



# A/E/C Business Basics Washington, DC

**IT'S BUSINESS UNUSUAL IN  
THE NATION'S CAPITAL**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Conducting business in the District of Columbia is unique since it isn't a state. For decades, this federal district remained a sleepy, slightly Southern town overseen by a Congressional House subcommittee. The shift began in the 1990s. By the time of Barrack Obama's inauguration, Washington transformed into a vibrant metropolis. The federal government, DC government and private entities control most of the architecture/engineering/construction (A/E/C) work.

### *Fun Facts*

Population: 703,608 (as of 1/1/2018 according to worldpopulation.com)

Area: 68.34 square miles

Hotel Rooms: Approximately 31,693

Rainfall: The District averages 39 inches of rain a year, which is more than Seattle.

Many folks set up a DC office and assume winning work will be easy. However, it's not that simple. The following are guidelines to help A/E/C professionals navigate the business cycle in Washington, DC.

## **FEDERAL**

*The federal fiscal year ends on September 30<sup>th</sup>. RFP activity spikes in August and September.*

### *History*

#### **L'Enfant's Plan**

In 1791, George Washington commissioned Frenchman Pierre L'Enfant to design a plan for the city of Washington. *This blueprint is still used today.* L'Enfant's vision focused on a great public walk, which became the National Mall. Capitol Hill formed the city center from which diagonal avenues named after the states radiate, cutting across a grid street system. The District of Columbia is divided into four quadrants (NE, NW, SE, SW) that originate from the US Capitol Building. Officials initiated L'Enfant's plan, but work stalled during the Civil War.

#### **McMillan Plan**

In 1901, Senator James McMillan convened the Senate Park Commission to continue L'Enfant's vision. The resulting McMillan Plan provided a distinctive direction, seen in the National Mall's open greenway, the

monumental core of federal buildings, and the comprehensive public park system.

### **Heights of Buildings Act**

In 1910, Congress passed the Heights of Buildings Act, establishing the District's horizontal character by setting maximum building heights controlled by street widths. Details include:

- On residential streets, the height limit is 90 feet.
- Height limits on commercial streets is the width of the adjacent street plus 20 feet, with a maximum height limit of 130 feet (except for 160 feet along portions of Pennsylvania Avenue).

Many residents challenged these restrictions. National Capital Planning Commission and the District of Columbia undertook the Height Master Plan to determine the relevance of this century-old rule and analyze potential changes. After extensive outreach, minor amendments were approved, such as allowing human occupancy in rooftop penthouse structures and maintaining the current 1:1 setback. President Obama signed the bill on May 16, 2014.

(SOURCE for all three sections: National Capital Planning Commission)

### **Review Boards**

Much of the land in the District is controlled by the federal government. Two federal agencies work in tandem to review and approve prominent projects within the monumental core.

*National Capital Planning Commission:* [www.ncpc.gov](http://www.ncpc.gov)

Founded in 1952, National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) is the federal government's central planning agency for the National Capital Region (NCR).

The Commission retains approval authority for:

- Projects on federal land in Washington, DC
- Projects on District land within the central core
- Projects on land in Maryland purchased with Capper-Cramton funds.
- Commemorative works in Washington, DC and its environs, on land administered by the National Park Service and General Services Administration

Transfers of jurisdiction in Washington, DC between:

- Federal agencies
- A federal agency and a District agency
- District agencies

The Commission has advisory authority for:

- Master plans for federal land in the NCR
- Projects on federal land in those portions of Maryland and Virginia within the NCR
- Projects on District land in Washington, DC outside the central core

The full commission meets every month (except August) and meetings are open to the public. You can also live stream each meeting from NCPCC's website.

General contractors interested in building federal work should refer to NCPCC's monthly agenda to see what's on the horizon. Design teams interested in federal work should be familiar with the review process.

*US Commission of Fine Arts:* [www.cfa.gov](http://www.cfa.gov)

Congress created the US Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) to serve as the McMillan Plan's guardian. Comprised of seven presidentially appointed experts, CFA delivers advice to the President, the Congress and the federal and District of Columbia governments on design issues. Meetings are held monthly (except August) and are open to the public.

Plan to submit for CFA review if you represent a federal or DC government agency that is:

- Planning a new government building, such as an office building, museum, school, library, or other building or structure on federal or DC government property
- Planning modifications or additions to an existing building on federal or DC government property
- Establishing a new park or public space or modifying an existing park or public space
- Installing artwork in an outdoor public space, such as a park, plaza, or Metro station
- Proposing major new public infrastructure, such as a bridge, or modifying the streetscape design of a public street
- Working with a private developer to propose a new building or modifications or additions to an existing building or site on federal or DC government property.
- Planning a new building or modifications or additions to an existing building or site at Arlington National Cemetery, the Pentagon, Joint Base Fort Myer-Henderson Hall, or an overseas military cemetery

Submit a project for review under the Shipstead-Luce Act if you are a private property owner whose property is within, fronts, or abuts the Shipstead-Luce Act area of jurisdiction (which encompasses the monumental and governmental core of the city, much of the Potomac waterfront, and Rock Creek Park) and you are:

- Building a new residential, commercial, or non-government institutional building
- Adding to or modifying the exterior of your property, including adding signs or replacing windows
- Proposing modifications to the public space adjacent to your property

Submit a project for review under the Old Georgetown Act if you are a private property owner in Georgetown and you are:

- Building a new residential, commercial, or non-government institutional building
- Adding to or modifying the exterior of your property, including adding signs or replacing windows
- Proposing modifications to the public space adjacent to your property

(Source: US Commission of Fine Arts)

### **Federal Set Asides**

Some federal procurements are set aside or reserved for certain socio-economic populations. The following is a partial list: competitive 8(a), emerging small business, HUBZone, partial small business, service-disabled veteran-owned small business, total small business, veteran-owned small business, women-owned small business, economically-disadvantaged women-owned small business, Indian (Native American) economic enterprise, and Indian small business economic enterprise.

Some federal solicitations require a percentage of the subcontractors meet certain set aside criteria. This condition varies from solicitation to solicitation. For more information, consult the Small Business Administration Contracting Assistance Programs:

[www.sba.gov/federal-contracting/contracting-assistance-programs](http://www.sba.gov/federal-contracting/contracting-assistance-programs)

### **GSA Schedules**

General Services Administration (GSA) is an independent federal agency that helps manage and support other federal agencies. Through a GSA Schedule, corporate entities are pre-approved to perform services at a discount. Click here for a list of GSA Schedules:

[www.gsaelibrary.gsa.gov/ElibMain/scheduleList.do](http://www.gsaelibrary.gsa.gov/ElibMain/scheduleList.do)

A/E/C firms are generally interested in the following:

Schedule 03FAC | Facilities Maintenance and Management:

[htwww.gsa.gov/acquisition/purchasing-programs/gsa-schedules/list-of-gsa-schedules/schedule-03facilities-maintenance-and-management](http://htwww.gsa.gov/acquisition/purchasing-programs/gsa-schedules/list-of-gsa-schedules/schedule-03facilities-maintenance-and-management)

Schedule 71 | Furniture: [www.gsa.gov/acquisition/purchasing-programs/gsa-schedules/list-of-gsa-schedules/schedule-71furniture](http://www.gsa.gov/acquisition/purchasing-programs/gsa-schedules/list-of-gsa-schedules/schedule-71furniture)

Schedule 71 IIK | Comprehensive Furniture Management Services: This schedule helps federal agencies plan and manage major office upgrades or relocation/reconfigurations by providing access to professional project managers, designers, asset management systems and furniture maintenance services, such as refinishing and reupholsters. For more information, click here: [www.gsa.gov/acquisition/purchasing-programs/gsa-schedules/list-of-gsa-schedules/schedule-71-ii-kcomprehensive-furniture-management-services](http://www.gsa.gov/acquisition/purchasing-programs/gsa-schedules/list-of-gsa-schedules/schedule-71-ii-kcomprehensive-furniture-management-services)

Professional Engineering Solutions (which includes MEP and fire protection): [www.gsa.gov/acquisition/products-services/professional-services/professional-services-schedule/what-the-schedule-offers/professional-engineering-solutions](http://www.gsa.gov/acquisition/products-services/professional-services/professional-services-schedule/what-the-schedule-offers/professional-engineering-solutions)

For information on bidding on federal construction projects, click here: [www.gsa.gov/real-estate/real-estate-services/for-businesses-seeking-opportunities/bidding-on-federal-construction-projects](http://www.gsa.gov/real-estate/real-estate-services/for-businesses-seeking-opportunities/bidding-on-federal-construction-projects)

## **DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

*The District's fiscal year ends on September 30<sup>th</sup>. RFP activity spikes in August and September.*

### *History*

The District of Columbia continually struggles for more autonomy from the federal government. For much of its history, the District was governed by a board of three commissioners appointed by the President. The commissioner form of government was replaced in 1967 by a mayor-commissioner and a nine-member city council appointed by the President.

In 1963, District residents won the right to vote for US President and Vice-President with the ratification of the 23rd Amendment to the Constitution. Four years later, citizens won the right to elect a school board. In 1970, the District gained a nonvoting delegate to the House of Representatives. While the fight for local autonomy endured, Congress, notably the House Committee on the District of Columbia, continued to exercise authority over the local affairs of the District.

In 1973, the Home Rule Act passed in Congress and District residents elected a mayor and council in 1974.

Bills to admit New Columbia as the 51st State and others expanding the authority of the local government are regularly introduced in the House and Senate, but never passed. In November 1990, as District voters elected two statehood senators and one representative to lobby Congress.

(Source: Council of the District of Columbia, Home Rule:  
<http://dccouncil.us/pages/dc-home-rule>)

Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development:  
<https://dmped.dc.gov>

This office oversees real estate projects on property controlled by the District of Columbia. Major developments include the former Walter Reed Army Medical Center and St. Elizabeths East Campus Redevelopment. Use this link to view the District's Project Pipeline Database:  
<https://octo.quickbase.com/db/bgk8b4c4n>

### Certified Business Entity (CBE)

The District of Columbia has its own designation to promote local businesses. The Certified Business Entity or "CBE" is coveted. Businesses must meet the following criteria:

- The principal office of the business enterprise must be in the District of Columbia.
- The chief executive officer and the highest-level managerial employees of the business enterprise must perform their managerial functions in their principal office located in the District.

*These guidelines are strictly enforced. Representatives will visit your DC office to evaluate whether the above criteria are met. Don't try to fake it.*

The business must demonstrate it meets one of the following:

- More than 50 percent of the employees of the business enterprise are residents of the District, or
- The owners of more than 50 percent of the business enterprise are residents of the District, or
- More than 50 percent of the assets of the business enterprise, excluding bank accounts, are located in the District, or
- More than 50 percent of the business enterprise's gross receipts are District gross receipts.

Many District contracts require a certain percentage of CBE firm participation. For more information, visit: <https://dslbd.dc.gov/page/get-certified>

Advisory Neighborhood Commissions: <https://anc.dc.gov/>

The District of Columbia is divided into eight wards. Each ward has four to six Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners (ANC) who are elected every four years. Each ward is represented on the City Council by a member. (There are also four elected At-Large Council members.) ANC commissioners focus on grassroots issues.

A/E/C Contracting Opportunities for the District of Columbia can be found:  
<https://dgs.dc.gov/page/dgs-solicitations>

### Permits

Obtaining a permit in the District is an exercise in patience. This process can often last for months, so plan accordingly. For the most up to date information, visit: <https://dcra.dc.gov/service/get-building-permit>. The District also instituted an Online Construction Permit Intake System: <https://dcra.dc.gov/service/online-construction-permit-intake-ocpi-20>

## **ORGANIZATIONS UNIQUE TO THE DISTRICT**

### National Park Service National Capital Region:

[www.nps.gov/orgs/1465/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/orgs/1465/index.htm)

The District of Columbia is home to more than 30 federal parks that are managed by the National Park Service. With over 25 million visitors a year, the most popular park is the National Mall. Rock Creek Park spans 1,754 acres, making it larger than New York's Central Park. Smaller national parks are found in every quadrant of the city, including Theodore Roosevelt Island across from Georgetown. Twenty percent of the District is park land.

### Business Improvement Districts

Business Improvement Districts or BIDs are established and funded by business owners in a commercial neighborhood to enhance the vitality of that area. To date, ten BIDs can be found throughout Washington. (For a full list, visit: <https://dslbd.dc.gov/service/business-improvement-districts-bids>)

Some BIDs hire design teams and general contractors directly for projects. The Georgetown BID created a 15-Year Action Plan that began in 2014: <http://bid.georgetowndc.com/15-year-plan>. The Georgetown BID hired A/E/C firms to restore the C&O Canal, improve wayfinding and streetscapes.

### Architect of The Capitol: [www.aoc.gov](http://www.aoc.gov)

Architect of the Capitol (AOC) is the builder and steward of the landmark buildings and grounds of Capitol Hill. This entity is responsible for the US Capitol Building, Capitol Visitors Center, Capitol Power Plant, House Office Buildings, Senate Office Buildings, Library of Congress, US Supreme Court, and the US Botanical Gardens.

For more information about AOC procurement process, visit: [www.aoc.gov/procurement](http://www.aoc.gov/procurement)

All AOC opportunities are listed in FedBizOpps: [www.fbo.gov](http://www.fbo.gov)

### Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority (WMATA): [www.wmata.com](http://www.wmata.com)

WMATA, created in 1967, operates the District's subway and bus system, which is the third busiest in the country behind New York and Chicago. The first stations opened in 1976. The original Metro plan was completed



in 2001. There are currently 91 subway stops along the Metro system's six color-coded lines totaling 117 miles of track. WMATA is continually improving these lines. For more information on WMATA's procurement process, visit: [www.wmata.com/business/procurement/index.cfm](http://www.wmata.com/business/procurement/index.cfm).

Work is underway to add five stations to the Silver Line in Northern Virginia. One of these stations will connect Washington Dulles International Airport passengers to the Metro. For more information, visit: <http://silverlinemetro.com/>

WMATA also has small and disadvantaged business programs: [www.wmata.com/business/small-disadvantaged-business/index.cfm](http://www.wmata.com/business/small-disadvantaged-business/index.cfm)

Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA): [www.mwaa.com](http://www.mwaa.com)  
MWAA oversees the operations and capital improvements at Washington's two airports (Washington National Ronald Reagan Airport/DCA and Washington Dulles International Airport/IAD) and the Dulles Toll Road. MWAA also is managing the Dulles Corridor Metrorail/Silver Line project. (All are in Virginia.)

Doing Business with the Airports Authority:

[www.mwaa.com/business/business](http://www.mwaa.com/business/business)

MWAA advertises all business opportunities through this website. You can sign up for MWAA's email alerts to get the latest information.

MWAA also manages a Local Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (LDBE) program. For more details, visit: [www.mwaa.com/business/department-supplier-diversity-dsd-1](http://www.mwaa.com/business/department-supplier-diversity-dsd-1)

## **MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATIONS**

Consider networking opportunities and membership in these local organizations:

Associated General Contractors of Metro Washington: [www.agcofdc.org](http://www.agcofdc.org)

ABC Metro Washington Chapter: [www.abcmetrowashington.org](http://www.abcmetrowashington.org)

CoreNet Global Mid Atlantic Chapter:

<http://midatlantic.corenetglobal.org/home>

CREW DC (Commercial Real Estate Women): [www.crewdc.org](http://www.crewdc.org)

DCBIA (District of Columbia Building Industry Association):

<https://dcbia.org/>

IFMA Capital Chapter: [www.ifmacap.org](http://www.ifmacap.org)

NAIOP DC/MD Chapter: [www.naiopdcmd.org](http://www.naiopdcmd.org)

NAIOP Northern Virginia: [www.naiopva.org](http://www.naiopva.org)

SCUP Mid Atlantic (Society of College and University Planners):

[www.scup.org/page/regions/ma/](http://www.scup.org/page/regions/ma/)

SMPS DC (Society of Marketing Services Professional):

<https://smpsdc.org/>

US Green Building Council National Capital Region:

[www.usgbc.org/usgbc-national-capital-region](http://www.usgbc.org/usgbc-national-capital-region)

Urban Land Institute Washington: <https://washington.uli.org/>

Washington Building Congress: [www.wbcnet.org](http://www.wbcnet.org)

## WEBSITES TO CHECK OUT

Bisnow Washington, DC: [www.bisnow.com/washington-dc](http://www.bisnow.com/washington-dc)

CityBizlist: <http://dc.citybizlist.com/>

Curbed: <https://dc.curbed.com/>

DCist: <http://dcist.com/>

Greater Washington: <https://ggwash.org/>

Washington Business Journal: [www.bizjournals.com/washington](http://www.bizjournals.com/washington)

## RESOURCES

Washington DC Economic Partnership: <https://wdcep.com>

This non-profit, public-private entity promotes business in the District of Columbia. Below are free resources curated by the group:

DC Development Report: <https://wdcep.com/reports/dc-development-report>

The DC Development Report is a summary of the major development and construction projects in the city. WDCEP tracks major development/construction projects throughout the year and performs an annual review every August. More than 100 developers, architects, contractors, and economic development organizations contribute to the report.

DC Neighborhood Profiles:

<https://wdcep.com/reports/neighborhoods>

Doing Business in DC Guide: <https://wdcep.com/reports/doing-business-guide>

This free booklet information provides information on licensing, community groups, business planning resources and more.

(Source: Washington DC Economic Partnership)

### System for Award Management or SAM.gov

SAM.gov is a free service where you register your entity to do business with the US government. An active SAM registration is required before your company can contract with the government.

There is NO FEE to register or maintain your registration. If you receive an email from a company claiming to represent SAM.gov, be wary. If you get an e-mail from a company offering to help you register in SAM.gov asking you to contact them and pay them money, be cautious. These messages are not from the Federal Government. It is FREE TO REGISTER in SAM.gov for any entity. (Source: [www.fbo.gov](http://www.fbo.gov))

Federal City Council (FC2): [www.federalcitycouncil.org](http://www.federalcitycouncil.org)

Established in 1954, the Federal City Council is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to improving Washington. Since its founding, the FC2 has played a decisive role in the creation of Metro, the renovation of Union Station, launching the Verizon Center (now the Capital One Arena), and the redevelopment of Pennsylvania Avenue.

FC2's current projects are: Anacostia River Initiative, Education Reform, Fiscal Stability, Job Creation, Metro Reform, Transportation/Infrastructure, and The Langston Initiative. (Source: Federal City Council)

National Building Museum: [www.nbm.org](http://www.nbm.org)

The National Building Museum celebrates architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, and design. The museum hosts a variety of industry events throughout the year.

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