Avoid using sales language to embellish the abilities of your company. Focus on the ability of your company to meet the contract expectations and show how you will meet the contract expectations and needs. Be generous with details and avoid leaving blank sections. Make your company stand out from the competition.
- Write a draft proposal and establish a dialogue with your team to ensure no stone is left unturned. Meet regularly with your team members to ensure your

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proposal presents a consistent voice and that there is continuity from one section of the proposal to the next. Writing a proposal is a time-sensitive endeavor and you must ensure all sections of the whole bring out the required message.

- Use clear, concise language when writing a proposal and avoid long complex sentences. In addition, make sure your proposal is accompanied with all supporting documentation.

### **Bidding for Government Contracts**

- Identify the capabilities of your company. Local, state, and federal governments have needs for virtually every product or service, but require expertise in a given area.
- Verify your company's business status. To win government contracts, you will be required to provide essential information about your business including your business DBA information as well as your tax identification number.
- Contact the Small Business Administration to register or verify your company's classification status.
- Go to the website of the federal government at [business.usa.gov](http://business.usa.gov)
- Apply for your [D-U-N-S](#) number, which is free for all companies that intend to do business with the government.
- Register your business with the federal government's Central Contractor Registration.
- Go to the website of the [Federal Business Opportunity \(FBO\)](#) and create an account.
- Use the search function on the FBO website to search for contracts that your business may qualify for using relevant keywords.
- Print out the performance work statement (PWS) of the contracts you pick to bid on.
- Call the officer listed on the performance work statement to get more detailed information about the contract or job you are considering.
- Ask the PWS officer for information on past performance of the contract. This information will help you create proper guidelines for pricing and operations.
- Consider all the expenses associated with the contract including cost of

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materials, travel, accommodation and other expenses. Consider bidding on contracts that you can positively fulfill.

- Follow the submission guidelines and submit your contract bid.

From State and Local Government on the Net <http://www.statelocalgov.net>

### **State, Local Government Contracts, Bids: e-Purchasing**

State and Local government purchases billions of dollars worth of products and services annually. For a list of products and services that the government buys, please check out the link, "What the Government Buys?"

State and local contracts and bids are important sales opportunities for small businesses. Many small businesses failed to take advantage of these government contracting and bidding opportunities, due to lack of understanding of the state and local government procurement processes. Knowing how to market and sell to state and local government agencies will help you turn these government procurement opportunities into profitable business for your company.

Local and state government purchasing department may not have to go through the formal procurement process that typically require publishing government bids and proposals in local newspapers or e-procurement sites. This is often the case for local and state government contracts and bids that involve small smaller-dollar amounts.

Some of the methods used by local and state government contracting offices for these small size local and state government bids and contracts include: cash, government purchase cards, purchase orders (PO), and blanket purchase agreements. Business that is interested in winning these local and state government contracts and bids can simply submit a quotation. A bidding contract is formed once the quotation is accepted and an order is placed by the state and local government.

If you would like to grow your business by connecting to the state and local government opportunities, Find RFP is ready to help. Find RFP helps our customers, many of them small businesses, small disadvantaged, minority businesses, and woman-owned businesses.

(Find RFP is the source for state and local government contracts and bids across America. Find RFP works directly with the state and local government agencies by publishing state and local bids contracts for these agencies.)



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Our e-Purchasing service is specifically designed and used by state and local government agencies. These local and state government bids and contracts are available exclusively at Find RFP via its e-Purchasing system.

### **What to Know When Writing a Proposal or Bid?**

Once you've identified a bid or contract to respond to, the next step is acquiring the bid package.

Most of the time, this information is downloadable as a Word or Adobe document. Depending on government agencies, sometimes you will need to contact the purchasing office at the government agency for the solicitation document.

Before writing any proposals, you need to do the following homework:

Consider the Return on Investment (ROI) associated with submitting a proposal. Is the cost of writing the proposal acceptable in terms of the potential for new business, even if you don't win?

Take time to review the RFP and understand what the government agency wants.

Understand the competition and how to beat it.

Refine your approach, write a draft executive summary and define discriminators, themes, and features and benefits.

There are two types of offers: - bids and proposals. Bids are used in sealed bidding purchases, while proposals involve awards to be made following negotiation.

Bids and proposals always should be prepared with utmost care. Bids or contracts awarded on erroneous offers may result in serious financial loss or other difficulty for the bidder. Before preparing an offer, close study should be made of the specifications to be sure that all requirements can be met. Particular attention should be given to the instructions to bidders and to conditions of purchase, delivery and payment.

When preparing a proposal on a negotiated procurement, the same care should be taken as with a sealed bid. However, because the negotiated purchase procedure is more flexible than the sealed bid procedure, there is greater opportunity to seek modification of specifications, conditions of purchase, or delivery and payment.

If the contracting officer decides to negotiate on a firm's proposal, a complete cost analysis may be required. Therefore, the firm should be prepared to support the quotation with facts and figures.

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One of the most significant changes government acquisition reform is the increased importance of "best value." Best value means that, rather than making awards to the lowest bidder as it generally did in the past, the government can now make awards for the item that best satisfies its needs at a slightly higher price.

If purchasers are going to make an award based on best value, they must state their intent in the solicitation document and include a description of the evaluation criteria, award factors, and factors other than the price that will be considered in making a contract award.

(From FindRFP.com)

## **TEN COMMANDMENTS OF GOVERNMENT CONTRACT BID PROPOSAL WRITING**

### **OVERLOOKING THESE BASIC COMMANDMENTS CAN COST YOU AN AWARD**

Protest decisions continue to show that companies are losing contracts simply because they overlook these basic ten commandments of Government proposal writing.

It's important to note that Federal source selection teams take a very detailed approach when evaluating your proposal.

By taking a moment to revisit your response to each government RFP will take your bid to a higher level where agencies will consider your company for the ultimate award.

Understanding the steps an agency has to take legally, as well as the stated evaluation criteria in the RFP can help you to overcome common nuances and hurdles in the proposal writing and development process.

### **INCREASE YOUR CHANCES OF WINNING FEDERAL BIDS BY FOLLOWING THESE TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR BID PROPOSAL WRITING ON GOVERNMENT RFP CONTRACTS**

1. Knowing how to bid on government contracts means avoid using generic proposal templates.

In the past, government contractors could successfully use proposal templates from prior bids. Today, cutting and pasting templates decreases your chance of receiving meaningful consideration from source selection teams.

When agencies look at technical proposals, they often see canned responses that have nothing to do with the proposal at hand. Companies who use this method

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when attempting how to bid government contracts are almost guaranteed to receive low technical scores.

2. Ensure your technical approach shows a low-risk solution to the problem.

Each federal government RFP often present a problem that the government needs your help in solving. Almost all negotiated procurements are evaluated by assessing strengths and weaknesses.

Not only do you have to discuss the minimum solicitation requirements, you also have to seek approaches that offer more than the basic RFP requirements. By utilizing this approach, you have a greater chance of receiving more strengths and better consideration for contract award. Each response to federal bids must offer detailed responses to avoid technical weaknesses.

You should write with the goal of beating your competition, don't solely focus on the solicitation's basic requirements.

Present solutions to the problem that also focus on the agency's mission.

Do your homework and figure out any future changes in the agency's mission.

Be familiar with how agencies look at proposals for best value.

3. Take advantage of government proposal estimates and historical data.

Government source selection teams probably have done some level of market research on the project. Many federal bids end up being too high or too low when compared to the government's proposal estimate.

You should explain why your approach is aligned with industry standards and how your approach will reach the agency's result. Utilize the agency's historical data or estimates, for your advantage.

If your price is too low the agency may think that you don't understand the requirements of the RFP. See information on [lowest price technically acceptable](#) proposals.

If it is high, provide documented support for your technical approach, labor hours, and staffing.

If your technical proposal is not superior to your competition, then you run the risk of not making the competitive range.

4. Have well-thought-out technical approaches.

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Once you identify the RFP requirements, it is very important that you read it carefully from beginning to end.

Develop meaningful compliance matrices.

Think through your recruitment and retention programs.

Describe the experience and capabilities of your key personnel.

Link teaming partners and subcontractors to the specific PWS requirements; avoid mistakes with affiliation.

Missing important elements of the RFP's source selection and evaluation criteria will get you disqualified.

Address in detail the HOW's for each PWS requirement

Have your most valuable project manager available to narrate the How's of the SOW in oral presentations.

5. Avoid the impact of size protests by developing sound teaming agreements.

When improving your bidding strategies on skills on how to bid on government contracts, you should be aware that contracting agencies consider the past performance of your teaming partners and subcontractors.

For small to medium-sized businesses that want to break into government contracting or want to win larger contracts, finding teaming partners is the best way to meet the goal. However, make sure you understand the underlying legal principles such as affiliation and ostensible subcontractor rule.

Consider selecting a teaming partner who has done a project similar in size and scope.

Look for a company that has successfully completed government contracts on time and within budget.

Make sure you understand affiliation and ostensible subcontractor rules.

Learn about hiring incumbent employees.

6. Make sure that your proposal highlights your best technical capability.

Your technical proposal must convince the agency that you have a strong management team and staffing approach that minimizes risk. Your past performance is another area that can gain high scores.

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Do not just copy and paste the previous contract past performance. This is another common problem when bidding on government contract proposals.

Seriously think about the Who, How, and When about your technical proposal

Consider suggesting longer warranties and discounts.

Understand your technical proposal is one of the highest evaluated sections of your bid.

Always describe your management approach in detail.

Make sure that your past performance projects are of similar size and scope. Past Performance is a large part of your Technical score when the federal government evaluates your bid proposal. Small and medium-sized businesses usually do not have the people or critical skill sets to handle larger government contracts. To overcome this hurdle, you could form a [teaming agreement](#) to fill the gaps.

7. Take advantage of questions and answer sessions.

If a government RFP is unclear, it is important to communicate with the designated contracting officer as soon as possible.

Your question may cause a change to the solicitation.

Be careful not to ask questions that give your entire technical ideas to your competition.

8. When writing a government proposal, always expect problems and tell the agency how you will deal with them.

This aspect of your technical proposal can lead to a strength for foresight and risk mitigation.

Don't assume the government knows your process. (Make it clear)

Tell the agency the exact amount of labor hours and people it takes to perform each task and why less would create a risk.

Inform the agency in your proposal which will be responsible for critical tasks.

Discuss key people and what they will be responsible for.

Highlight your proposal's Quality Control Plan.

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9. Make sure that your government proposal writers understand procurement regulations.

Many companies hire a bid proposal writing staff not well-versed in procurement laws. This can be a costly mistake. There is an apparent difference between a general editor and bid proposal writing experts who understand the evaluation process.

Changes in government regulations and trends in source selection have made it more important than ever that you understand the procurement process to be able to write a winning bid proposal.

This has affected the importance of having professional bid proposal writers as part of your team, whether they are a part of your permanent staff or an outside professional resource.

10. Conduct your due diligence by researching pricing for similar projects.

“Low bid” is not the sole basis for contract award. There are numerous bid protest decisions to prove that point. However, price does play a major role in the government’s [best value analysis](#). You should know acceptable profit margins avoid unbalanced pricing with CLINs.

**Tip:** Be careful when hiring incumbent employees. Also, become familiar with rights of first refusal and displace of incumbent staff.

The above information only touches the surface of the main points for you to consider when learning how to bid on government contracts and improving you government bid proposal writing. However, focusing on these major points can increase your chances of winning federal government proposals. Staying current on amendments or changes to the solicitation will keep you compliant.

(From Watson and Associates)

An insightful, informative and accurate proposal is very important to prove to your customer that you have the best solution to meet their needs. Here are some tips that may help you in writing an effective and, hopefully, successful proposal:

**1. Understand the Customer** - You can’t propose a solution if you do not understand customer’s problems and requirements, otherwise known as “hot buttons”. Don’t ignore them!

Winning business usually begins well before an Request for Proposal (RFP) is released. Talk to you customer and understand what keeps them up at night. How can you develop a solution set, or refine your existing solution set, to meet the needs of the customer and relieve them of their ‘headaches’?

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**2. Discover Needs** - Understand your customer's requirements. Typically this will be stated in the form of a RFP or similar document. You need to be able to analyze the RFP and understand each individual stated requirement of the customer and provide a compelling response/solution to each requirement.

Don't forget to also look for implied requirements. These are requirements that are specifically stated in the RFP, however, through understanding your customer well and knowing what their hot buttons are, you can develop a list of implied requirements that you should also provide solutions to.

**3. Analyze the Competition** - Who are the likely other companies to submit proposals? Conduct a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) on each known competitor. Do the same for your own company. This way, you can understand who the stronger competitors are and what their likely solutions will include. Think about ways that you can adjust your solutions, provide added value options, and draft your response in order to "ghost" your competition.

**4. Outline your Plan** - Once you are clear with the customer's implied needs and stated requirements, develop a plan and steps to execute your plan. Draft a response that provides the solutions offered by your plan, but make sure you do so in the order that the customer defines in the RFP. Try to place yourself in your customer's shoes when responding; show the customer that their objectives and needs are clear to you and that you have the most appropriate solution.

**5. Analyze the Cost** - Depending on the services, time and resources needed to achieve customer's needs, estimate a cost along with its benefits for client. Make sure that your solutions are at a price that is relevant and affordable for to your customer.

**6. Present Your Strengths** - Don't forget to highlight your achievements and show your expertise and qualities to demonstrate that you are more capable than your competitors.

Now that you know the steps for writing a winning proposal, you can start working on it. But, don't forget to review your work carefully. Proofread it and for check grammar and spelling errors. Not doing so displays a lack of attention to detail.

If you need additional assistance, visit [ProposalGurus.com](http://ProposalGurus.com) to find the right proposal expert for your business.

(From Proposal Gurus)

## **About Asian Contractor Association (ACA)**

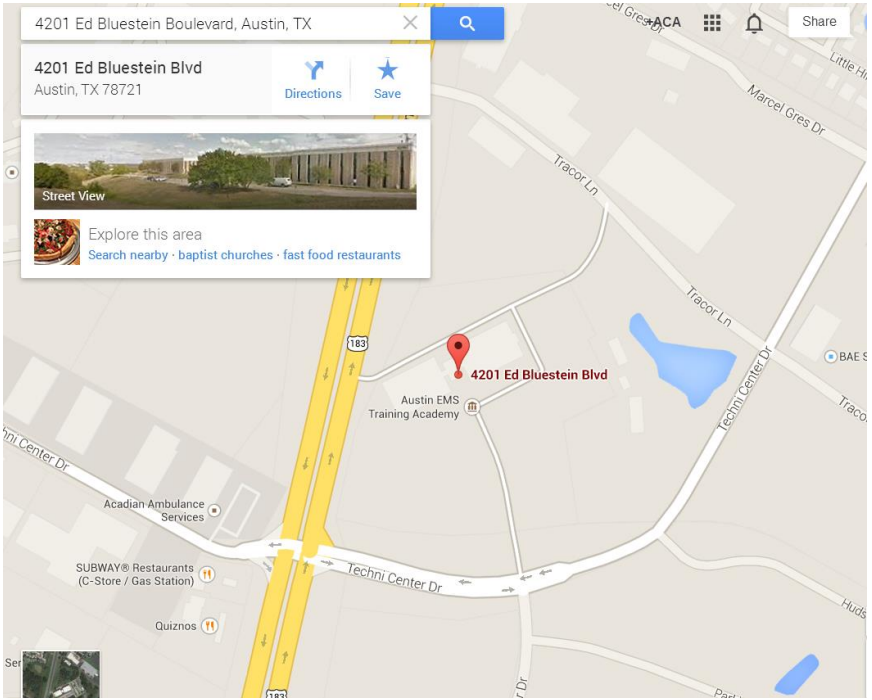
Founded in 2001, ACA has been a service provider for the City of Austin to help increase Asian participation of the city's MBE program. Our services include:

- Individual consultation
- Bid and project opportunities notifications
- Networking with prime contractors
- Referral services
- Plan room services
- Plan reading and estimating
- City procurement process
- MBE/WBE program advocacy
- ... much more

## **Maps and Directions --- ACA and SMBR**

Heading south on Highway 183 – continue on S. Hwy 183. You will pass MLK, and 51<sup>st</sup> St. Make a left on Techni Center Dr. and another left at the light. Keep going straight to enter the parking lot located at the back of the office building. Go down a flight of stairs to enter the lobby to sign in. SMBR and ACA are on the second floor. ACA is located inside SMBR in room #2105.





## **ACA Member Services**

1. Business and Technical Consultation
2. Minority Business Enterprise Certification Application, Renewal and Profile Change Process
3. Asian Subcontractor/Sub-consultant Referral Services
4. Upcoming Bid/Event Notifications
5. How to Use COA Vendor Connection
6. Plans Room Services
7. Plan Reading, Cost Estimating Consultation (RSMeans)
8. Proposal Writing and Bid Submission
9. Assist Vendors in Navigating City Procurement Processes
10. Contract Compliance and Contract Review
11. M/WBE Program Ordinance and Compliance Plan Orientation
12. Translations
13. Liaison Services Between Vendors and City Departments
14. Research Assistance of Current and Past City Solicitations and Winning Proposals
15. Collective Representation to Improve Asian Vendor Utilization

# Asian Contractor Association

A non-profit organization serving Asian businesses  
in the Greater Austin Metro Area since 2001

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4201 Ed Bluestein Blvd., #2105, Austin, TX 78721

Tel: 512-926-5400

[www.acta-austin.com](http://www.acta-austin.com)

[asiancontractor@gmail.com](mailto:asiancontractor@gmail.com)

*Executive Director*  
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