

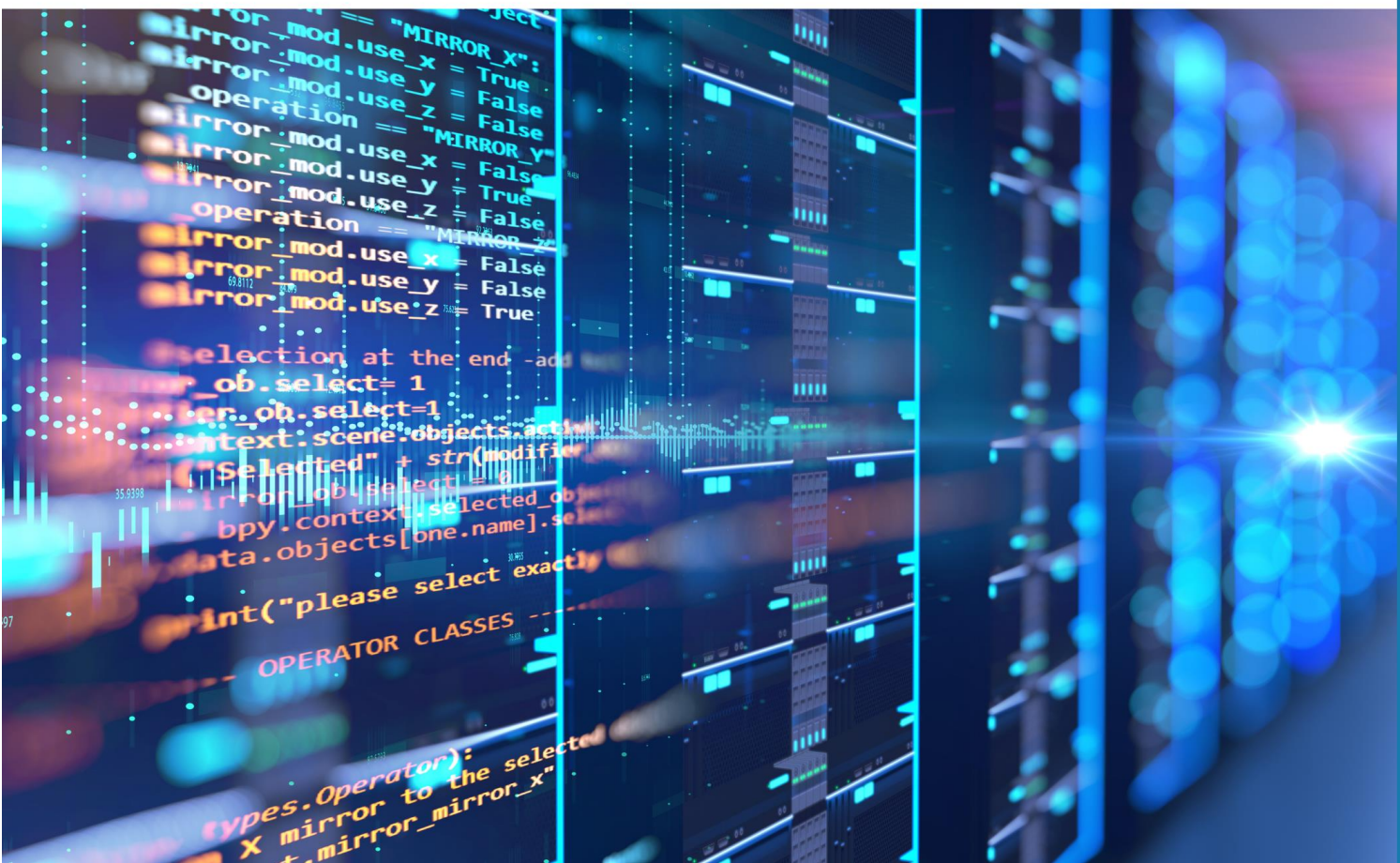


SBA 8(a) BD Service Delivery Evaluation Final Evaluation Report

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Prepared by: **Summit Consulting, LLC**
777 6th Street NW, Suite 520 | Washington, DC 20001
UEI: FNYSF7X4ELS5 | Taxpayer ID: 95-4816438 | CAGE Code: 3GZS9
www.summitllc.us



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Key to icons



SBA program documentation



Administrative data



Survey with BOSs and program leadership



Value-stream mapping sessions with BOSs and program leadership

List of acronyms

BAT – Business Activity Target

BD – Business Development

BDS – Business Development Specialist

BOS – Business Opportunity Specialist

DD – District Director

DDD – Deputy District Director

DO – District Office

DUNS – Data Universal Numbering System

GCBD – Office of Government Contracting & Business Development

GMATT – Goals and Measures Activity Tracking Tool

HQ – SBA headquarters

JV – Joint Venture

LBOS – Lead Business Opportunity Specialist

MPP – Mentor-Protégé Program

NAICS – North American Industry Classification System

OBD – Office of Business Development

OFO – Office of Field Operations

OIG – Office of Inspector General

RQ – research question

SAM – System for Award Management

SBA – Small Business Administration

SBOS – Supervisory Business Opportunity Specialist

SOP – standard operating procedure

UEI – Unique Entity Identifier

VSM – value-stream mapping

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE. Summit Consulting, LLC (Summit) conducted this evaluation of the SBA 8(a) Business Development (BD) Program, specifically focusing on (1) BD service delivery; (2) processes and procedures; and (3) coordination, communications, and reporting strategies and techniques. The purpose of the evaluation was to understand whether Business Opportunity Specialist (BOS) methods to support participants across district offices are consistent, efficient, and effective, and to identify opportunities within the U.S. Small Business Administration’s (SBA) processes to increase efficiency and reduce known process variations to maximize customer value and develop BOSs.

METHODOLOGIES. This mixed-methods evaluation included a document review of relevant program documentation, quantitative analysis of administrative data, a survey with program leadership and BOSs, and qualitative analysis of value-stream mapping (VSM) sessions with program leadership and BOSs. In addition to these methods, Summit conducted two additional evaluation activities to inform findings and recommendations. First, the team created a current-state and future-state process map to document the timing, responsibility, and pain points for each BD activity. Second, the team revised the existing program logic model with a specific focus on the BD elements.

RESULTS. A high-level summary of findings is presented below, organized by research question.

Research Question 1. What is the frequency and distribution of BD services received by 8(a) firms?

Caseload size was well distributed, with around half of BOSs (47%) reporting a caseload of 30 to 50 firms, while 21% reported more than 50 firms. Region 3¹ has the most 8(a) firms, while Region 1 has the fewest. Most BOSs (87%) reported spending more than 20 hours per week on BD activities. BOS survey respondents report spending the most time conducting annual reviews; providing training, guidance, or advice to program participants; and managing and servicing contracts. Due to their high workloads, BOSs reported prioritizing actions with a monetary impact for firms (such as approving business plans, which are required before firms are eligible to receive 8(a) contracts). The data show that BD services are primarily influenced by firm business goals and needs rather than other factors such as 8(a) firm geographic proximity. Variations were identified in BD activities, such as what types of counseling and guidance are provided across District Offices (DOs).

Research Question 2. What processes and procedures do staff use to conduct 8(a) BD activities?

BOS and program leadership survey respondents agreed that the groups *involved* in creating policies and procedures include the Office of Government Contracting & Business Development (GCBD) and program leadership from the Office of Business Development (OBD) and the Office of Field Operations (OFO). While most respondents stated that GCBD/OBD program leadership are *primarily* responsible for developing policies and procedures, program leadership were more likely to say this. The data show that implementation of processes and procedures is primarily influenced by firm business goals and needs, rather than other factors such as 8(a) firm geographic proximity or the DO in which the BOS is located. The VSM sessions identified variations in process and procedure implementation, such as how orientation sessions are conducted. The process variations identified are largely due to workloads or differences across DOs.

¹ The SBA maintains ten regional offices that together encompass the entirety of the United States. A map of these regions is available in the Agency Financial Report (<https://www.sba.gov/document/report-agency-financial-report>).

Research Question 3. What BD activity coordination, communications, and reporting strategies and techniques do staff use? Nearly all BOSs reported using virtual meetings, phone calls, and email communication to provide BD services, while most also reported using in-person meetings. The majority of BOSs track BD services using GMATT, email, and the annual review workbook. When asked how the existing tools and technology could be improved, BOSs suggested improved efficiency, automation, or centralization of platforms as well as additional training or clarification for BOSs. The VSM sessions also highlighted pain points specific to the Certify platform,² such as ineffective automated notifications. A majority of BOSs (65%) reported that an 8(a) firm's business goals and needs have a moderate or great deal of influence on coordination and communication tool selection. Similarly, a majority of leadership respondents (92%) felt that business goals and needs *should* influence coordination and communication tools. BOSs and program leadership were split regarding whether the distance from the DO to the firm influences reporting strategies and techniques, with roughly half of each population saying it should not have an influence. Program leadership survey respondents were asked whether the DO in which the BOS is located *should* influence coordination, communications, and reporting strategies and techniques. Across each of these, leadership respondents were roughly split regarding whether the BOS's DO should or should not have an impact. Reporting variations in data entry highlighted actions with inconsistent data entry or duplication.

Research Question 4. To what extent do processes, procedures, coordination, communications, and reporting variations result in different BD short-term and intermediate outcomes? BOS and program leadership survey respondents agreed that variations in processes and procedures have the greatest impact on BD outcomes (69% of BOSs and 74% of leadership reported this). Although lesser, between 50% and 60% of both populations reported that variations in tools and technology as well as coordination and communications also have an impact on BD outcomes. In contrast, while 69% of BOSs stated that reporting variations do not impact BD outcomes, 45% of leadership respondents said they did not know and only 22% said reporting variations make no difference.

Research Question 5. What process and procedure revisions or coordination and communication efforts between OBD and OFO could improve 8(a) BD outcomes? The VSM sessions identified opportunities to improve consistency and clarity in communication of program changes, which suggests a need for change management tools to consistently communicate and document policy changes. This will improve consistency in BD service delivery, which may have an impact on firm BD outcomes. While 46% of BOS survey respondents and 59% of program leadership survey respondents felt that changes to policies and procedures are communicated somewhat effectively, very few (10% and 15%, respectively) reported they were *very* effectively communicated. BOSs suggested that the process for communicating policy and procedure changes could be improved through a repository tracking program changes, consistency in the source of communications about changes, and informing program staff internally of changes before participants or the public. While 53% of BOS survey respondents and 65% of program leadership respondents felt that coordination between OBD program leadership and OFO BOSs is somewhat effective, very few (9% and 15%, respectively) reported coordination is *very* effective. When asked how coordination between OBD program leadership and OFO BOSs could be improved, the most common suggestions from BOSs were more consistent communication and to solicit input from BOSs prior to making program changes.

² Certify is a centralized portal for small businesses to apply to the 8(a) program and manage their account profile. Certify data for participating 8(a) firms include information such as their program start date, end date, primary NAICS code, and disadvantage type.

RECOMMENDATIONS. The team made six recommendations based on the evaluation findings.

Recommendation 1. Incorporate evaluation findings into the design of a new system of record to better meet overall program needs (including data tracking needs) and BOS needs. Incorporate proposed changes from the future-state process map, add capabilities to track outcome metrics identified in the revised logic model (to enable future outcome evaluations), and improve user-friendliness by addressing specific pain points raised by BOSs.

Recommendation 2. Solicit firm feedback throughout program tenure by adding a brief firm feedback survey to the annual review package submitted by firms every year. Automate the sending of the exit survey via the system of record and send to graduating firms 6 months before their graduation date (rather than 30 to 90 days) to improve exit survey response rates.

Recommendation 3. Incorporate the annual review workbook into the new system of record for increased automation, improved process tracking, and improved reporting and analytics.

Recommendation 4. Conduct future research on 8(a) firm program experience by gathering primary data on 8(a) firms' program experience, focusing on topics such as the ease and pain points related to the delivery of BD services, the quality of BD services received, and how well BD services align with firm goals and needs. This data will help the SBA identify and implement program improvements, resulting in enhanced customer service for participating 8(a) firms.

Recommendation 5. Update and expand the program desk guide to provide a reference tool for new and experienced BOSs, standardize communication of program changes between HQ and the field, and reduce process variations through the change log and links to up-to-date materials. The updated desk guide should include step-by-step processes for BD activities, clear descriptions of roles and responsibilities, links to resources, and a change log documenting all process changes and effective dates.

Recommendation 6. Conduct future research on the distribution model to determine whether the current model meets program needs and produce recommendations to directly address or balance workloads based on an understanding of what and where the needs are, how needs differ across different types of firms, how required skill sets and proficiencies differ by factors, and other topics.

2 INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) 8(a) Business Development (BD) Program provides training and technical assistance to small, disadvantaged businesses (particularly minority-owned businesses) to enhance their ability to compete in competitive business environments. While the 8(a) BD program is a business development program, participating firms also benefit from the opportunity to compete for set-aside and sole-source awards only available to certified 8(a) firms. Once admitted to the program, participants are assigned to a Business Opportunity Specialist (BOS) in the Office of Field Operations (OFO). These BOSs work directly with their assigned 8(a) firms, providing guidance and counseling to improve firms' understanding of business management and ability to compete for work, with the overall goal of increasing competitive viability and enabling former 8(a) firms (which have "graduated" from the 9-year program) to be more competitive in the marketplace. Program staff in the Office of Business Development (OBD)—which resides within the SBA's Office of Government Contracting & Business Development (GCBD)—evaluate all program applications and conduct continuing eligibility reviews of any "high-risk" or "complex" 8(a) firms.

The SBA's 8(a) service delivery processes and procedures are tailored to each participant's unique needs, which can lead to trade-offs in standardized implementation and risks to potential output validations. This evaluation was designed to identify and measure known process variations and inefficiencies within and across district offices in how BOSs assess program participants' development needs, counsel participants, conduct annual field visits, and maintain required documentation. This evaluation also examined whether BOS methods to support participants across district offices are consistent, efficient, effective, and appropriately validated in the SBA's logic model. Furthermore, Summit Consulting, LLC (Summit) examined opportunities within the SBA's processes to increase efficiency and reduce variation to maximize customer value and develop BOSs.

Summit used a Lean Six Sigma approach to conduct this evaluation, with the goal of reducing unnecessary variation to the extent feasible to minimize waste and increase efficiency of service delivery. The evaluation focused on (1) BD service delivery; (2) processes and procedures; and (3) coordination, communications, and reporting strategies and techniques. Some variation in BOS approach is necessary to allow tailoring to specific 8(a) firm needs. Thus, variation cannot—and should not—be eliminated entirely. However, unnecessary variations can be addressed to enhance process control, reduce waste, and drive customer satisfaction. The period of interest for this evaluation was August 1, 2020, through the present to account for programmatic changes made in 2020.³

This evaluation used a mixed-methods approach to answer the five research questions (RQs) and their sub-questions presented in Table 1.

³ Primary data collection was completed in April 2023. The latest administrative data date to June 2023 (GMATT) and May 2023 (Certify).

Table 1: Evaluation research questions

Research Questions
Research Question 1. What is the frequency and distribution of BD services received by 8(a) firms?
RQ1a. How much time per week do BOSs allocate to BD services and activities and for how many firms?
RQ1b. How do BOSs allocate time among BD services and activities?
RQ1c. How are BD services influenced by (1) the 8(a) firm’s business goals and needs; (2) the 8(a) firm–BOS geographic proximity; (3) the homogeneity of 8(a) firms serviced by the BOS; and (4) the BOS’s annual performance metrics?
RQ1d. To what extent do the 7(j) and mentor-protégé programs provide business guidance and development support?
RQ1e. To what extent do BD services vary across district offices?
Research Question 2. What processes and procedures do staff use to conduct 8(a) BD activities?
RQ2a. How are 8(a) BD services policies and procedures developed?
RQ2b. How are BOS staff trained on policies and procedures related to 8(a) BD services?
RQ2c. To what extent do BOS staff BD skills vary?
RQ2d. How is the implementation of processes and procedures influenced by each 8(a) firm’s (1) business goals and (2) business needs?
RQ2e. How is the implementation of processes and procedures influenced by (1) the firm–BOS geographic proximity; (2) the homogeneity of 8(a) firms serviced by the BOS; and (3) the BOS’s annual performance metrics?
RQ2f. To what extent does the implementation of processes and procedures vary across district offices?
Research Question 3. What BD activity coordination, communications, and reporting strategies and techniques do staff use?
RQ3a. What tools and technology do BOSs use to track and monitor BD services and activities?
RQ3b. How are coordination, communications, and reporting strategies and techniques influenced by (1) the firm–BOS geographic proximity; (2) the homogeneity of 8(a) firms serviced by the BOS; and (3) the BOS’s annual performance metrics?
RQ3c. To what extent do coordination, communications, and reporting strategies and techniques vary across district offices?
Research Question 4. To what extent do processes, procedures, coordination, communications, and reporting variations result in different BD short-term and intermediate outcomes?
Research Question 5. What process and procedure revisions or coordination and communication efforts between OBD and OFO could improve 8(a) BD outcomes?

2.1 Defining BD services and activities

For the purposes of this evaluation, BD services and activities include the following:

- Conducting 8(a) orientation for new program participants;
- Conducting annual reviews;
- Conducting site visits or field visits;
- Managing and servicing contracts (including reviewing and accepting 8(a) offering letters, securing non 8(a) contracts, processing sole source and financial statement waivers, and initiating search or requirement letters);
- Providing access to management and technical training through the 7(j) program;
- Providing advice, counsel, guidance, training, and assistance to participants (on topics including contract administration, prime contracting, and marketing to the federal government);
- Providing referrals to SBA Resource Partners and APEX Accelerators, formerly known as Procurement Technical Assistance Center;
- Reviewing business plans;
- Reviewing Joint Venture agreements;
- Mentor-Protégé counseling and matchmaking;

- Reviewing remedial action plans;
- Contract development activities including working with procuring activities to identify requirements, forward 8(a) capability statements, and identify new 8(a) firms; and
- Conducting exit reviews and evaluations.

This definition was informed by (1) a list of 8(a) compliance and BD servicing activities tracked in the Goals and Measures Activity Tracking Tool (GMATT); (2) the BOS annual review workbook; and (3) the 8(a) program SOP (in particular chapter 3, “Servicing the Participant”).

3 DATA SOURCES AND METHODS

In this section, we discuss the data sources and methods used for this evaluation. These include SBA program documentation, administrative data, a survey with BOSs and program leadership, and VSM sessions with BOSs and program leadership. At the end of this section, we discuss potential limitations.

3.1 SBA program documentation

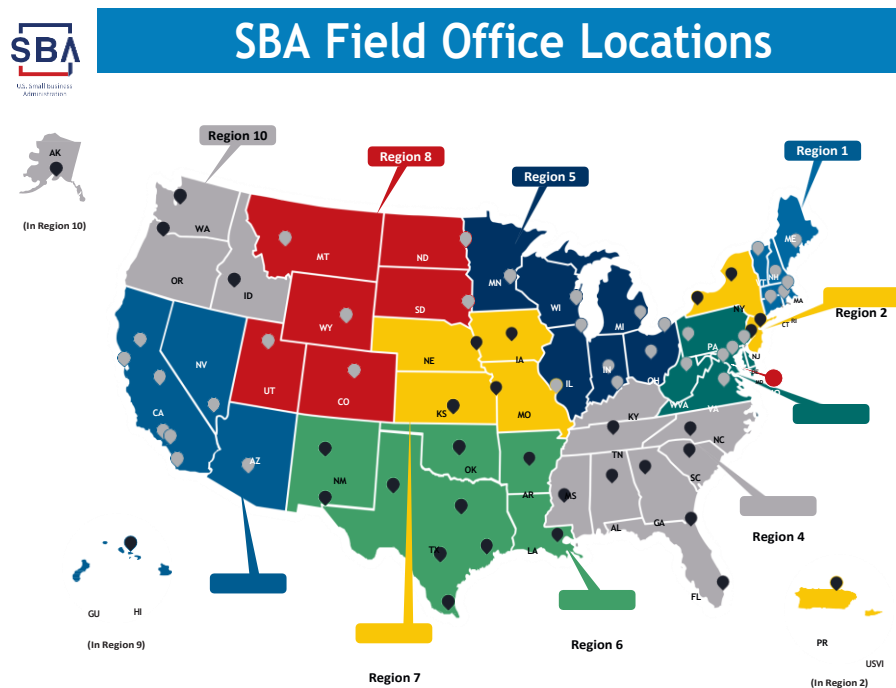
To understand the 8(a) BD service delivery process, Summit conducted in-depth reviews of key strategy and process documentation provided by the SBA. The document review informed specific research questions, process map development, and survey development. While the full list of documents reviewed is extensive, key documents are listed below. Relevant documents are discussed with the related findings in Section 4.

- *Standard Operating Procedure for the Office of Business Development*
- *8(a) Desk Guide*
- *SBA’s “8(a) Program”: Overview, History, and Current Issues*
- *SBA’s Business Development Assistance to 8(a) Program Participants*
- *Business Development Tracking Tool*

3.2 Administrative data

The team conducted a quantitative analysis of 8(a) program administrative data to measure 8(a) firms’ short-term and intermediate outcomes and understand the frequency and distribution of BD activities across the ten SBA regions (shown in Figure 1). Administrative data findings are reported in aggregate by region to maintain anonymity.

Figure 1: SBA field office locations



Source: Agency Financial Report for FY 2022 (available at: <https://www.sba.gov/document/report-agency-financial-report>).

There were two primary sources of administrative data analyzed in this evaluation:

- **Certify.sba.gov (Certify)** provides a centralized portal for small businesses to apply to the 8(a) program, manage their 8(a) program account profile, and provide updates for annual review to remain in the program. The Certify data had records on 8(a) firms in the program from 2010 to May 2023, but we limited our analysis to firms with an “Active” program status (i.e., current 8(a) Participants). Certify data were reported at the participant level and contained information such as each 8(a) firm’s program start date, end date, primary NAICS code, and disadvantage type. Since Certify data are reported at the participant level, we aggregated small business characteristics to the district office level and SBA region level. Summit used these data to count the active 8(a) firms in each SBA region, find the distances between 8(a) firms and their district offices, and summarize the business characteristics of the portfolios of each SBA region.
- **Goals and Measures Activity Tracking Tool (GMATT)** is a planning and reporting tool that BOSs use to record, summarize, and otherwise document substantial discussions, training events, presentations, and other interactions with lenders, resource partners, small businesses, and other stakeholders.⁴ We used measures from GMATT to describe the types of BD assistance activities that BOSs perform with their 8(a) firms. Due to GMATT’s role as an activity tracker—rather than a case management tool with activity notes—GMATT measures primarily indicated the existence of an activity and not its nature or quality. The GMATT data available covered fiscal year 2022 through the beginning of quarter 3 of fiscal year 2023. We grouped GMATT activity types into two broad categories: BD and compliance. The breakdown of those two groups can be found in Appendix A. Although there is known underreporting in GMATT data, the team generated summary statistics for the reported BD activities to better understand the frequency and distribution of activity reporting.

Administrative data assessment. The goal of this evaluation was to identify true differences across SBA regions and BOSs, not artifacts of data quality issues, so the team began by checking the reliability and validity of the data.⁵ We used univariate analysis to generate summary statistics for Certify and GMATT data variables where applicable and checked for missingness and variation in values that could be indicative of poor data quality. The team then linked GMATT and Certify datasets based on iterative combinations of 8(a) firm name, state, SBA region, and district office. We analyzed individual datasets as well as the combined datasets to describe 8(a) firm characteristics both at the region and program level; identify types and frequency of BD activities reported in GMATT; and give additional context to survey and VSM session results.

3.3 Survey

Summit conducted web-based surveys with program leadership (from both OBD and OFO) and all BOSs in OFO’s 68 District Offices (DOs). The surveys were designed to address all research questions by collecting data on the following topics:

- Time allocated to providing BD services;
- How BD services are tailored for specific firms (based on the factors in the research questions);
- 8(a) processes, procedures, coordination, communication, and reporting strategies;
- The 7(j) Management and Technical Assistance Program;

⁴ SBA Office of Field Operations goals and activity definitions as of FY 2023.

⁵ To guard against identifiability, all administrative data are reported at the region level rather than the DO level.

- The Mentor-Protégé Program;
- Tools and technology used to track and monitor BD services;
- Skills and trainings; and
- Suggestions for improvements.

Draft survey instruments were pretested with program leadership and BOSs and revised before fielding. Surveys were administered online using Qualtrics over a 4-week fielding period, with weekly email reminders. Table 2 reports the response rate for each survey type.

Table 2: Survey response rates

	Leadership Survey	BOS Survey
Number in sample	164	124
Number of complete responses*	75	78
Response rate (%)	46%	63%

*A response is considered complete if a respondent answered at least 80% of survey questions.

Survey analysis. Following survey data collection, Summit conducted two types of analyses. Through univariate analysis the team generated summary statistics for the survey results, including the mean, median, and mode of each question. Next, the team conducted multivariate analysis, stratifying the analysis of survey response distributions from the univariate analyses among the participant groups, including (1) length of time working in the 8(a) program, (2) region, and (3) caseload. We also conducted multivariate analyses of survey items showing interesting or large variations to determine whether there were clear drivers of the observed variation.

3.4 VSM sessions

Summit conducted value-stream mapping sessions with program leadership and BOSs who work directly with 8(a) firms to gather process information on each program step (responsibilities, dependencies, duration), identify any pain points or inefficiencies in the process, and inform the future-state process map (see Section 4.1.1). Summit conducted two 90-minute VSM sessions with six different groups, as shown in Table 3. VSM sessions were conducted in two rounds, as shown in Table 4.

Table 3: VSM participants

VSM Group	Participant Type
Group 1	Program leadership
Group 2	BOSs from a high-volume DO*
Group 3	BOSs from a high-volume DO
Group 4	BOSs from other DOs
Group 5	BOSs from other DOs
Group 6	BOSs from other DOs

*To maintain anonymity, DOs are not identified in the findings presented in this report.

Table 4: Breakdown of VSM sessions

VSM Round	Purpose	Population
Round 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update draft process map. Ensure a more accurate depiction of current processes before continuing with data collection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Groups 1–3 (one VSM session each)
Round 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Validate the current process map. Identify variations between high-volume DOs and other DOs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Groups 1–3 (one confirmatory VSM session each) Groups 4–6 (two VSM sessions each)

The sessions followed a flexible discussion guide that covers the activities, timelines, and stakeholders involved in each step, how they currently work, and how they should work. The VSM data collection guide is provided in Appendix B.

Transcripts were produced for each VSM session and thematic analysis was conducted to identify common trends and outliers in program responsibilities, activity duration and timelines, data entry, pain points, and any areas of inefficiency or waste.

3.5 Limitations

The team has identified four limitations due to the data available. These limitations and their implications are described below.

Limitation 1: Lack of data to answer homogeneity research questions. RQ2e and RQ3b ask how factors including the homogeneity of 8(a) firms serviced by the BOS influence the implementation of processes and procedures, coordination, communications, and reporting strategies and techniques. However, the necessary data were either not available or could not be collected. This topic was also not captured in the surveys, as pretesting showed that questions related to caseload homogeneity were not understood as intended. Therefore, Summit determined that this topic was unsuitable for survey inclusion.

Limitation 2: Lack of outcomes data. Although RQ4 asks about BD short-term and intermediate outcomes, the data sources either lacked needed information or could not be reliably linked to SBA data, as described below. The System for Award Management (SAM) database reports a large amount of data about federal contracting, including opportunities and award information. We intended to use the SAM.gov data from 2019 to January 2023 to measure short-term and intermediate 8(a) firm outcomes in response to RQ4, but we were unable to reliably link SBA data to SAM.gov data to do so. Because the SAM.gov data did not include a UEI or DUNS indicator, the team had to rely on fuzzy matching techniques to identify matching 8(a) firms in Certify. Although some matches were made, this process is not rigorous, and analysis of those linked data would therefore be unreliable. Additionally, the annual review workbook contains some information on 8(a) firm short-term and intermediate outcomes, such as the number of 8(a) versus non-8(a) contracts awarded; however, that data was unavailable for analysis.

Although there is currently no source of SBA data that captures outcomes, several of our recommendations (including the new or revised metrics in the logic model) are designed to situate the SBA to begin collecting these data moving forward. This will position the SBA to answer this research question in the future.

Limitation 3: Underreporting in GMATT data. Conversations with SBA leadership revealed there is underreporting in GMATT data, and our univariate analysis showed variables with missingness or little

variation in value. This meant that few GMATT variables beyond BD activity type were considered for analysis, and those that were considered still do not reflect the complete picture of BD service delivery in the 8(a) program. Results of the analysis of GMATT data are only reflective of what BD activities had been recorded, not necessarily the full scope of what BD activities were provided.

Limitation 4: Recency of shift away from ownership eligibility (compliance) focus. Informed by the findings of a 2022 Office of Inspector General (OIG) audit, the SBA recently shifted the focus of BOS activities from compliance (ensuring continued firm eligibility) to business assistance. Given the recency of this shift (June 2022), the SBA is continuing to make adjustments and provide new guidance to BOSs. While the shift was intended to be fully implemented by the time this evaluation began primary data collection, the impacts are ongoing. This led to the identification of process variations in the VSM sessions resulting from ongoing changes. Throughout the evaluation, our team maintained contact with program leadership to ensure we remained up to date on process changes related to this shift.

4 FINDINGS

This section presents the key findings of this evaluation. A summary of findings from the process maps and logic model refinement are presented first, followed by findings organized by research question.

4.1 Summary of findings from process maps and logic model refinement

4.1.1 Process maps

Summit developed a current-state process map that depicts the current state of BD-related activities in the 8(a) program, beginning with a firm's acceptance into the program. It is important to note that the BOSs' responsibilities are much broader than the actions included in the process map, as it is restricted only to the BD-specific actions within this scope. The current-state process documents each BD activity, responsibility for conducting each activity, process time and delay time for each activity, the frequency with which each activity occurs, and pain points and areas of inefficiency or waste. The future-state process map identifies potential process improvements to reduce inefficiency or waste and address pain points. The current-state and future-state process maps are presented in Appendix C and Appendix D, respectively.

Key findings from the process map development include:

- *Most activities are conducted as needed rather than at a predefined point in a sequential process.* There are several processes with clear activities that must be conducted in a specific order (for example, program onboarding in which a firm is assigned a BOS and participates in an orientation session or conducting an annual review evaluation). However, many BD activities are not part of a clear sequential process. Instead, activities such as providing counseling and guidance (on a variety of topics based on the firm's needs), providing Joint Venture partnership guidance, connecting firms to local and state supplier diversity partners, initiating and sending requirement letters, and many more are conducted on an ad hoc, as-needed basis. In other words, these activities are not part of a sequential process with a designated order of steps. This finding reflects that much of the BOSs' BD workload is based on firms' specific needs.
- *Process variations are largely due to workloads or differences across DOs.* Process variations were mostly identified at the DO level. Variations were generally due to differences in workloads across DOs, rather than driven by specific firm needs. For example, most DOs assign BOSs on an individual basis for new firms, but some high-volume DOs assign new firms in batches.
- *Differences in delay time primarily due to portfolio volume.* The most notable differences in delay times in the process map were due to high caseloads in specific DOs. For example, when a new firm is accepted into the program, the delay time for assigning a BOS to the new firm was estimated at 1 day to 2 weeks for most DOs. However, one high-volume DO estimated delay time could be as high as 4 months.
- *Responsibility for conducting tasks varies based on DO composition.* OFO DOs include SBA staff in the following roles: BOS, Business Development Specialist (BDS), Lead Business Opportunity Specialist (LBOS), Supervisory Business Opportunity Specialist (SBOS), District Director (DD), and Deputy District Director (DDD). However, the specific roles within each DO vary; for example, not all DOs have a BDS, BOS, or LBOS. The role responsible for specific BD activities in the process map may depend on the roles available in that office. For example, assigning a BOS to a

new firm in the program may be done by an LBOS, SBOS, DDD, or DD, depending upon the composition of the specific DO.

4.1.2 Logic model refinement

Based on findings from the document review, informational meetings with program leadership, and survey results, Summit revised the existing 8(a) BD Program logic model, focusing specifically on 8(a) BD servicing activities. The logic model revisions focused on creating specific, measurable metrics for program outputs and outcomes (short-term, intermediate, and long-term) to allow the SBA to create continuous improvement opportunities and organize structural and procedural changes around the identified outcomes. The refined logic model is provided in Appendix E.

4.2 Research Question 1

What is the frequency and distribution of BD services received by 8(a) firms?

RQ1 executive summary. *Caseload.* Almost half of BOSs (47%) have a caseload of 30 to 50 firms, while 32% have fewer than 30 and 21% have more than 50 firms. Of the SBA's 10 regions, Region 3 has the most 8(a) firms and BOSs entering data in GMATT.

Time spent on BD activities. Eighty-seven percent of BOSs spend more than 20 hours per week on BD activities. They reported that BD activities represent a large portion of their time and some activities (such as evaluating the annual review package) are particularly time-intensive.

BOSs report spending the most time conducting annual reviews; providing training, guidance, or advice to program participants; and managing and servicing contracts. Due to their high workloads, BOSs also reported prioritizing actions with a monetary impact for firms over more purely business development actions.

How BD services are influenced by various factors. The data show that BD services are primarily influenced by firm business goals and needs:

- BOSs and leadership agreed that BD services are or should be influenced by (1) the 8(a) firm's business goals and needs and (2) the firm participation stage.
- Both BOS and leadership survey respondents agree that 8(a) firm–DO geographic proximity does not (BOS) or should not (leadership) influence BD services. The exception is annual field visits, which 80% of BOSs reported are impacted by geographic proximity.
- Leadership survey respondents felt that DO goaling metrics and the DO where the BOS is located should not have an influence on how BD services are tailored (BOSs were not asked about these factors).

Variation across DOs. Regional variations were found in how BOSs allocate their time, what types of counseling and guidance are provided, whether the annual field visit is completed, whether BOSs share 8(a) capability statements with procuring activities, and whether BOSs initiate and send search letters. In addition, the OIG report noted a need for clear, standardized processes to supplement the SOP information, suggesting the need for an updated desk guide.

7(j) program. The majority of BOSs (80%) report connecting most or all of their firms to the 7(j) program. BOS and leadership survey respondents agreed that the 7(j) program is effective (60% and 63%, respectively). However, information on how useful 8(a) firms find these trainings is lacking.

Mentor-Protégé Program. The majority of both BOS (89%) and leadership (89%) survey respondents reported that the MPP is effective. However, BOS survey respondents reported low rates of 8(a) firms entering the MPP, and there was variation in whether and how BOSs help firms evaluate potential mentors, ranging from no guidance to evaluating mentors for firms.

4.2.1 Research Question 1a

How much time per week do BOSs allocate to BD services and activities and for how many firms?

Summary: Caseload. Roughly half of BOSs (47%) have a caseload of 30-50 firms, while 32% have less than 30 and 21% have more than 50. Region 3 has both the largest number of 8(a) firms and the most BOSs entering data in GMATT. Although Region 3 has twice as many 8(a) firms as Region 4 (the region with the second-highest caseload), it only has six more BOSs to handle this caseload.

Time spent per week. The majority (87%) of BOSs reported spending more than 20 hours per week on BD activities. BOSs with more firms report spending more time on BD activities, but they are also balancing non-BD activities with compliance actions for their firms. In the VSM sessions, BOSs reported that BD activities represent a significant portion of how they spend their time and certain activities (such as evaluating the annual review package) are particularly time-intensive.



Documentation review. The OIG report documents several findings related to staffing levels and caseloads. The report asserts that the program did not ensure that “staffing levels were consistent with established expectations designed to balance program objectives with available resources,” which may result in 8(a) firms not receiving the support they need to compete for contracts. At the time of the OIG report publication, they found that BOSs at 14 out of 68 DOs were assigned more than 40 firms; those 14 DOs had more than half of all 8(a) firms in the program portfolio.



Survey. Around half of BOSs (46%) reported a caseload of 30 to 50 firms, while 32% reported less than 30 firms and 21% reported more than 50 firms. Additionally, most BOSs reported spending a significant amount of their work week providing BD services. Thirteen percent spent 11 to 20 hours, 30% spent 21 to 30 hours, 39% spent 31 to 40 hours, and 9% spent more than 40 hours on BD services.

Figure 2 shows how the time spent per week on BD activities varies based on BOS caseload. As shown in the chart, BOSs with more than 50 firms were more likely to report spending more than 30 hours per week on BD services (70%) compared to BOSs with 30 to 50 firms (53%) or less than 30 firms (29%). While it might seem self-explanatory that BOSs with more firms spend more time on BD activities, there is more nuance to this finding. BD services are not the entirety of the BOSs’ workload; they also conduct other activities for the 8(a) program that do not fall in this category (such as processing updates to firm characteristics or information). A BOS with more firms will also have more non-BD activities to conduct than a BOS with fewer firms. In addition, BOSs may also have responsibilities outside of the 8(a) program that they are juggling with their caseload.



Figure 2: BOS caseload by time per week spent on BD activities

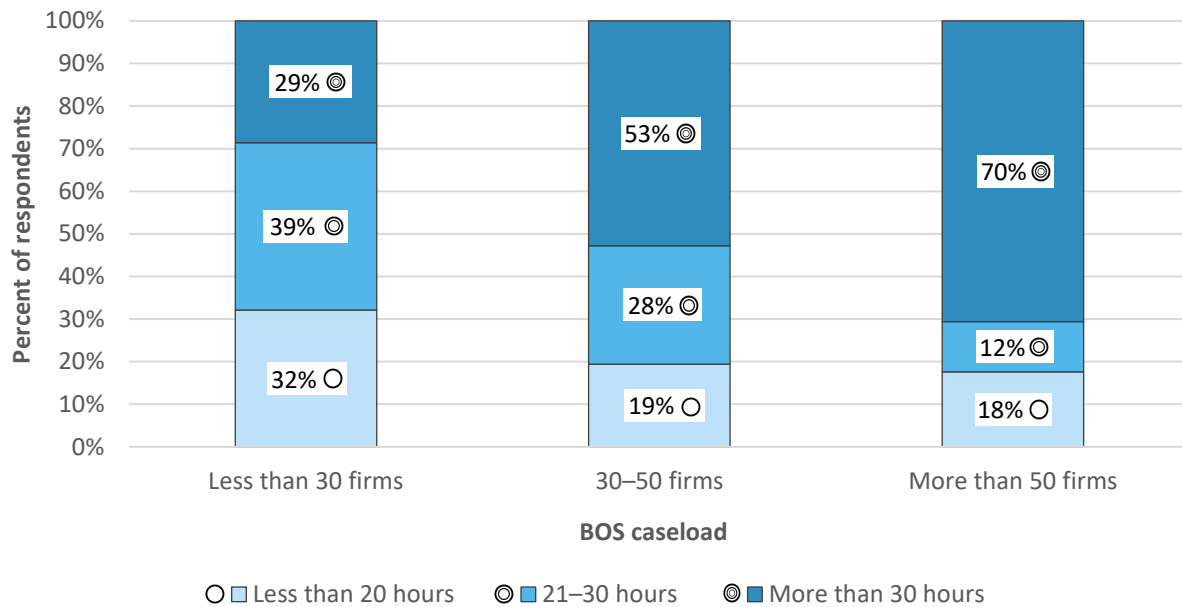
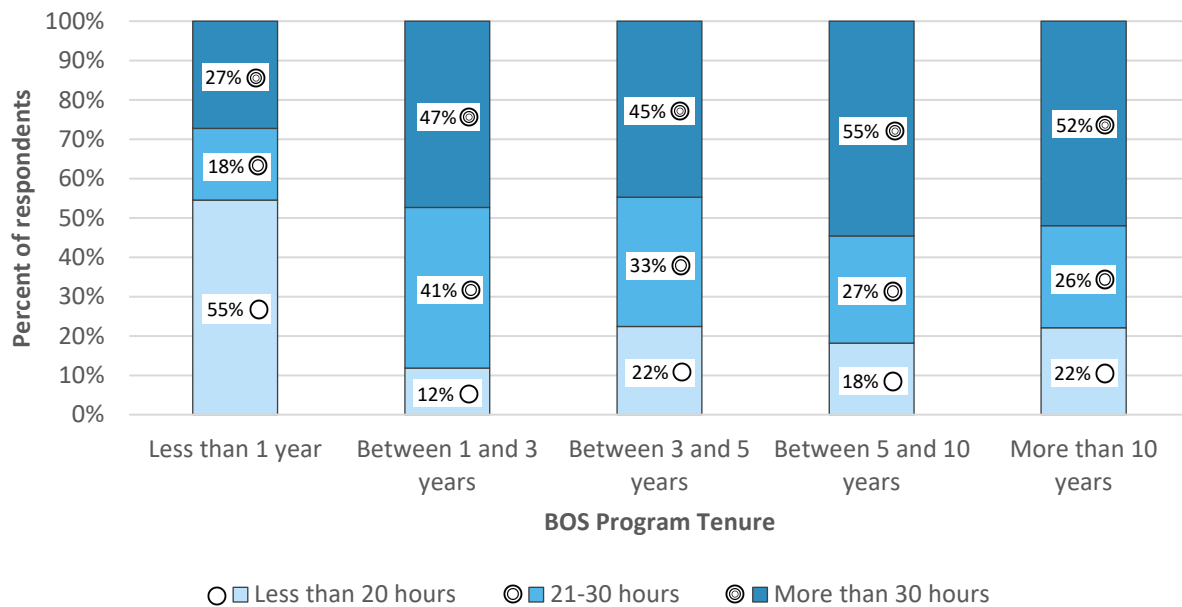


Figure 3 shows how BOS tenure in the 8(a) BD program is associated with the amount of time spent per week on BD activities. Interestingly, BOSs that have worked in the 8(a) program for less than a year spend less time on BD activities. As shown in Figure 3, 55% of BOSs that have been with the program for less than a year report spending less than 20 hours on BD activities, compared with an average of 17% across all longer-tenured BOSs who report the same.

Figure 3: Program tenure by time per week spent on BD activities





VSM. The VSM sessions provided information on the time that BOSs spend on each BD activity, including both process time and delay time. This information is depicted in the process maps in Appendix C and Appendix D.

BD activities represent a significant portion of BOS time. BOSs reported that they spend a very large part of their time conducting the BD activities. In particular, providing counseling and guidance to 8(a) firms—which can include ad hoc or scheduled meetings with the firm, referring firms to resource partners for training or technical assistance, answering firm questions, and many other types of support—represents a large part of the workload for most BOSs. While each individual instance of counseling or guidance may only be a half-hour phone call or 15 minutes spent writing an email, the volume of these activities is the reason BOSs spend so much time on this action.

Time-intensive activities. Certain BD activities—such as evaluating the annual review package, receiving offering letters, and completing acceptance letters—require much longer process time than other activities. For example, when a procuring activity sends the SBA an offering letter to document the intent to award a contract in the 8(a) program, the BOS then processes the determination of eligibility and creates an acceptance letter (the SBA’s formal acceptance of the contract into the 8(a) program for award). Estimates of process time for this activity ranged from 2.5 hours up to 12 hours. The potentially long process times for this step were attributed to pain points such as receipt of incomplete offering letters with missing information, time spent creating the acceptance letter (including generating the requirement number in Certify), and the process of completing the determination of eligibility (which was described as “very technical”).

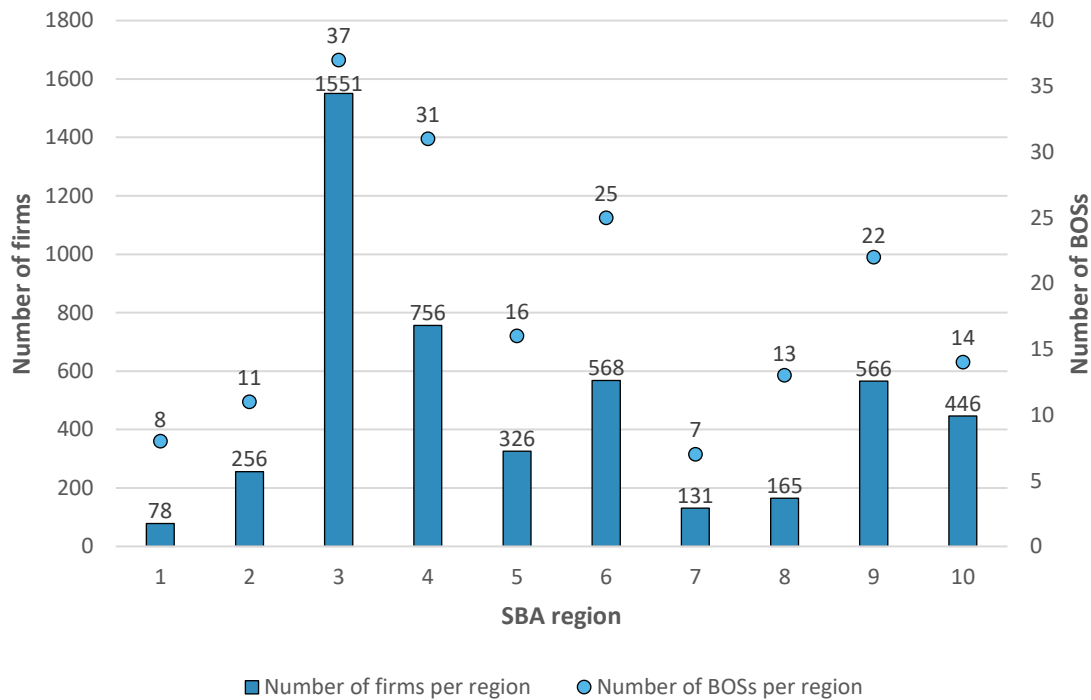
BOS workloads impact time spent. All six VSM groups discussed the impact of high workloads on the BD services that BOSs provide. In some cases, high workloads mean BOSs aren’t able to accomplish certain tasks. For example, respondents in one VSM session reported having to delay tasks to the next month when other staff are out of the office. Respondents in another session noted that while the best time to conduct the annual field visit is within 30 days of the annual review (when findings are fresh in their minds), this is sometimes done when “workload permits,” which may be months later. We also found notable variation in delay times for certain activities in high-volume DOs. For example, evaluating the annual review using the annual review workbook had a delay time of up to 6 months for high-volume DOs, compared to 1 to 3 weeks for other DOs.



Administrative data. While the available administrative data cannot accurately answer the question of how many 8(a) firms each BOS services, they can be used to understand how many 8(a) firms are serviced by each SBA region. Figure 4 shows the number of 8(a) firms in each of the SBA’s 10 regions (from Certify data) and the number of BOSs recording data in each region from FY 2022 Q1 to FY 2023 Q3 (from GMATT data).⁶ Notably, Region 3 has the most firms—more than double the number of 8(a) firms in Region 4, the region with the second-highest caseload—and the most BOSs entering data. However, although Region 3 has double the number of 8(a) firms as Region 4, it only has six more BOSs entering data.

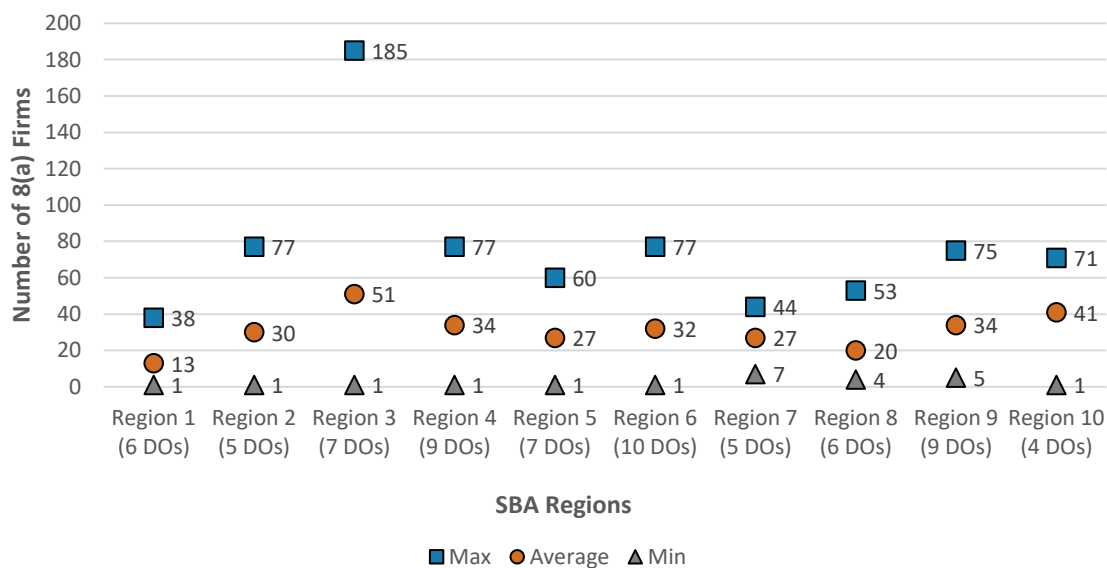
⁶ Data from FY 2023 Q3 are incomplete; the dates of collected data range from the beginning of the fiscal quarter to June 8, 2023.

Figure 4: Number of 8(a) firms and BOSs in each SBA region



GMATT data also show the number of 8(a) firms BOSs entered data for in GMATT from FY 2022 Q1 to FY 2023 Q3, as shown in Figure 5.⁷ The BOSs in most regions have an average of 20 to 40 firms. Region 3, however, has a few outliers, with a few BOSs entering data for between 170 and 190 firms.

Figure 5: Number of 8(a) firms for which BOSs entered data



⁷ Data from FY 2023 Q3 are incomplete; the dates of collected data range from the beginning of the fiscal quarter to June 8, 2023.

GMATT data also reveal that, on average, firms in all regions have a single BOS recording data for them in GMATT, though one firm in Region 3 had associated entries from eight different BOSs.

4.2.2 Research Question 1b

How do BOSs allocate time among BD services and activities?

Summary: BOS survey respondents report spending the most time conducting annual reviews; providing training, guidance, or advice to program participants; and managing and servicing contracts. BOSs and leadership agreed that more time should be spent on the first two activities.

Due to their high workloads, BOSs reported prioritizing actions with financial implications for firms (such as approving business plans, which are required before firms are eligible to receive 8(a) contracts) over BD activities without the same monetary impact.



Survey. *How BOSs allocated their time.* Out of 11 BD activities, BOSs reported they spend the most time conducting annual reviews, followed by providing training, guidance, or advice to program participants; managing and servicing contracts; and conducting field visits and working with procuring activities. BOSs spend the least amount of time conducting mentor-protégé counseling. Notable differences in these responses by region include:

- **Providing referrals to SBA Resource Partners and APEX accelerators:** BOSs in five regions spent more time than average providing referrals. BOSs in one of these regions report they spend the second-most time on referrals overall (they reported spending the most time on annual reviews).
- **Providing access to 7(j) assistance:** BOSs in three regions spend more time providing access to 7(j) assistance than the other regions.
- **Mentor-protégé counseling:** BOSs in three regions spent more time providing mentor-protégé counseling than BOSs in other regions.
- **Working with procuring activities:** BOSs in two regions spent less time than average working with procuring activities.

Other patterns included that BDSs spend more time providing referrals to SBA Resource Partners and APEX accelerators compared to BOSs. Additionally, BOSs with a lower caseload reported spending significantly more time on this activity than BOSs with higher caseloads. Together, these findings may suggest that when BOSs have more time, they are more likely to conduct this activity.

Activities on which to spend more time. BOSs were also asked to select which activities they would like to be able to spend more time on to improve 8(a) firms' BD outcomes (top five activities shown in Table 5), while program leadership were asked to select which activities BOSs *should* spend more time on (top five activities shown in Table 6).

Table 5: BD activities on which BOSs would like to spend more time

Type of Activity	Count	Percent of Respondents
Working with procuring activities to identify requirements, forward 8(a) capability statements, and identify new 8(a) firms	53	68%
Providing training, guidance, or advice to program participants	46	59%
Conducting annual reviews (including business plan review and financial review)	26	33%
Managing and servicing contracts including offer/acceptance review	24	31%
Monitoring firm success in securing non-8(a) contract opportunities	24	31%

Table 6: BD activities on which BOSs should spend more time according to leadership

Type of Activity	Count	Percent of Respondents
Providing training, guidance, or advice to program participants	60	80%
Working with procuring activities to identify requirements, forward 8(a) capability statements, and identify new 8(a) firms	59	79%
Conducting 8(a) orientation for new program participants	39	52%
Conducting field visits	38	51%
Monitoring firm success in securing non-8(a) contract opportunities	32	43%

BOSs and program leadership agree that BOSs should spend more of their time (1) working with procuring activities to identify requirements, forwarding 8(a) capability statements, and identifying new 8(a) firms and (2) providing training, guidance, or advice to program participants. As discussed earlier, these are the activities that BOSs already report spending more time on compared to other BD activities, suggesting they are time-intensive activities.



VSM. Given high workloads, BOSs in three of six VSM groups reported prioritizing actions with a monetary impact for firms over more purely business development actions. For example, some BOSs prioritized the business plan review—as an approved business plan is required before firms are eligible to receive 8(a) contracts—and offering letters (which one BOS noted mean “actual money to the firm”).



Administrative data. Annual reviews are the most entered activity in GMATT across all regions, representing 40% of all BD entries in GMATT; according to program leadership, the annual review is required to be entered into GMATT.

4.2.3 Research Question 1c

How are BD services influenced by (1) the 8(a) firm’s business goals and needs; (2) the 8(a) firm–BOS geographic proximity; (3) the homogeneity of 8(a) firms serviced by the BOS; and (4) the BOS’s annual performance metrics?

Summary: BD services are primarily influenced by firm business goals and needs, rather than other factors identified in the research question:

- The SOP suggests that the 8(a) firm’s business goals and needs should influence the business plan review, annual review, and annual field visit. However, the OIG report noted a need for clear, standardized processes to supplement the SOP information, suggesting the need for an updated desk guide.

- BOS and leadership survey respondents reported that BD services are and should be influenced by (1) the 8(a) firm’s business goals and needs and (2) the firm participation stage.
- Both BOS and leadership survey respondents agree that 8(a) firm–DO geographic proximity does not (BOS) or should not (leadership) influence BD services (the exception being annual field visits, which 80% of BOSs reported are impacted by geographic proximity).
- Leadership survey respondents felt that DO goaling metrics and the DO where the BOS is located should not have an influence on how BD services are tailored (BOSs were not asked about these factors).
- VSM data showed that provision of counseling and guidance as well as recommendations based on the annual review are both influenced by the 8(a) firm’s business goals and needs.



Document review. According to the SOP, the 8(a) firm’s business goals and needs should influence the business plan review, annual review, and annual field visit. While the SOP notes that BOSs’ overall responsibilities include helping firms identify their strengths and weaknesses and providing advice, counsel, and guidance, it does not directly state that these actions should be tailored to the firm’s specific goals and needs. The SOP does not include information on tailoring BD services based on firm–BOS geographic proximity, homogeneity of the BOS’s caseload, or annual performance metrics.

The 2022 OIG report stated that the 8(a) program was lacking standardized procedures for reviewing business plans and documenting firm progress in meeting its goals. OIG’s recommendations included implementing standard processes to approve business plans, monitoring annual review of business plans, and tracking firms’ achievement of their targets and goals. While the SOP re-iterates the regulations, clear processes are not established. These findings support the need for an up-to-date desk guide that provides clear step-by-step instructions for key BD activities. Appendix 3A in the SOP (“Steps to Conducting a Site Visit to an 8(a) Participant”) provides a good example of the type of step-by-step instructions that would be useful to provide for all relevant processes.

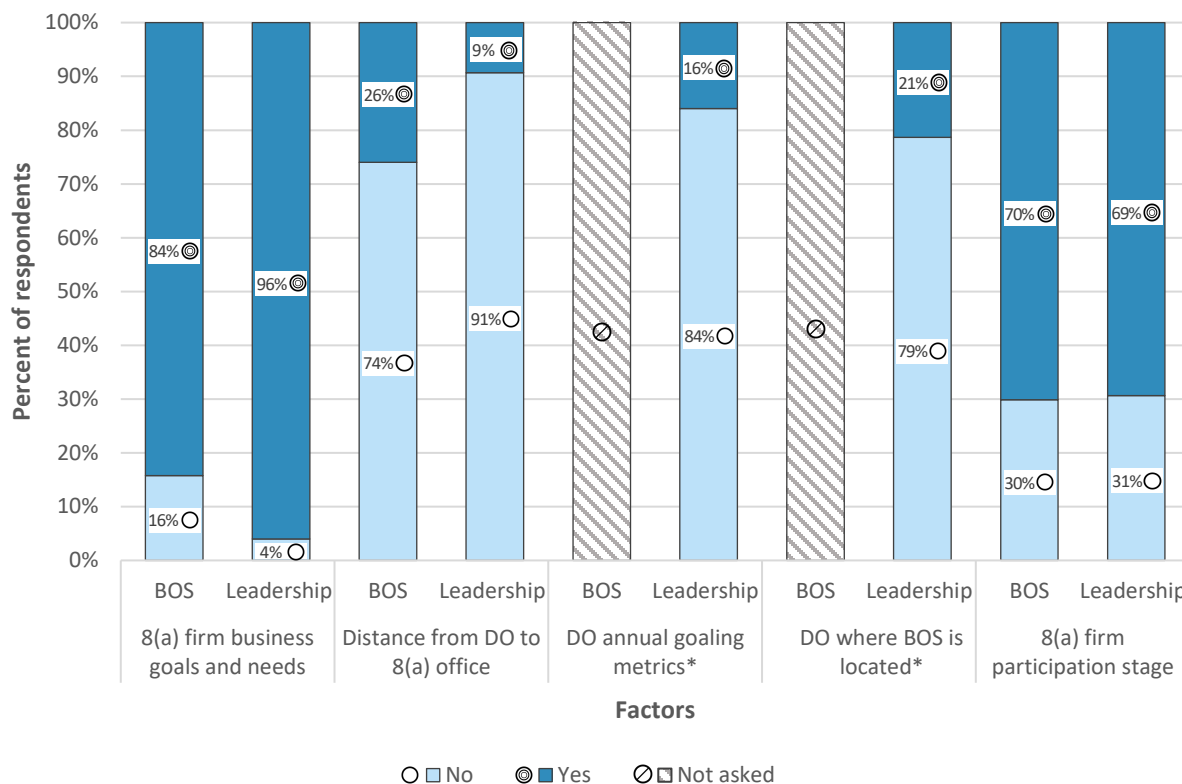


Survey. The survey asked BOSs to identify which factors *do* influence how they tailor BD services, while leadership were asked which factors *should* influence how BOSs tailor BD services. These results are shown in Figure 6. A large majority of BOSs answered that the 8(a) firm’s specific business goals and needs (84%) and their participation stage (70%) *do* influence how BD services are tailored, but distance from the servicing DO to the 8(a) firm does not.⁸ This mirrors responses from the leadership survey, in which respondents reported that business goals and needs (96%) and participation stage (69%) *should* influence how BD services are tailored, while geographic proximity should not (9%). Leadership were also asked about DO goaling metrics and the DO where the BOS is located; most respondents felt these *should not* have an influence on how BD services are tailored. Only 16% of program leadership believed DO goaling metrics *should* influence BD services, and 21% of program leadership indicated the DO where the BOS is located *should* influence BD services.

⁸ Survey questions related to the 8(a) firm-BOS geographic proximity collected data on the impact of the distance between the servicing DO and the 8(a) firm office but did not distinguish between 8(a) firms located within the servicing BOS’s DO compared to firms located outside of their servicing BOS’s DO.



Figure 6: Factors that influence how BOSs tailor BD services



Note: BOS respondents were not asked about the DO’s annual goaling metrics or the DO in which the BOS is located.

Although most respondents felt that the distance from the servicing DO to the 8(a) office does not or should not influence the tailoring of BD services (shown in Figure 6), we find an outlier when examining how BOSs believe the factor influences *specific BD activities*. Unlike for other BD activities, 85% of BOSs stated that the distance from the servicing DO to the 8(a) office *does* impact how field visits are conducted. This difference is likely due to the need to travel to the firm’s office location if the field visit is being conducted in person.



VSM. VSM data showed that variations in how BD services are provided are primarily due to the 8(a) firm’s business goals and needs, not the 8(a) firm–BOS geographic proximity, the homogeneity of 8(a) firms serviced by the BOS, or the BOS’s annual performance metrics. The variations in how BD services are provided based on specific 8(a) firm business goals and needs reflect how BOSs adapt their services to meet their customers’ needs and do not represent waste or unnecessary variation.

- After the annual review, BOSs make suggestions and recommendations for each specific firm using the annual review workbook. These suggestions are tailored based on the firm’s specific goals and needs as documented in their business plan. Firms meeting or exceeding the goals in their business plan receive recommendations that differ from firms struggling to meet their goals in specific areas.

- The provision of counseling and guidance to 8(a) firms is an activity that covers a wide range of topics driven primarily by the specific firm’s needs. For example, this can include ad hoc or scheduled meetings with the firm, referring firms to resource partners for training or technical assistance, answering firm questions, and many other types of support. The specific type and topic of support provided depends upon the needs of the firm.

4.2.4 Research Question 1d

To what extent do the 7(j) and Mentor-Protégé programs provide business guidance and development support?

Summary: 7(j) program. Eighty percent of BOS survey respondents connect all or most of their firms to the 7(j) program. The majority of both BOS (60%) and leadership (63%) survey respondents reported that the 7(j) program is effective. According to VSM participants, the only action related to the 7(j) program outside of the annual review is sending an email to all firms about upcoming 7(j) classes when information is received from OFO. However, information is lacking on how useful these trainings are to 8(a) firms.

Mentor-Protégé Program. BOS survey respondents reported low rates of 8(a) firms entering the MPP; no BOSs said all their firms entered the program, and the majority (60%) said a few of their firms entered the program. The majority of both BOS (89%) and leadership (89%) survey respondents reported that the MPP is effective. VSM respondents noted that although BOSs are not involved with MPP applications or agreements, they do provide guidance to firms. There was variation in whether and how BOSs help firms evaluate potential mentors, ranging from no guidance to evaluating mentors for firms.



Document review. 7(j) program. The 7(j) Management and Technical Assistance Program—also known as the 7(j) program—provides training on a variety of business topics, including marketing, accounting, opportunity development and capture, contract management, compliance, and financial analysis. According to the SOP, 7(j) assistance is provided through third-party providers that have entered into grants or cooperative agreements with the SBA. The SOP states that BOS responsibilities include assessing the firm’s need for management and technical assistance and referring the firm to service delivery partners such as 7(j) partners when relevant. This is highlighted in a general overview of BOS responsibilities and in reference to the annual reviews specifically. While the SOP states that the BOS should communicate the firm’s specific needs to the service provider, this information appears to be out of date; Summit learned from program leadership that 7(j) trainings are now group trainings on predetermined topics, rather than one-on-one trainings on specific topics requested by the firm.

Mentor-Protégé Program. According to the Congressional Research Service (CRS) report, the MPP provides assistance including “technical or management training, financial assistance in the form of equity investments or loans, subcontracts, trade education, and assistance in performing prime contracts with the federal government through joint venture agreements.” The SOP states that it establishes SBA policy for the All Small Mentor-Protégé Program (ASMPP)—which has merged into the MPP⁹—and provides guidance for “reviewing and evaluating small business applications for compliance

⁹ U.S. Small Business Administration, “SBA Mentor-Protégé program.” Revised June 8, 2023. <https://www.sba.gov/federal-contracting/contracting-assistance-programs/sba-mentor-protege-program>

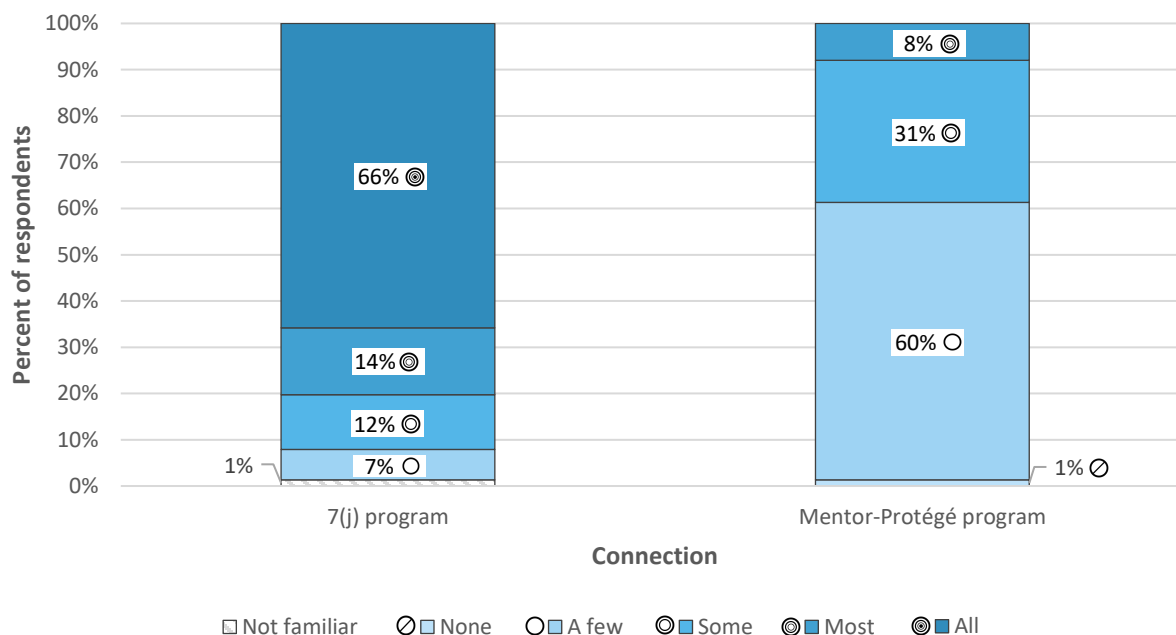


with program regulations, standard operating procedures, and policies; approval or denial of Mentor-Protégé applications; and reviewing performance under approved Mentor-Protégé Agreements.” The detailed instructions in the SOP pertain to Business Analyst responsibilities for processing and reviewing MPP applications.



Survey. *Firm participation rates.* As shown in Figure 7, a large majority of BOSs connect all (66%) or most (14%) of their firms to the 7(j) program.

Figure 7: Number of firms connected to 7(j) or entering MPP according to BOSs

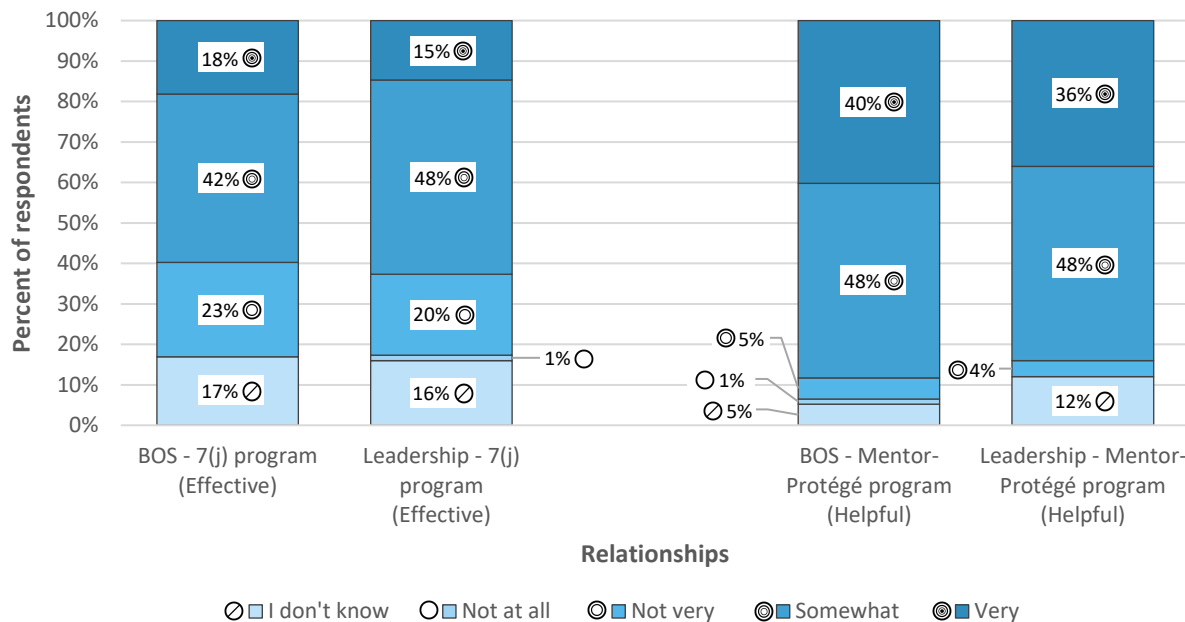


There are a handful of patterns in participation rates associated with BOS characteristics. More BOSs with 1 to 3 years of program tenure (73%) and greater than 10 years of program tenure (87%) connected all 8(a) firms, compared to the average (50%). Additionally, more BOSs with 0 to 29 firms connect all of their firms (72%), compared to BOSs with 35 to 50 firms (66%) and more than 50 firms (53%).

Turning to the Mentor-Protégé Program, BOSs reported low rates of firms entering this program. No BOSs reported that all their firms entered the program, and only 8% reported most of their firms enter the program. The majority of respondents (60%) reported a few of their firms enter the program. There are a handful of patterns in participation rates associated with BOS characteristics. Thirty-six percent of BOSs in one region report most of their firms enter the MPP, compared to 2% across other regions. Additionally, BOSs with smaller caseloads reported fewer firms entering the MPP; 17% of BOSs with caseloads of 0 to 29 had some or most of their firms enter the program, compared to BOSs with caseloads of 30 to 50 (40%) and greater than 50 (69%).

Program effectiveness. As shown in Figure 8, the majority of both BOS and leadership respondents reported that 7(j) program support was effective and the mentor-protégé relationship was helpful.

Figure 8: Effectiveness of 7(j) assistance and helpfulness of MPP relationships according to BOSs



For the 7(j) program, 60% of BOS respondents and 63% of leadership respondents indicate the program is somewhat or very effective. Only one leadership respondent indicated the 7(j) program was not at all effective. For the MPP, 89% of BOS respondents and 89% of leadership respondents indicated that the mentor-protégé relationship was somewhat or very helpful. Only one BOS respondent (and no leadership respondents) indicated that the mentor-protégé relationship was not at all helpful.

Among program leadership, respondents who reported that the 7(j) training or mentor-protégé relationship was not very or not at all effective received a follow-up question to provide further feedback. Two respondents stated that the mentor-protégé relationship is not helpful because firms join the program primarily to earn contracts, not for mentoring opportunities. Leadership feedback on why the 7(j) program is not effective included concerns that trainings are too basic, not relevant for 8(a) firms, poor quality, or not the appropriate topics for firm needs.



VSM. 7(j) program. According to VSM participants, assessing firm needs and recommending specific 7(j) training is part of the annual review process. Outside of the annual review, the only related action for BOSs is sending an email blast to all firms about upcoming 7(j) classes. This is done when the BOS has received the information from OFO to pass along to their firms.

It is unclear from the VSM data how frequently 8(a) firms take 7(j) classes. BOSs who work with entity-owned firms stated that these firms typically do not participate in 7(j) classes. One DO reported they treat five 7(j) courses as mandatory for new firms onboarding into the 8(a) program.

There is no data entry associated with this step, as BOSs do not track whether firms have taken classes during the year. While the annual review package captures whether a firm took a 7(j) class, it does not capture how many classes or which subjects. Additionally, information is lacking on how helpful 8(a) participants feel these trainings are, including whether the appropriate topics are offered and the impact of the shift from one-on-one trainings to group classes.



Mentor-Protégé Program. Although BOSs are not involved with MPP applications or agreements, they do provide guidance (typically when requested by firms). This guidance can include answering firm questions about MPP participation, referring the firm to resources such as the MPP email address, and providing guidance for how to evaluate a potential mentor. There was variation in whether and how BOSs help firms evaluate potential mentors. Participants in one VSM session each reported:

- Assisting firms with evaluating possible mentors;
- Providing guidance to firms on how to evaluate (but not assisting with the evaluation);
- Evaluating mentors; and
- Not evaluating mentors at all.

The BOS who reported they do evaluate mentors explained they do this to protect their firms, because they had “really bad experiences with some mentors, one that took an entire business away from one of my 8(a) firms like right underneath their nose.” These variations in the type of guidance provided may result from the recent changes that reduced BOSs’ responsibility for the MPP, as more tenured BOSs would still retain the detailed information that they were previously responsible for sharing with BOSs.

There was a lack of consistency regarding whether any data entry occurs after this action. Participants in two VSM sessions reported no data entry. Participants in one VSM session reported entering this action as a counseling session under the “BD” entry in GMATT, while participants in another session reported they may make this GMATT entry depending on “how we are on our GMATT goals.”

4.2.5 Research Question 1e

To what extent do BD services vary across district offices?

Summary: The survey found regional variations in how BOSs allocate their time across BD services, how many firms are connected to the 7(j) program, and how many firms enter the MPP. Further, the VSM sessions found variations in what types of counseling and guidance are provided across DOs (including whether BOSs consider their guidance as “training”), whether the annual field visit is completed, whether BOSs share 8(a) capability statements with procuring activities, and whether BOSs initiate and send search letters.

Findings relevant to this research question are presented in aggregate at the region level, rather than the DO level, to maintain anonymity of participants.



Survey. As shown above, we found meaningful regional variation across regions regarding how BOSs allocate their time across BD services, how many firms they connect to the 7(j) program, and how many firms enter the MPP. These regional variations are summarized below.

How BOSs allocate time across BD services. BOSs from two regions reported spending more time than average providing referrals to SBA resource partners, access to 7(j) assistance, and mentor protégé counseling. Conversely, BOSs in these regions reported spending less time than average working with procuring activities. BOSs from two regions differed from BOSs in other regions regarding the BD activities they would like to spend more time on; these were the only two regions in which the BOSs indicated there are very few activities on which they would like to spend more time.

Connections to 7(j) and MPP. There was some regional variation with respect to the frequency with which BOSs reported connecting their firms with business guidance and development support through

the 7(j) program and how many of their firms enter the Mentor-Protégé Program. BOSs in one region reported connecting fewer of their firms to the 7(j) program than other regions. While 85% of BOSs in other regions connect all or most of their firms to the 7(j) program, only 57% of BOSs in this one region reported doing the same. However, BOSs in that region reported 36% of their firms enter the Mentor-Protégé Program compared to 2% across other regions.



VSM. The VSM sessions identified several variations in what BD services are provided across DOs, including:

- *Providing counseling and guidance to 8(a) firms.* There was variation across DOs regarding whether counseling and guidance is initiated by the BOS or done at the firm’s request. Most participants reported this action is initiated by the firm. As one BOS noted, “[W]e don’t have the personnel to be proactively reaching out.” However, one DO reported organizing standing monthly meetings with their firms. Another DO noted that “when we were fully staffed” they were able to schedule standing 30- to 60-minute monthly calls with their firms to monitor progress and provide counseling.
- *Conducting annual field visits.* The annual field visit currently happens upon completion of the annual review. However, one DO—which primarily services entity-owned firms—reported that instead of a formal annual field visit they have a continual “open-door policy” and routinely meet with their firms throughout the year.
- *Sharing 8(a) capability statements with procuring activities.* One DO noted that they encourage firms to share their capability statements directly with the procuring activities, rather than the BOS doing so. This is both due to high BOS workloads and because it “[cuts] out the middleman” as the firm is best able to market itself. According to one BOS, “That’s a piece of customer service, in my opinion, that we don’t have the capability for.”
- *Initiating and sending search letters.* Search letters are requests sent from the SBA to an agency to identify and reserve requirements for a particular 8(a) firm. However, search letters are not done consistently across DOs; some reported never doing search letters, while others do them rarely. These letters are not typically completed for entity-owned firms but may be done for individually owned firms. One DO reported completing search letters only at the firm’s request when they have identified an agency within which they hope to do business. Another DO that does not complete search letters noted that if they did these, “they’d spend all day doing nothing but search letters” given how large their requirements are and how many firms they service. BOSs in this DO felt that search letters are a “waste of time” because firm capability statements are a better way for procuring agencies to see what firms can do and require less effort from BOSs with high workloads to submit.
- *Providing trainings.* While the majority of BOSs do not provide what they consider “training” (typically referring firms to resource partners instead), an exception was the DOs in one VSM session focused on BOSs who service entity-owned firms in addition to individually-owned firms. These participants reported conducting trainings for their firms as needed on topics such as understanding and responding to solicitations, reading agency forecasts, and navigating SAM.gov. Although some BOSs in other sessions also reported providing guidance on these topics, they did not consider it training.

The variations in the type of guidance that BOSs provide regarding participation in the Mentor-Protégé Program and use of the 7(j) program were previously discussed.



4.3 Research Question 2

What processes and procedures do staff use to conduct 8(a) BD activities?

RQ2 executive summary. Policy and procedure development. Survey respondents agreed that GCBD/OBD program leadership are involved in creating policies and procedures (80% of BOSs, 85% of program leadership). While program leadership were more likely to say this group is *primarily* responsible for developing policies and procedures (86%), most BOSs (62%) stated the same. VSM sessions showed that frequent changes led to confusion among BOSs on the most up-to-date procedures. This finding suggests a need for more consistent communication of policy changes and a change log or central repository documenting all changes.

Staff policy and procedure training. BOS survey respondents reported receiving training on policies and procedures via web conferencing (96%) and reference materials such as handouts or job aids (59%). BOSs (46%) and program leadership (48%) generally rated training effectiveness as “good” (the middle option of a five-point scale from “poor” to “excellent”). BOSs and leadership suggested additional training on financial analysis would be beneficial.

Staff skills. Most BOSs felt they have the skills necessary to effectively provide BD services to their 8(a) firms. BOSs rated their skills in communication-related competencies the highest, while business-related competencies (such as business finance) were rated the lowest. Leadership reported that the competencies requiring the highest level of BOS expertise involve directly increasing BD acumen of 8(a) firms (for example, business coaching), while the competencies requiring the lowest level of expertise centered on softer skills such as leveraging diversity.

Factors influencing process and procedure implementation. Survey respondents stated that the firm’s business goals and needs does (82% of BOSs) or should (95%) of leadership influence implementation a great deal or a moderate amount. Sixty-nine percent of BOS survey respondents said the firm–BOS geographic proximity *does not* influence implementation of processes and procedures at all, while 49% of leadership said it *should not* influence implementation.

Process and procedure variation across DOs. While 41% of program leadership survey respondents felt that the BOS’s DO *should not* impact implementation of processes and procedures, roughly half felt it *should* influence implementation a great deal or a moderate amount. The VSM sessions identified variations in several BD activities including how orientation sessions are conducted, reviewing and approving the business plan, and screening the firm’s annual review for completeness.

4.3.1 Research Question 2a

How are 8(a) BD services policies and procedures developed?

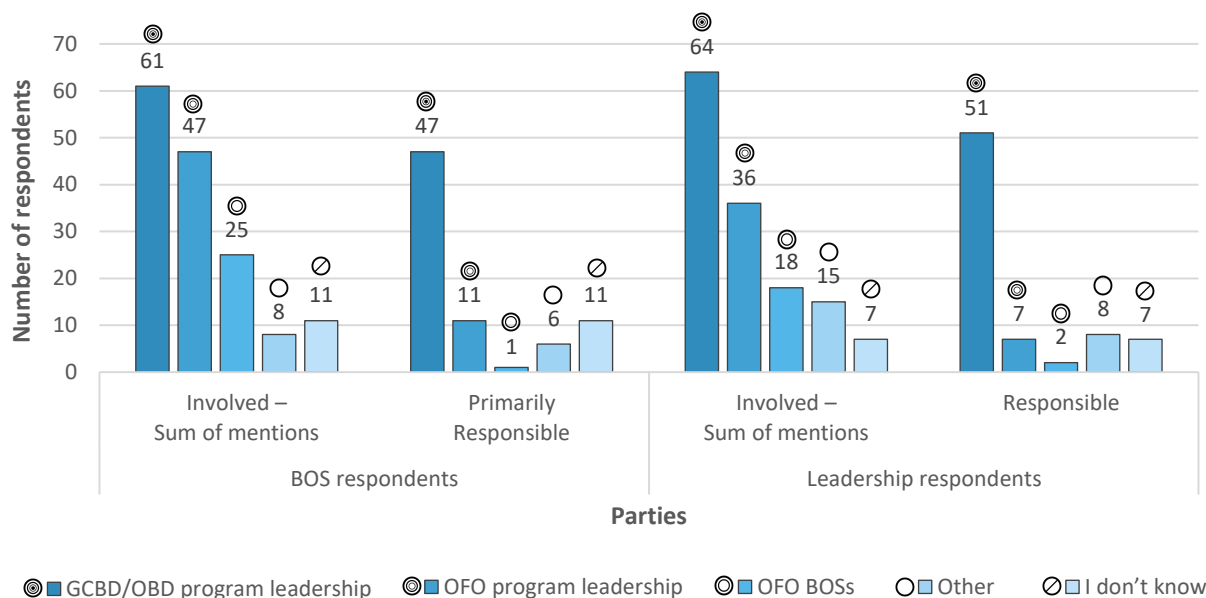
Summary: BOS and program leadership survey respondents agreed that the groups involved in creating policies and procedures include GCBD/OBD program leadership (80% BOS, 85% leadership) and OFO program leadership (62% BOS, 48% leadership). While most respondents stated that GCBD/OBD program leadership are *primarily* responsible for developing policies and procedures, program leadership were more likely to say this (62% BOS, 86% leadership).

The VSM sessions revealed confusion among BOSs on the most up-to-date procedures due to the frequency of changes, which highlights an opportunity for improved consistency in the communication of policy changes and a change log to document all updates.



Survey. Survey respondents were first asked to indicate any groups involved in policy development (in a “choose all that apply” question) and then asked to pick a single group that is *primarily* responsible for policy development. As shown in Figure 9, BOS and leadership respondents generally agreed across their responses.

Figure 9: Parties involved in developing policies and procedures according to BOSs and leadership



Both BOSs (80%) and leadership (85%) felt that GCBD/OBD program leadership are involved in developing policy. While most also reported GCBD/OBD leadership were *primarily* responsible, program leadership were more likely than BOSs to respond this way (62% BOS, 86% leadership). Roughly half of BOS (62%) and leadership (48%) respondents reported that OFO program leadership are also involved in policy development, but fewer reported they were *primarily* responsible (15% BOS; 9% leadership). No patterns were found in responses by BOS or leadership characteristics.



VSM. While the VSM sessions did not result in information on how policies and procedures are developed, they did reveal that there is occasionally confusion among BOSs on the most up-to-date procedures due to frequent changes to 8(a) policies and procedures. For example, now that the 8(a) participation agreement signed by new firms is housed in Certify, there was confusion regarding whether Certify allows electronic signatures or if it is possible some firms are submitting unsigned agreements (one BOS reported seeing agreements that were not signed). Additionally, as discussed in greater detail in RQ5, some BOSs reported in open-ended survey questions that there is a lack of consistency in communicating program changes and they sometimes hear about policy changes from their 8(a) firm or other external parties. Together, these findings suggest a need for more consistent communication of policy changes and a change log or central repository documenting all changes.

4.3.2 Research Question 2b

How are BOS staff trained on policies and procedures related to 8(a) BD services?

Summary: Almost all BOSs (96%) receive training live via web conferencing, while about half (59%) received handouts, job aids, or other reference materials. The most common rating of perceived training effectiveness among both BOS (46%) and program leadership (48%) survey respondents was “good” (the middle option of a five-point scale from “poor” to “excellent”). BOSs and leadership were also asked what additional training topics would help them improve BD services, with the most common suggestion across both groups being financial analysis.



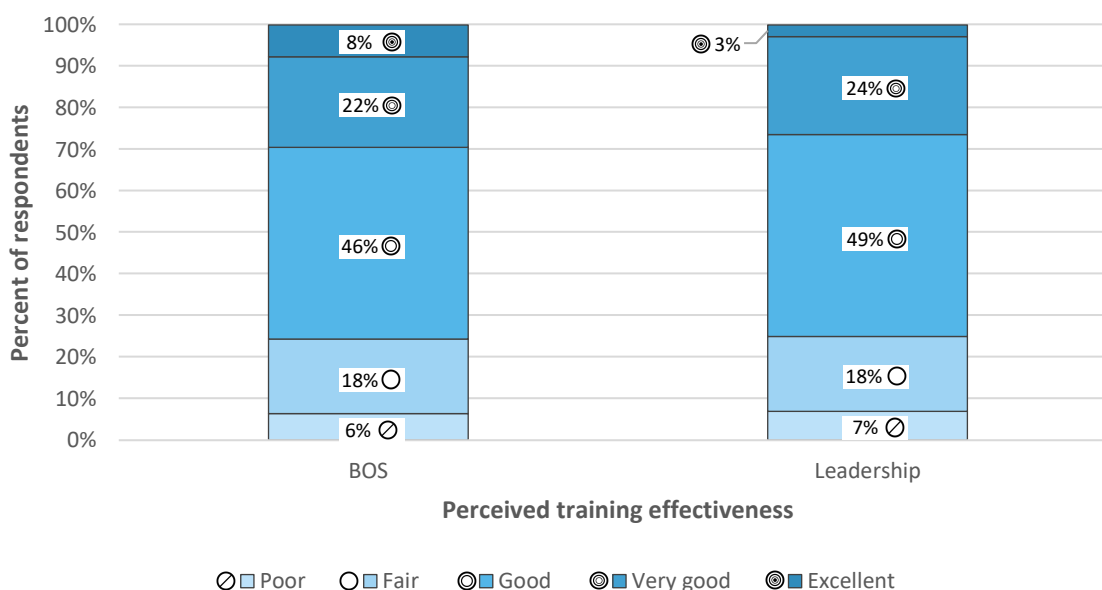
Survey. As shown in Table 7, nearly all BOSs (96%) receive training live via web conferencing such as Microsoft Teams, while slightly more than half (59%) of BOSs also reported receiving handouts, job aids, or other reference materials to support process and procedure training. Interestingly, BOSs in one region reported never receiving in-person training on processes and procedures, while BOSs in another region reported receiving in-person training more often (67%) than BOSs from the other eight regions (18%).

Table 7: How trainings are provided according to BOSs

Method Provided	Count	Percent of Respondents
Live via web-conferencing service	75	96%
Live in person	19	24%
Prerecorded video sessions or presentations	26	33%
Distributed handouts, job aids, and other reference materials	46	59%
Other	4	5%

As shown in Figure 10, just under half of BOSs (46%) and leadership (49%) rated the effectiveness of trainings on policies and procedures as “good.” No patterns were identified by respondent characteristics.

Figure 10: Perceived training effectiveness according to BOSs and leadership



Respondents who indicated that trainings were only fair or poor were asked why in an open-ended question. Leadership noted a lack of formal training opportunities (three respondents) and a lack of trainings on BD procedures and methods (three respondents). BOSs stated there was not enough time to complete trainings and ask relevant questions (four respondents), trainings were disorganized or poor quality (two respondents), and there were limited opportunities to receive training (two respondents).

Based on these responses, there may be an opportunity to improve the effectiveness of the trainings on policies and procedures. However, more specific feedback should be collected following the trainings to understand what knowledge is needed, how participants effectively learn, and how participants believe the trainings can be improved. This will allow the SBA to design and improve trainings to have the greatest impact and achieve the desired learning objectives.

BOSs and program leadership were also asked what additional training topics would help improve the BD services that BOSs provide to firms. The top five themes identified in this open-ended question are shown in Table 8 and Table 9, respectively. Trainings related to financial analysis was the most common suggestion across both populations.

Table 8: Additional training topics desired by BOSs

Theme	Count
Finance basics and financial analysis	10
Identifying and developing contract opportunities	7
Business development (including tools and best practices)	6
8(a) program basics or updates	5
Contracts (including contract negotiations, contract issues, and FAC Level II and III training)	5

Table 9: Additional training topics suggested by leadership

Theme	Count
Accounting or finance-related trainings	10
Business analysis	9
Communication skills	6
Marketing*	4
Government contracting*	4
SBA resources*	4
More staff are needed, not more training*	4

*Theme is tied for fourth-most frequently raised.

4.3.3 Research Question 2c

To what extent do BOS staff BD skills vary?

Summary: BOS self-assessment. Most BOSs felt they completely (38%) or mostly (44%) have the skills needed to effectively provide BD. BOSs self-assessed their skills highest for communication-related competencies and lowest for general business competencies (such as business finance). BOSs tended to rate their competencies approximately 0.5 to 1 point lower than other roles. Additionally, respondents from two regions rated their proficiency lower than average, while respondents from two other regions rated their proficiency higher.

Leadership perception of required skill levels. Leadership reported that competencies which involved increasing BD acumen of 8(a) firms (for example, business coaching) require the highest levels of BOS



expertise. The three competencies they reported need the lowest levels of BOS expertise centered on softer skills such as leveraging diversity. In 17 of the 20 competencies, the average BOS self-assessed rating exceeds the expertise level identified by leadership; the only exceptions were business finance, business coaching, and government contracting and procurement.

Leadership-identified opportunities for growth. According to leadership, BOSs’ strongest competencies are government contracting and procurement (61% of respondents) and knowledge of SBA business (36% of respondents). This finding aligns with the two competencies identified by leadership as needing the highest level of expertise. The most frequently cited opportunities for growth centered around general business development, including business finance, business coaching, and government contracting and procurement.



Survey. *BOS assessment of their skills.* Most BOSs agreed that they have the skills necessary to effectively provide BD services to 8(a) firms; 38% responded they *completely* had the necessary skills and 44% responding they *mostly* had the necessary skills. However, since not all respondents reported having the necessary skills to effectively provide BD services, there may be opportunities for training in skill areas.

The BOS survey also asked respondents to rate their proficiency levels across 20 specific competencies (drawn from the position descriptions) on a five-point scale from Level 1 (Awareness) to Level 5 (Expert). Table 10 reports the mean and standard deviation for the top and bottom three competencies. The competencies with the highest average BOS rating are focused on communication, while the competencies with the lowest average BOS rating are focused on general business practices.

Table 10: BOS self-assessment of proficiency – highest and lowest

Competency	Mean	Std Deviation
Building coalition and communication	4.32	0.83
Oral communication	4.32	0.75
Business writing and written communication	4.17	0.97
Economic development	3.61	1.04
Legal, government, and jurisprudence interpretation	3.58	1.18
Business finance	3.36	0.98

There are several patterns in these survey responses by BOS characteristics. First, BDSs routinely rated their competencies approximately 0.5 to 1 point lower than BOS/LBOS or SBOS/Other roles. This is not surprising since BDSs tend to have less experience and may have less training and fewer responsibilities than staff in the other roles. BDSs rated themselves lower for twelve of the 20 competencies. Additionally, respondents from two regions routinely rated their proficiency lower than respondents in other regions, while respondents from two different regions routinely rated their proficiency higher. This could be due to true differences in staff composition, experience, or skills or it could be due to region-specific factors that impacts how respondents assess their competencies.

Leadership perception of required skill levels. The leadership survey asked respondents to rate the level of expertise a BOS needs to successfully provide BD support to 8(a) firms, using the same 5-point scale as the BOS survey. Table 11 reports the mean and standard deviation for the top and bottom three competencies. The 3 competencies indicated by leadership as needing the highest level of expertise are



centered around fundamentals of directly increasing BD acumen of 8(a) firms, while the 3 competencies indicated by leadership as needing the lowest level of expertise are centered around softer skills.

Table 11: Leadership assessment of needed proficiency level – highest and lowest

Competency	Mean	Std Deviation
Government contracting and procurement	4.27	0.82
Knowledge of SBA business	3.88	0.85
Business coaching	3.86	0.63
Leveraging diversity	3.01	1.05
Leading people	2.97	1.01
Leading change	2.95	1.01

Although there is not an exact match between BOS self-assessed skills levels and leadership’s assessment of the required level, the average BOS competency assessment exceeds the leadership threshold in 17 of the 20 skills. The only three competencies where the BOS self-assessments are lower than the level of competency leadership states is required are business finance (the BOS rating is 0.06 points less than leadership), business coaching (0.10 lower), and government contracting and procurement (0.35 lower). These may indicate opportunities for areas of growth.

Leadership-identified opportunities for growth. As shown in Table 12, leadership reported that BOSs’ strongest competencies are government contracting and procurement, knowledge of SBA business, and SBA marketing and outreach. The first two of these competencies aligns with the two competencies identified by leadership as needing the highest level of expertise.

Table 12: Leadership assessment of strongest BOS competencies

Competency	Count	Percent
Government contracting and procurement	46	61%
Knowledge of SBA business	27	36%
SBA marketing and outreach	20	27%

As shown in Table 13, the most frequently cited opportunities for growth centered around general business development, specifically business finance, business coaching, and government contracting. Interestingly, government contracting and procurement is highlighted by leadership both as one of BOSs’ strongest competencies and one of the greatest opportunities for growth. This overlap highlights the importance of this competency, suggesting that even though BOSs may be strong in this topic, continued education would be worthwhile.

Table 13: Leadership assessment of BOS opportunities for growth

Competency	Count	Percent
Business finance	18	24%
Business coaching	18	24%
Government contracting and procurement	17	23%



VSM. Participants in half of the VSM sessions noted that BOS experience in their current position may impact how much time activities take. For example, one respondent who stated they were a relatively new BOS reported taking “a while longer” to review a firm’s business plan in order to research “technical jargon” and make sure they follow the checklist carefully to guide the review. Newer BOSs also reported spending additional preparation time ahead of meetings and spending time waiting on

answers to technical questions they have asked their supervisors. Similarly, respondents in two VSM sessions noted that supervisors might take longer to review the annual review workbook completed by a newer BOS to ensure everything is correct.

4.3.4 Research Question 2d

How is the implementation of processes and procedures influenced by each 8(a) firm's (1) business goals and (2) business needs?

Summary: Survey respondents agreed that each 8(a) firm's business goals and needs does (82% of BOSs) or should (95% of leadership) influence implementation a great deal or a moderate amount.

Variations in the implementation of processes and procedures based on firm goals and needs were most likely to be influenced by the firm's participation stage and how frequently the firm contacts their assigned BOS. In general, however, firm goals and needs were more likely to influence what specific BD services are provided, rather than how processes and procedures are implemented.

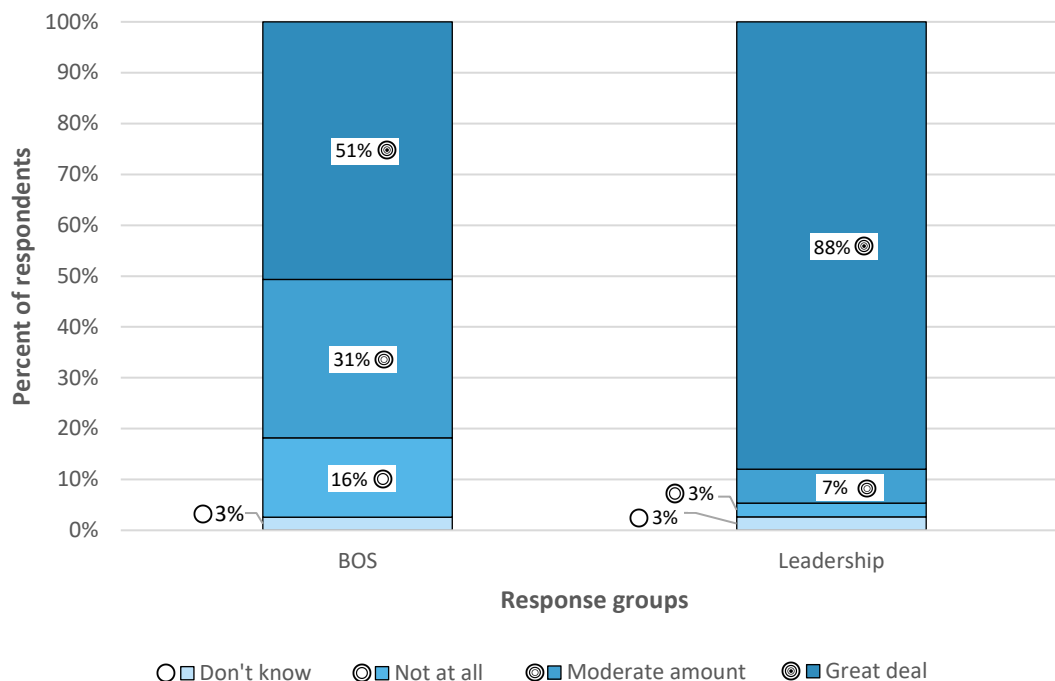


Document review. As discussed above, the SOP notes that the 8(a) firm's business goals and needs should influence the business plan review, annual review, and annual field visit. Additionally, the 2022 OIG report stated that the 8(a) program was lacking standardized procedures for reviewing business plans and documenting firm progress in meeting its goals.



Survey. As shown in Figure 11, while only about half of BOS respondents (51%) reported that 8(a) firms' business goals and needs *do* impact implementation a great deal, the majority (88%) of leadership respondents stated that it *should* impact implementation a great deal. However, the percentages are more comparable when looking at both "a great deal" and "a moderate amount": 82% of BOS respondents said this factor does influence implementation a great deal or a moderate amount, while 95% of leadership respondents said it should influence implementation a great deal or a moderate amount.

Figure 11: Influence of firm goals and needs on implementation of processes and procedures according to BOSs and leadership



VSM. There is some variation in how processes and procedures are implemented based on businesses’ specific goals and needs. However, more variations based on firm goals and needs were identified in terms of what BD services are provided, as discussed previously. Variations in how processes and procedures are implemented based on firm goals and needs were primarily due to the firm’s program year and how frequently a firm contacts their BOS.

- *8(a) firm participation stage.* Several variations were related to whether the firm is in the development stage (years 1 to 4) or transition stage (years 5 through 9). For example, process time for evaluating the firm’s annual review using the annual review workbook may be higher for firms in the transition stage. Firms at this stage may still rely heavily on 8(a) contracts, which risks not meeting their Business Activity Target, triggering a good-faith effort evaluation in which the BOS must evaluate whether the firm put an acceptable level of effort into winning non-8(a) contracts. This additional activity increases process time. As another example, process time for providing counseling and guidance to firms was estimated as higher for firms in the development stage. These variations due to the firm’s program year do not represent unnecessary variation or waste, as they are examples of BOSs tailoring how they provide services to meet different firm needs.
- *Frequency of firm contacting BOS.* According to BOSs, one reason for variations in how counseling and guidance are provided relates to how frequently the firm reaches out. Some firms routinely reach out to their BOS for guidance, while others almost never do. Estimates of how frequently BOSs provide counseling or guidance to an individual firm included several times a week, several times a month, monthly, two to three times per year, and annually. One BOS stated that the amount of delay time resulting from scheduling can depend on how vocal the firm is, noting that they may schedule quickly to satisfy the customer. While this variation is not unnecessary or wasteful, it is worth noting that less vocal or persistent firms may receive less

frequent assistance from their assigned BOSs. It may be worth considering how to equalize support provided across firms by standardizing how frequently a BOS reaches out to each firm or addressing BOS caseloads (given that high workloads were identified as a challenge in the VSM sessions).

4.3.5 Research Question 2e

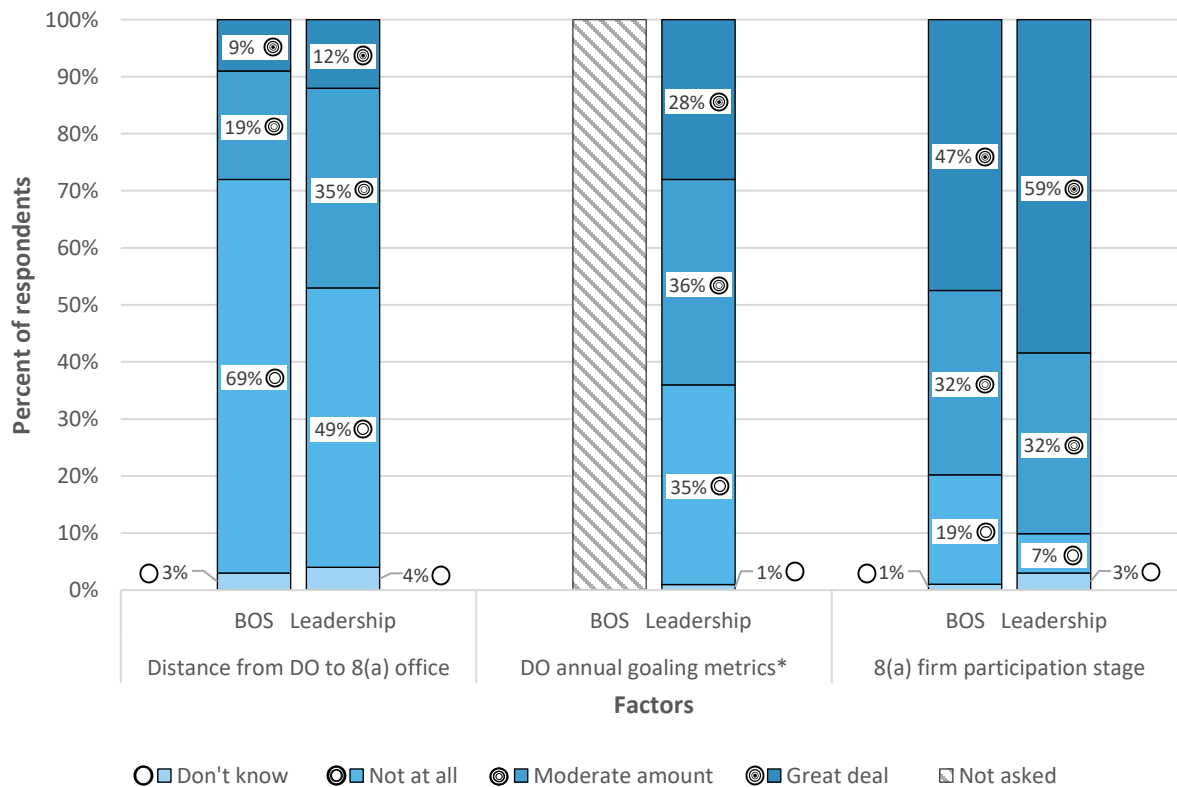
How is the implementation of processes and procedures influenced by (1) the firm–BOS geographic proximity; (2) the homogeneity of 8(a) firms serviced by the BOS; and (3) the BOS’s annual performance metrics?

Summary: While 69% of BOSs said the firm–BOS geographic proximity *does not* influence implementation of processes and procedures at all, only 49% of leadership said it *should not* have an influence. Sixty-four percent of leadership reported that DOs’ annual goaling metrics should influence implementation either a great deal or a moderate amount (BOSs were not asked about this factor).



Survey. As shown in Figure 12, there was some disagreement between BOSs and leadership regarding the extent to which factors do or should influence the implementation of processes and procedures.

Figure 12: Factors that do or should influence implementation of processes and procedures according to BOSs and leadership



*BOSs were not asked about this factor.

While 69% of BOSs reported the distance from the servicing DO to the 8(a) firm *does not* influence their implementation of processes and procedures, 49% of program leadership that said this factor *should not* influence implementation. While 47% of BOSs said the 8(a) firm participation stage *does* influence implementation of processes and procedures a great deal, 59% of leadership said it *should* influence implementation a great deal. Equal percentages (32%) said this factor does or should influence implementation a moderate amount.

Only leadership were asked about DOs' annual goaling metrics. While 28% of respondents said this factor should influence implementation of processes and procedures a great deal, 36% said it should influence implementation a moderate amount.

4.3.6 Research Question 2f

To what extent does the implementation of processes and procedures vary across district offices?

Summary: While 41% of program leadership survey respondents felt the DO in which the BOS should not impact the implementation of processes and procedures, 55% felt it should influence implementation either a great deal or a moderate amount.

The VSM sessions identified several variations in how processes and procedures are implemented across DOs. Variations were found in how BOSs are assigned to new participants, how orientation sessions are conducted, the sending of welcome letters and other materials to new participants, confirmation of signed participation agreements, reviewing and approving the business plan, screening the firm's annual review for completeness, sending the annual review follow-up to firms, and conducting the exit review.

Findings relevant to this research question are presented in aggregate at the region level, rather than the DO level, to maintain anonymity of participants.



Survey. Program leadership were split on whether the DO in which the BOS is located *should* influence the implementation of processes and procedures. While 41% responded this factor should not influence implementation, 28% said it should influence implementation a great deal and 27% said a moderate amount.



VSM. The VSM sessions identified variations in how processes and procedures are implemented across DOs.

- *Assign BOS to firm and conduct orientation session.* The first step for most DOs upon a firm's entry into the program is assigning a BOS to the new firm. That BOS then reaches out to their new firm to schedule and conduct the orientation session. While most DOs conduct individual orientation sessions, some DOs schedule a group orientation session on a prescheduled, rolling basis (such as monthly or quarterly). For firms with prescheduled group orientations, conducting the orientation session is not contingent upon the assignment of a BOS to a new firm. This means the firm may be invited to an orientation session before they are assigned a BOS. In this scenario, some BOSs will schedule a separate "meet-and-greet" meeting with their assigned firm.
- *Send welcome letter and other materials.* The SBA sends new firms a welcome letter upon program entry. Responsibility for this step varies across DOs. In several DOs, the BOS sends the welcome letter (often when scheduling the orientation session). In two DOs, the SBOS writes



and sends the welcome letter after assigning the firm a BOS (one participant noted that the SOP specifies the SBOS should send the welcome letter). In one DO, the DDD completes this step. In addition to variation around the role conducting this action, there is variation in the materials sent with the welcome letter. Other materials sent at this step include the orientation guide, the business plan template, and the participation agreement; there was a lack of consistency across DOs around which materials are sent.

- *Confirm participation agreement has been signed.* New 8(a) firms are instructed to sign the participation agreement when they first sign into Certify. There was some variation regarding whether BOSs confirm the participation agreement has been signed before scheduling or conducting the orientation session. DOs in two VSM sessions reported no requirement in terms of the order of these steps. Two DOs in another session will schedule the orientation session but reported the agreement must be signed by the day of the orientation session. One DO stated the agreement must be signed before they will schedule the orientation session. Another DO resends the participation agreement every year to firms to be signed again, acting as a reminder of program requirements.
- *Review and approve business plan.* The SBA must review and approve new firms' business plans before they are eligible to receive 8(a) contracts. There was some variation in when this action is completed during the program entry phase. Two DOs require the business plan to be received before they will schedule the orientation session to enable tailoring of the orientation session to the firm's specific needs. Another DO informs firms during the orientation session that they have 30 days from that date to submit the business plan for review. According to the SOP, this action should be conducted within 30 days of orientation.
- *Screen firm's annual review for completeness.* Once the firm has submitted their annual review in Certify, BOSs review the submission for completeness (to ensure they can complete the next step, evaluating the submitted annual review). There was some variation in whether this screening is conducted as a stand-alone step or done during evaluation of the firm's annual review. BOSs in one "high-volume" DO create a list of all missing information and schedule a 30- to 60-minute interview with the firm to collect the missing information. In another session, some BOSs said they conduct this action as a discrete step, opening all submitted documents at once to determine what is missing. Other BOSs in the same session said they begin conducting the evaluation with the annual review workbook, create a list of missing information as they go, and then return the annual review to the firm to solicit missing information.
- *Send annual review follow-up to firm.* Following the annual field visit, the BOS follows up with the firm to summarize the meeting and provide discussed resources. However, this step is not completed consistently across DOs. For one DO, this step includes both updating the annual review workbook with information obtained during the field visit (which can take up to an hour) and drafting a follow-up letter. One BOS reported drafting an email (with resources and information discussed in the meeting) rather than a formal letter. Several DOs do not complete this step and only complete the field visit report.
- *Conduct exit review 30 to 90 days before end of participant's program term.* Upon completion of the exit survey by the graduating firm, the BOS completes the exit review by documenting services received by the firm during their program tenure. However, challenges in receiving the completed survey from firms lead to some variation in how DOs conduct this step. One DO reported that if the firm does not respond to the exit survey, BOSs will complete this step with whatever information is available in Certify for DD or DDD review. The BOS reported that if the exit survey was sent 90 days from the graduation date but not received by 30 days before the graduation date, that is the point at which the BOS will conduct this alternative process to "just get something in there [GMATT]."

The COVID-19 pandemic also created variation in how BD services are provided. As noted in the OIG report, annual field visits switched from in-person to virtual platforms during the pandemic. While most DOs are continuing to conduct virtual field visits, some are beginning to move back to in-person visits as of writing this report. Among VSM participants, one DO reported requiring BOSs to begin transitioning back to in-person visits, one DO conducts the visit in person if the firm is working in person (and virtually if the firm is teleworking), and one DO gives firms their choice of platform. In-person annual field visits had significantly longer process times (between 4 and 8 hours) compared to virtual field visits (between 20 minutes and 2 hours) due to the time spent traveling to the firm's physical location. Participants in three VSM sessions expressed a desire for continued flexibility to conduct virtual field visits, given the significant time savings due to reduced travel time. This represents a positive variation that can reduce process times and BOS burden.

4.4 Research Question 3

What BD activity coordination, communications, and reporting strategies and techniques do staff use?

RQ3 executive summary: *Tools and technology used to track BD services.* The majority of BOSs reported using GMATT, email, and the annual review workbook to track BD activities. BOSs' suggestions to improve tools and technology included improved efficiency, automation, or centralization of platforms as well as additional training for BOSs.

VSM respondents reported that many DOs keep their own activity trackers to maintain an up-to-date record of current activity statuses. Additionally, some BOSs reported keeping a personal, even more detailed tracker. The VSM sessions also highlighted pain points specific to Certify including technical challenges and the need for usability improvements.

How coordination, communications, and reporting strategies and techniques are influenced by various factors. The majority of BOSs reported that an 8(a) firm's business goals and needs, firm participation stage, and distance *does* influence coordination, communication tool selection and reporting strategies and techniques. However, in each instance, a greater number of leadership respondents indicated that those factors *should* have an influence. Conversely, BOSs and leadership were equally split regarding whether the distance from the DO to the firm influences reporting strategies and techniques; roughly half of all respondents said it should not have an influence, while roughly half said it should.

Coordination, communications, and reporting strategy variation across DOs. Program leadership survey respondents were roughly split regarding whether the DO in which the BOS is located *should* influence coordination, communications, and reporting strategies and techniques.

The VSM sessions identified some variations across DOs related to approving Joint Ventures, reviewing the completed annual review evaluation, materials sent with the welcome letter, and whether an annual review follow-up message is sent. Reporting variations highlighted several inconsistencies and duplication related to data entry.



4.4.1 Research Question 3a

What tools and technology do BOSs use to track and monitor BD services and activities?

Summary: Neither the SOP nor the desk guide include guidance on how BD activities should be tracked. For tracking BD services, nearly all BOSs reported using GMATT, email, and the annual review workbook; formal reports and meeting minutes were less frequently used. When asked how the existing tools and technology could be improved, BOSs suggested improved efficiency, automation, or centralization of platforms as well as additional training or clarification for BOSs.

In addition to Certify and GMATT, VSM respondents reported that many DOs have created their own activity trackers to record current activity statuses. Some of this tracking creates overprocessing by duplicating data entry conducted in Certify or GMATT. Additionally, some BOSs keep a separate, personal tracker.

The VSM sessions also highlighted pain points specific to Certify, including ineffective automated notifications, technical issues such as the system being “down” or slow, the need to look up information from multiple data systems, challenges accessing previous years’ annual reviews, and the need for usability improvements.



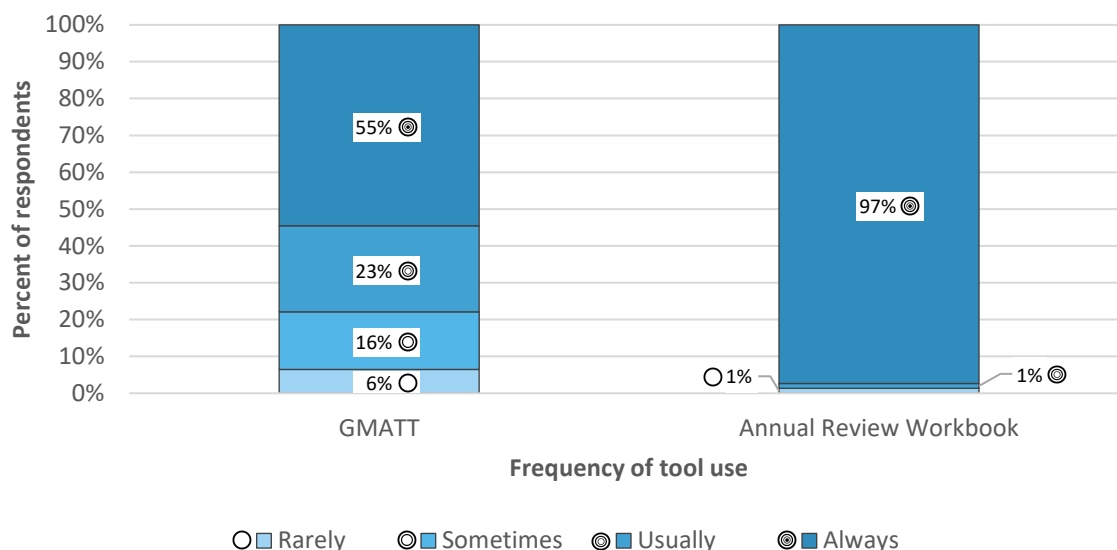
Document review. Other than identifying several BD actions that should be tracked in “the SBA’s 8(a) electronic system,” the SOP does not include any guidance on how BD activities should be tracked. While the desk guide includes references to “the electronic tracking system” in relation to the procedure for a termination action (which is not considered a BD activity), it provides no guidance on how BD activities should be tracked. The August 2022 SBA Procedural Notice titled “8(a) Business Development (BD) Program – Standardization of 8(a) Business Processes – Business Plan, Offer & Acceptance, and Annual Review Workbook” states whether the specific BD actions identified in the title should be tracked in GMATT or Certify. However, these instructions were not presented in other materials that Summit reviewed, representing an opportunity to standardize a single reference tool (such as an updated desk guide) with instructions on how to track all BD activities.



Survey. *Use of the SBA’s case management tools.* As shown in Figure 13, nearly all respondents (97%) report using the BOS annual review workbook, while GMATT use was less frequent (only 55% always use GMATT).



Figure 13: BOS use of SBA’s case management tools



Several patterns were identified regarding GMATT use. First, staff that have worked in the 8(a) BD program for less than 1 year reported always using GMATT at a higher rate (73%) than staff with longer tenure in the program (52%). Second, no staff in one region reported that they always use GMATT, compared to 59% of staff in other regions.

Coordination and communication tools used to provide BD services. Nearly all staff reported using virtual meetings (99%), phone calls (97%), and email communication (96%) to provide BD services. Most BOSs (73%) reported using in-person meetings. Respondents less frequently reported using coordinated calendars (64%) and text messages (31%).

There were some patterns on this topic by BOS characteristics. First, BOSs with 8(a) program tenure under 1 year used in-person meetings less frequently (45%) than other BOSs (71%). Additionally, BOSs with the highest caseloads appeared to have had the least time for in-person meetings, as only 50% of BOSs assigned to more than 50 firms used in-person meetings, compared to 79% of BOSs with lower caseloads.

Tools and technology used to track and monitor BD services. When asked to select the tools and technology they used to track and monitor BD services, nearly all BOSs reported using GMATT (90%), email (83%), and the annual review workbook (77%). Formal reports (26%) and meeting minutes (17%) were less frequently used. The use of formal reports is more common in some regions than others; more than 33% of respondents in four regions report the use of formal reports, compared to less than 20% of respondents from another four regions. BOSs were also asked an open-ended question to identify any other tools or technology they use to support or track BD services. The most commonly reported tools were spreadsheets (raised by 30 respondents) and Certify or Certify Notes (raised by 15 respondents).

The survey also collected suggestions from both BOSs and leadership on how the available tools and technology could be improved. The most common suggestions from BOSs were:

- *Improved efficiency, automation, or centralization of platforms.* Nine respondents suggested platform improvements related to these topics. Specific suggestions included making Certify capable of centralized communication and processing (rather than relying on external spreadsheets), making all checklists for firm documentation requirements accessible via Certify, and allowing annual review information to roll over year to year (i.e., allowing firms to revise as needed rather than entering the same information every year). One respondent noted that having multiple tools is time-consuming and would be more effective and less time-intensive if they were integrated into a single platform.
- *Training or clarification for BOSs.* Seven respondents raised the need for training or clarification related to these tools. Suggestions included a better organized BD Corner or other central location with all needed information, spreadsheets, templates, and the most up-to-date SOP. Another respondent raised the need for training or clear instructions on actions such as identifying evidence of stock dilution. Finally, one respondent requested clarification on what activities should or should not get entered into GMATT.

The most common suggestions from program leadership were:

- *Enable systems to run reports and conduct analyses.* Nine respondents highlighted the need for a system which can conduct analysis (such as firm financial analysis) to support BD activities. Several respondents specifically called out Certify's inability to output reports.
- *Remove duplicate data entry across systems.* Six respondents suggested improvements to remove the need for duplicate data entry across multiple systems. Examples of this duplication included completing the annual review workbook and tracking the annual review in GMATT, as well as uploading firm site visit reports to both GMATT and Certify.
- *Improve user friendliness of systems.* Five respondents highlighted the need to improve "ease of use" of current systems. One respondent noted that "all tools been to be intuitive."



VSM. While all respondents reported using both Certify and GMATT to record activities (such as completed annual reviews), these tools are used as reporting mechanisms rather than activity trackers. Many DOs have created their own activity trackers (typically in Excel) that keep an up-to-date record of current activity statuses, tracking items such as firms with a remedial action plan, field visit status, and the BOS assigned to each firm. While some of the topics included in these trackers are more detailed than what is entered into either Certify or GMATT, others duplicate topics already tracked in Certify or GMATT, creating overprocessing. Additionally, some BOSs (across multiple regions) reported keeping a personal, even more detailed tracker (typically in Excel). BOSs use this personal tool to document their detailed interactions with firms and next steps or firm needs.

While BOSs use Certify as required by the program, VSM respondents raised significant pain points related to this tool. The key challenges are summarized below:

- *Ineffective Certify notifications.* Although Certify automatically sends notifications for certain activities, in some scenarios the system has failed to send these automated notifications. This issue has been consistent enough that some DOs have instituted new processes to reduce the impact by duplicating the task, thereby creating waste. Additionally, the generic "You have a message in Certify" email subject line may not prompt recipients to log into Certify to view the message. The ability to customize or choose from a prespecified list of subject lines could help minimize the impact of this issue.



- *Technical issues.* VSM respondents reported increased delay times due to Certify being slow or not working. One DO reported they download annual review documents from Certify so they have a backup in case the system is down.
- *Need to look up information from multiple sources.* Because Certify does not include all of the information needed to complete the annual review evaluation, BOSs must refer to additional data sources such as SAM, the Dynamic Small Business Search (DSBS), USASpending, SBA’s table of size standards, and the firm itself. This is compounded by the fact that information from last year’s annual review does not roll over in Certify, which means BOSs must look up the previous year’s workbook and reenter information that has not changed.
- *Challenge accessing previous annual reviews.* Reviewing materials from previous years are crucial inputs for annual reviews to help BOSs understand how the firm is performing year to year. Although program leadership felt it should be easy to look up these materials in Certify, BOSs reported these materials are difficult to look up and they “waste time looking for it.”
- *Tracking annual review progress.* Because Certify is a system of record and not a tracking system, there is no way to measure current status until the BOS Analysis Workbook and approval letter are uploaded into Certify. One BOS noted that they have annual reviews that are only waiting on a few small things but cannot yet be marked as complete and are now months overdue, despite the fact that the vast majority of work is complete.
- *Usability improvements.* Respondents in one VSM session raised several suggestions to improve Certify’s usability for BOSs. Proposed improvements included the ability to open PDFs directly in Certify (rather than having to download PDFs to a desktop), the ability to drag and drop non-SBA documents for upload (rather than having to save all documents on the server first), and a “wizard” that would allow letters to be generated and customized within Certify rather than copying and pasting the template into Word.

4.4.2 Research Question 3b

How are coordination, communications, and reporting strategies and techniques influenced by (1) the firm–BOS geographic proximity; (2) the homogeneity of 8(a) firms serviced by the BOS; and (3) the BOS’s annual performance metrics?

Summary: *Coordination and communication tools.* While both BOSs and program leadership reported that each 8(a) firm’s business goals and needs and the 8(a) firm’s participation stage does or should influence coordination and communication tool selection, leadership were more likely to respond this way for both factors. Ninety-two percent of leadership said business goals and needs *should* have an influence, compared to 65% of BOSs who said it *does* have an influence. Similarly, 85% of leadership said participation stage *should* have an influence, compared to 52% of BOSs who said it *does* have an influence. BOSs and leadership were both split regarding the impact of the distance from the servicing DO to the 8(a) firm office on coordination and communication tool selection; about half of each group reported it does or should not have an influence, while roughly half said it does or should influence.

Reporting strategies and techniques. BOSs and leadership agreed that each firm’s business goals and needs does or should influence the selection of reporting strategies and techniques (55% of BOSs, 69% of leadership). Both groups were less likely to report that the distance from the servicing DO to the firm office does or should have an influence (21% of BOSs, 31% of leadership).

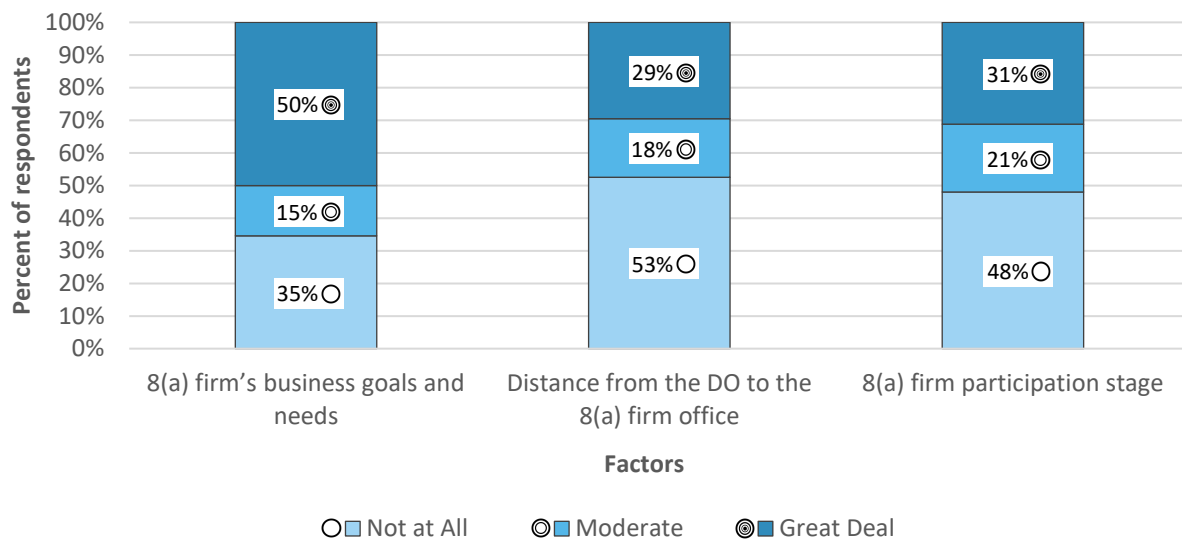


Document review. While the SOP defines primary responsibilities for the SBA offices and roles in the 8(a) program, there is minimal guidance on how the SBA staff coordinate and communicate across roles or offices. As discussed previously, while the SOP identifies several BD actions that should be tracked in “the SBA’s 8(a) electronic system,” it doesn’t otherwise provide reporting guidance. Although the desk guide covers more compliance processes than BD processes, the existing process flows do provide some information on coordinating and communicating between offices (typically via email). Providing this type of guidance on coordination and communication for BD processes in an updated desk guide would be a useful reference for program staff.



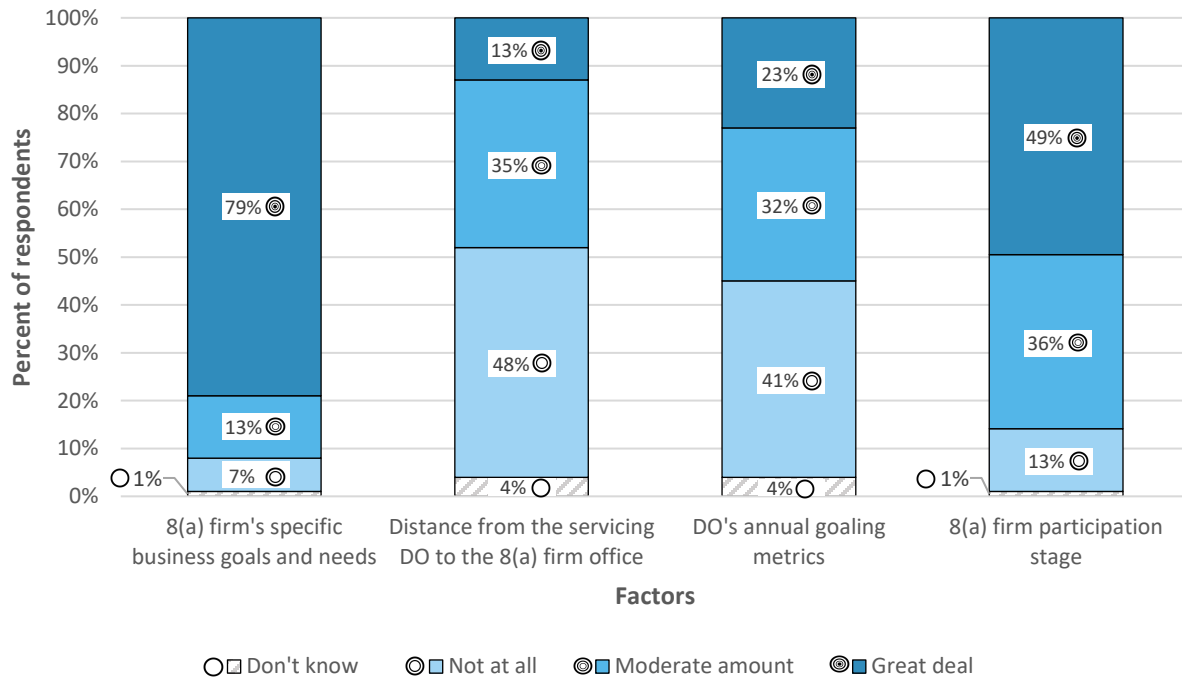
Survey. Coordination and communication tools. As shown in Figure 14, a majority (65%) of BOSs report that each 8(a) firm’s business goals and needs have a moderate or great deal of influence on the coordination and communication tools they use. Roughly half of BOSs report that the distance from the servicing DO to the 8(a) firm office (47%) and the 8(a) firm’s participation stage (52%) also influence tool use.

Figure 14: Factors that influence coordination and communication tool use according to BOSs



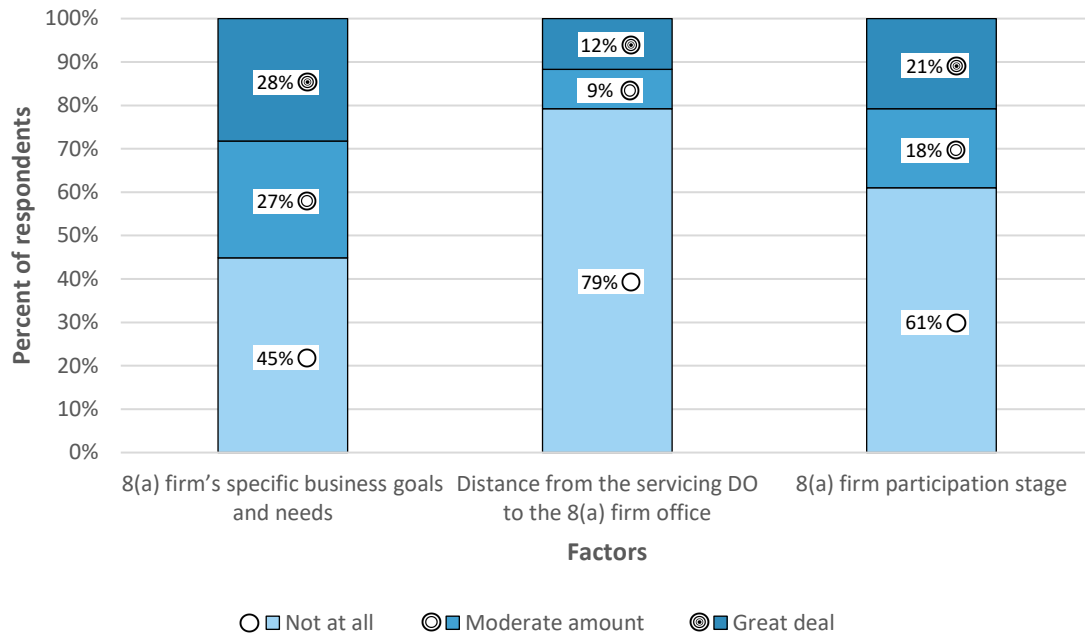
As shown in Figure 15, the majority of leadership felt that the 8(a) firms’ goals and needs (92%) and participation stage (85%) *should* affect coordination and communication tools used moderately or a great deal. Roughly half felt that the distance from the DO to the 8(a) firms (48%) and the DO’s annual goaling metrics (55%) *should* affect the tools used moderately or a great deal.

Figure 15: Factors that should influence coordination and communication tool use according to leadership



Reporting strategies and techniques. As shown in Figure 16, a majority (55%) of BOSs reported that their firms' business goals and needs influenced the reporting strategies and techniques they used either a moderate amount or a great deal. Fewer BOSs reported that the 8(a) firm participation stage (39%) or distance from the DO to the firm (21%) influenced their choice of reporting strategies and techniques.

Figure 16: Factors that influence reporting strategy and technique use according to BOSs

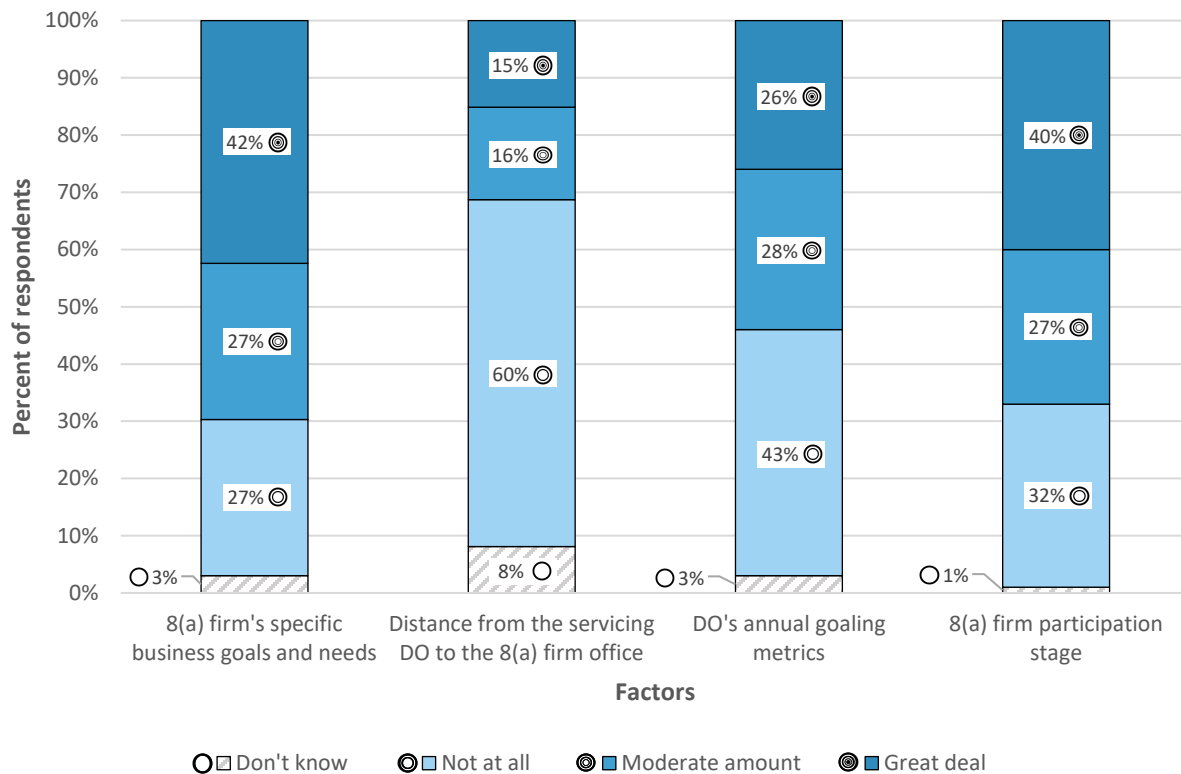


While the BOS's region overall did not appear strongly associated with any of the factors that influence reporting method use, BOSs in one region almost never reported that any factor influences their use of reporting method. One respondent reported that the 8(a) firm's business goals and needs (and no other factors) moderately influenced the reporting method used.

Two patterns in the use of reporting method were also noted. BOSs with less than 1 year of program tenure (73%) more frequently reported that the 8(a) firm's business goals and needs do not influence their reporting method use, compared to those with more experience (40%). Additionally, BOSs with the largest caseloads were more likely to indicate that the firm's participation stage influences their choice of reporting strategy or technique. Sixty-nine percent of BOSs assigned to more than 50 firms reported that the firm participation stage does affect their reporting method use, compared to those with lower caseloads (32%).

As shown in Figure 17, a majority of leadership respondents felt that the 8(a) firm's specific business goals and needs (69%) and participation stage (67%) *should* influence the reporting strategies and techniques used. Roughly half of leadership respondents felt that the DO's annual goaling metrics (54%). Only 31% felt that the distance from the DO to the 8(a) firm office should influence reporting methods.

Figure 17: Factors that should influence reporting strategy and technique use according to leadership



4.4.3 Research Question 3c

To what extent do coordination, communications, and reporting strategies and techniques vary across district offices?

Summary: Program leadership were roughly split regarding whether the DO in which the BOS is located should or should not influence coordination, communications, and reporting strategies and techniques.

The VSM sessions identified some variations in coordination, communication, and reporting across DOs. Coordination variations were related to approving Joint Ventures and reviewing the completed annual review evaluation. The main communication variations related to the materials sent with the welcome letter and whether an annual review follow-up message is sent to the firm. Reporting variations highlighted inconsistent data entry for specific actions (for example, some BOSs report entering an activity in GMATT, while others enter the same action in Certify) or duplication (in which an activity is entered into multiple systems).

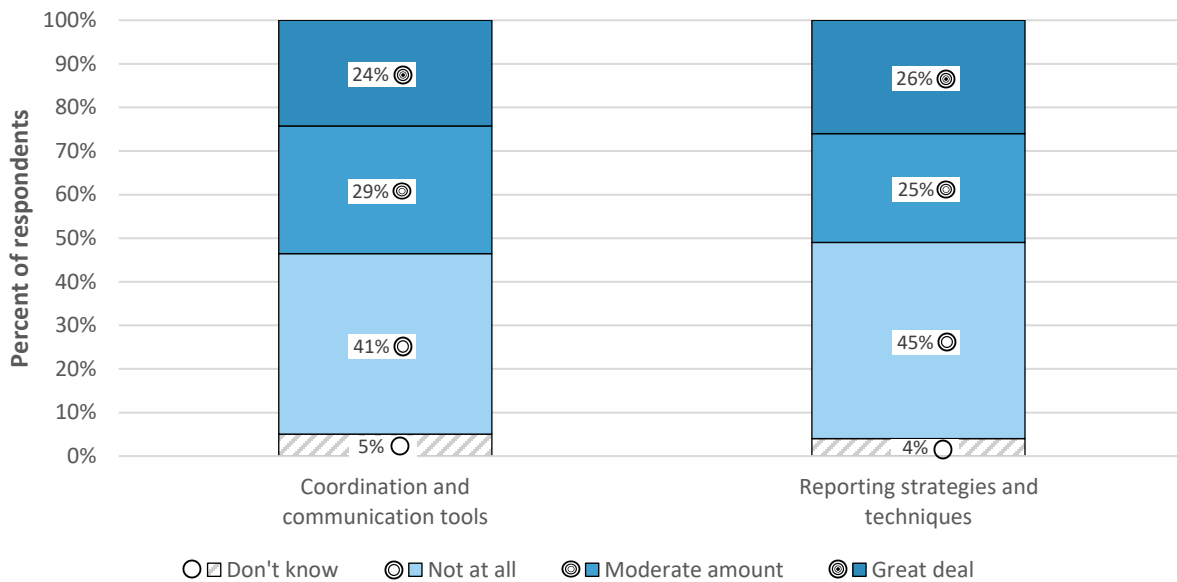
Findings relevant to this research question are presented in aggregate at the region level, rather than the DO level, to maintain anonymity of participants.



Survey. As shown in Figure 18, program leadership were split on whether the DO in which the BOS is located *should* influence coordination or communication tools. While 41% stated this factor should not influence coordination and communication tools at all, 53% said it should influence them a great deal or moderate amount. Program leadership were similarly split regarding

whether the BOS’s DO *should* influence reporting strategies and techniques. While 45% said it should not influence reporting strategies and techniques at all, 51% felt it should influence reporting strategies and techniques a great deal or moderate amount.

Figure 18: Influence of BOS location on coordination, communication, and reporting strategies and techniques according to leadership



VSM. The VSM sessions gathered data on coordination, communication, and reporting variations across DOs, as well as what type of reporting and data entry actions are conducted for each BD activity.

Coordination variations across DOs. The main coordination variations identified in the VSM sessions were related to approving Joint Ventures and reviewing the completed annual review evaluation:

- When an 8(a) firm is forming a JV to pursue sole source 8(a) contracts, the BOS reviews their submitted Joint Venture checklist using the BOS Joint Venture checklist. Once the BOS JV checklist is completed, the JV can be approved. Participants in one session noted that some DO leadership still require District Council sign-off, even though that is no longer required as of January 2023. Whether legal sign-off is still required depends on the “DO leadership’s preference,” according to one BOS. When legal sign-off becomes part of the process, it increases the delay time for this step. This variation represents waste, as it increases delay time and is no longer required.
- After the BOS completes the annual review workbook (used to evaluate the firm’s submitted annual review), a supervisor reviews the workbook. However, participants from one high-volume DO reported that the LBOS is not involved in workbook review “unless there is a major issue.” This is done to streamline the annual review process, enabling the BOS to move to the next step. This variation represents an internal control issue.

Communication variations across DOs. The main communication variations are around what materials get sent with the welcome letter and whether a follow-up message is sent to the firm summarizing the annual review (both discussed previously in RQ2f).

Reporting variations across DOs. The main variation identified was related to the field visit report, which is meant to be completed and uploaded to GMATT following an annual field visit. However, this step is not completed consistently across DOs. Two DOs reported using the report shell from the BD Corner, which they describe as a copy of the HUBZone site visit form (one BOS noted this is not the “right” report “but it was approved” by HQ). One DO does not use the field visit report because it is a copy of the HUBZone site visit form and instead sends a follow-up letter summarizing the meeting. One DO reported using the form included in the SOP (but called this a “lazy” method because the report template is “cheesy-looking”). One BOS felt no report is necessary for this step, noting the GMATT entry for the field visit should be sufficient. They stated there is no added value to filling out the report and that it felt like duplication. Across these variations, BOSs agreed that the report felt redundant on top of the follow-up letter to the firm.

Additionally, the VSM sessions gathered information on what data entry actions are taken for each BD activity identified in the process map. The full list of data entry actions is provided in Appendix F. The key finding from this information is that some steps result in reporting duplication (with activities reported in both Certify and GMATT), while others highlight BOS confusion or lack of clarity regarding where to report activities. For example, some BOSs report in GMATT, others report in Certify, and others don’t report. This suggests that BOSs would benefit from clarification regarding how, when, and where to report BD activities; ideally, this clarification would be in a central, easily accessible location that BOSs can reference when needed.

4.5 Research Question 4

To what extent do processes, procedures, coordination, communications, and reporting variations result in different BD short-term and intermediate outcomes?

Summary: The survey data show that BOSs and program leadership generally agree that variations in processes and procedures have the greatest impact on BD outcomes (69% of BOSs and 74% of leadership reported this has an impact). Between 50% and 60% of both populations also reported that variations in tools and technology as well as coordination and communications also have an impact on BD outcomes.



Document review. The OIG report identifies several challenges with understanding BD outcomes for firms, noting that Certify lacks “the analytical or reporting features promised for the 8(a) program.” Additionally, the report notes that BD processes lacked a mechanism for determining whether firms have met their BD goals. Although the OIG report attributed this challenge to a heavy focus on compliance, the program’s shift toward emphasizing BD over compliance since the report’s publication, while a positive change, has not fully addressed this challenge. OIG’s first finding—“SBA Must Improve Processes for Monitoring 8(a) Participant Goal Achievements and for Measuring Program Impact”—remains relevant.

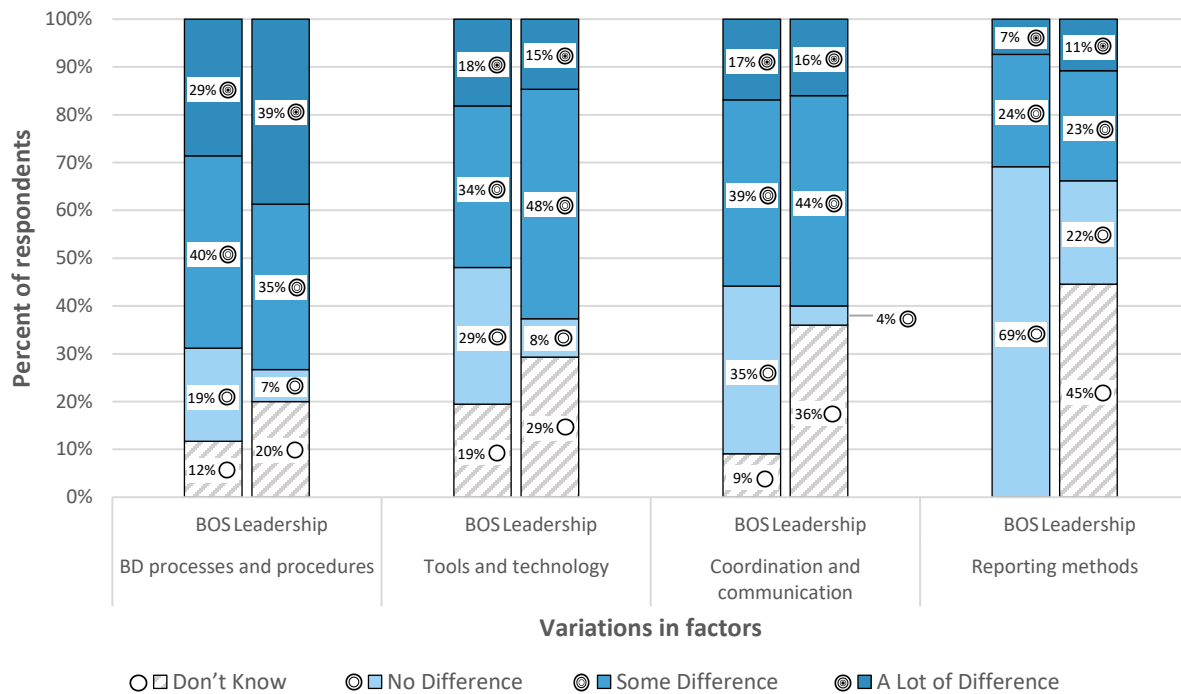


Survey. As shown in Figure 19, a majority of BOSs (69%) felt that variations in BD processes and procedures affect firm outcomes, while roughly half said the same for tools and technology (52%) and coordination and communication (56%). Leadership were generally in alignment, reporting that variations in BD processes and procedures (74%), tools and technology (63%), and coordination and communication (60%) all impact firm BD outcomes. However, a greater difference between BOS and program leadership responses is seen regarding how variations in reporting methods impact firm



outcomes. A majority of BOSs (69%) responded that reporting variations have no impact on firm outcomes. Leadership were less certain; 45% reported they did not know whether reporting variations impacted firm outcomes, while 22% said it made no difference, and 34% said it made some or a lot of difference.

Figure 19: Variations that impact 8(a) firm outcomes according to BOSs and leadership



An interesting pattern emerges based on BOS caseloads. BOSs with more than 50 firms were more likely to report that the following factors affected 8(a) firm outcomes some or a lot: tools and technology (67% compared to 49% for BOSs with lower caseloads) and coordination and communication (73% compared to 53%).

4.6 Research Question 5

What process and procedure revisions or coordination and communication efforts between OBD and OFO could improve 8(a) BD outcomes?

Summary: Process and procedure revisions. The future-state process map proposes that the annual field visit is conducted 6 to 8 months after the annual review, rather than immediately after. This shift is designed to provide an additional touch point between BOSs and firms and ensure the business plan is discussed twice per year, thereby providing additional support for firms.

Communication of policy and procedure changes. The VSM findings showed occasional confusion regarding the most up-to-date procedures and a lack of consistency in communicating program changes. Together, these findings suggest a need for more consistent communication of policy changes and a change log or central repository documenting all changes. This will improve consistency in BD service delivery, which may have an impact on firm BD outcomes.

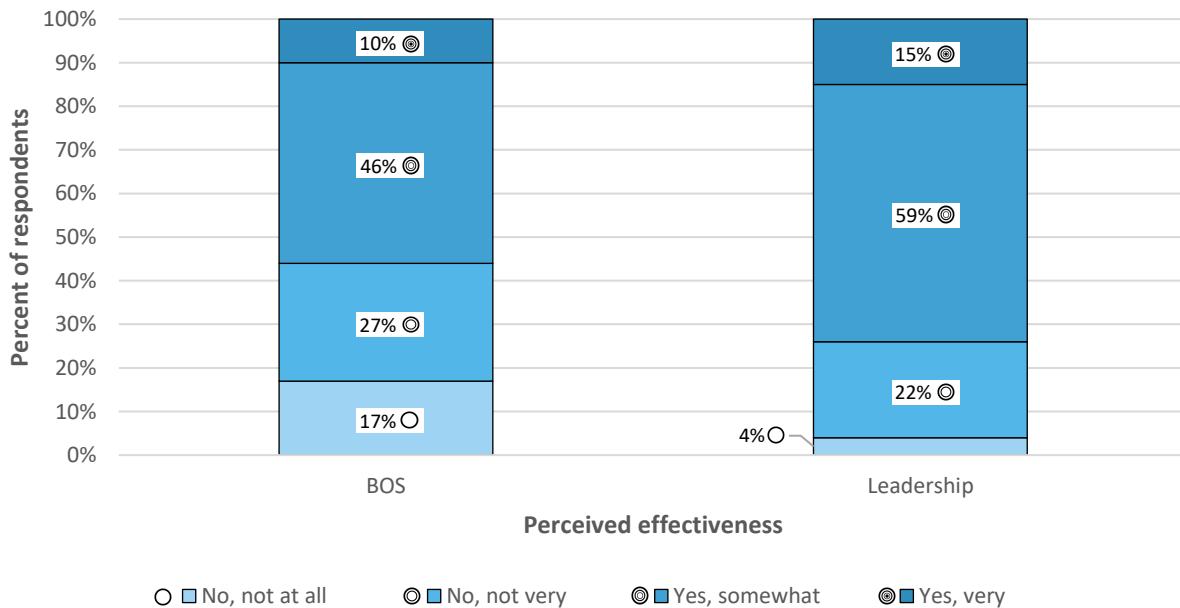
While 46% of BOS survey respondents and 59% of leadership respondents felt that changes to policies and procedures are communicated somewhat effectively, very few (10% and 15%, respectively) reported they were very effectively communicated. BOSs suggested that the process for communicating policy and procedure changes could be improved through a repository tracking program changes, consistency in the source of communications about changes, and informing program staff internally of changes before participants or the public.

Coordination and communication. While 53% of BOS survey respondents and 65% of leadership survey respondents felt that coordination between OBD program leadership and OFO BOSs is somewhat effective, very few (9% and 15%, respectively) reported coordination is very effective. The most common suggestions from BOSs to improve coordination were more consistent communication and to solicit input from BOSs prior to making program changes.



Survey. *Communication of policy and procedure changes.* As shown in Figure 20, program leadership were more likely than BOSs to say that policy and procedure changes were somewhat or very effectively communicated across the 8(a) program (74% of program leadership, compared to 56% of BOSs). However, a low percentage of both groups stated communication is very effect (15% of program leadership and 10% of BOSs). Forty-four percent of BOS respondents reported that communication was not or not very effectively communicated (compared to 26% of program leadership respondents).

Figure 20: Perceived effectiveness of policy and procedure change communication according to BOSs and leadership



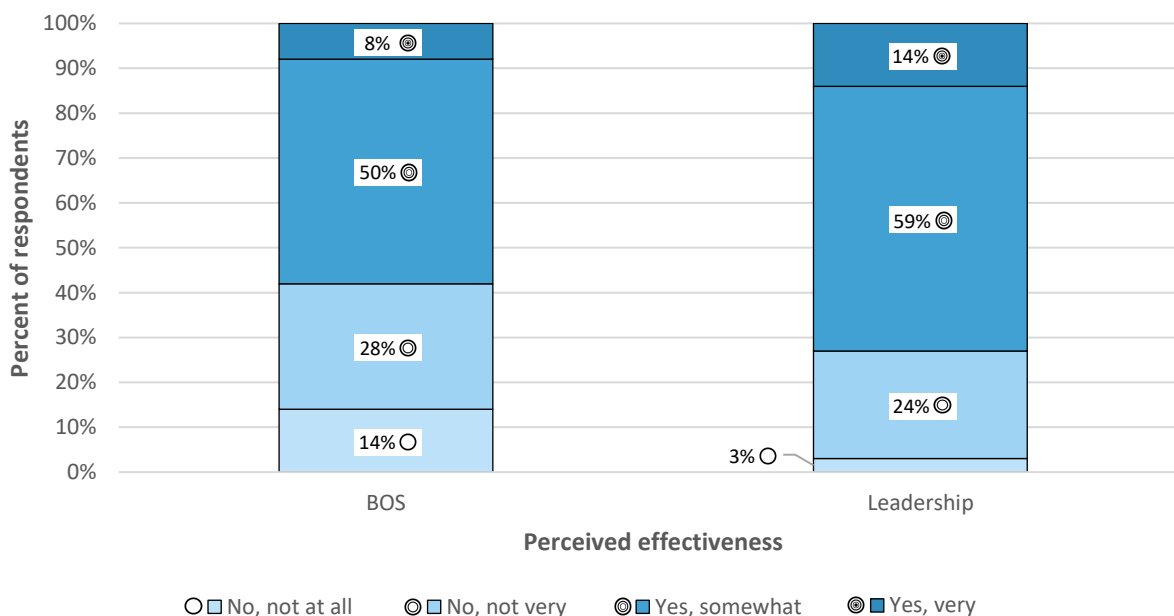
In the BOS survey, there are a few patterns that can be identified by BOS characteristics. BOSs with lower program tenure or those with smaller caseloads perceived communication more favorably. Specifically, 81% of BOSs that have worked in the 8(a) BD program for 3 years or less reported that policy and procedure change communication was very or somewhat effective; in comparison, 44% of those with longer program tenure reported the same. In addition, BOSs with the smallest caseloads (0 to

29 firms) reported communication of changes was very or somewhat effective more frequently (76%) compared to those with higher caseloads (48%). On average, 68% of BOSs across all regions reported that communication was very or somewhat effective, however three regions were notably lower than average (0%, 33%, and 33%). No meaningful patterns were identified in the leadership survey by respondent characteristics.

Survey respondents were also asked an open-ended question to gather data on how the process for communicating changes to policies and procedures could be improved. The most common suggestions from BOSs were to create a well-organized historical repository tracking changes (7 respondents), improve consistency in the source of communications about changes (6 respondents), and make sure 8(a) program staff are informed internally of changes before participants or the public (6 respondents). Program leadership felt there was too much email communication (2 respondents), there is a need for better coordination of calls (2 respondents), and there is an opportunity to ensure DO leadership is always aware of changes (2 respondents).

Implementation of policy and procedure changes. As shown in Figure 21, 50% of BOS respondents and 59% of leadership respondents felt that implementation of policy and procedure changes were somewhat effective; however, only 8% of BOSs and 14% of leadership felt the implementation of policy changes was very effective. Overall, more leadership respondents felt implementation of policy and procedure changes is very or somewhat effective (73%) than BOS respondents (58%).

Figure 21: Perceived effectiveness of policy and procedure change implementation according to BOSs and leadership



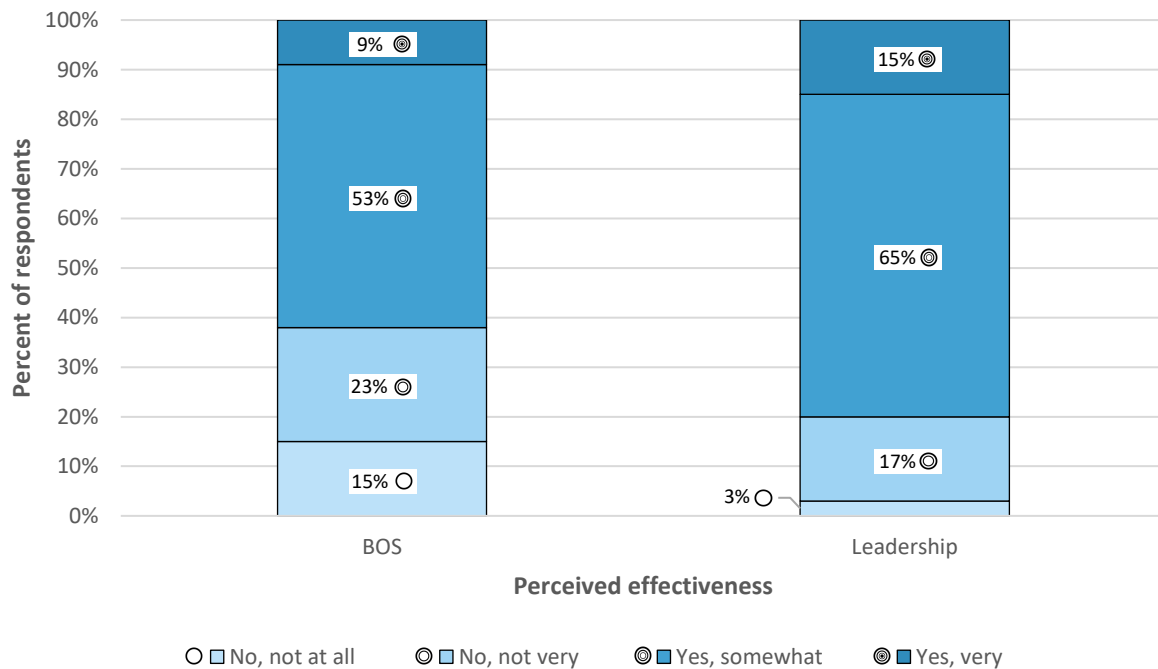
The patterns by BOS characteristics found here are similar to those discussed in relation to communication of policy and procedure changes; BOSs with shorter program tenure or smaller caseloads perceived implementation more favorably. BOSs with program tenure of less than 1 year reported that policy and procedure change implementation was very or somewhat effective more frequently (91%) compared to those with more experience (52%). In addition, BOSs assigned to the smallest caseloads (0 to 29 firms) reported implementation was very or somewhat effective more

frequently (72%) compared to those with higher caseloads (52%). BOSs in the same three regions discussed above were less likely to say communication was very or somewhat effective (0%, 33%, and 33%) compared to the average across all regions (70%).

When asked how the process for implementing changes to policies or procedures could be improved, the most common suggestions from BOSs were clearer instructions on implementing new policies and procedures (4 respondents) and more time between notifying BOSs and implementing the change (4 respondents). Program leadership responded that there is a need to improve communications to avoid an information vacuum before, during, and after implementing changes (2 respondents).

Effectiveness of OBD and OFO coordination. As shown in Figure 22, only 9% of BOS respondents and 15% of leadership respondents felt coordination between OBD program leadership and OFO BOSs was very effective, while 53% of BOS respondents and 65% of leadership respondents felt coordination was somewhat effective. Overall, more leadership respondents felt OBD and OFO coordination was either very or somewhat effective (80%) than BOS respondents (62%).

Figure 22: Perceived effectiveness of OBD and OFO coordination according to BOSs and leadership



Patterns by BOS characteristics were similar to other topics under this RQ. BOSs with less tenure in the 8(a) program and those with the longest program tenure were most likely to report that coordination is effective; 91% of BOSs with program tenure of less than 1 year and 74% of BOSs with program tenure of more than 10 years reported coordination was very or somewhat effective, which was significantly higher than BOSs with tenure of 1 to 10 years (48%). Fewer BOSs from three regions perceived coordination as very or somewhat effective (33%, 33%, and 17%) compared to the average across all regions (69%).

When BOSs were asked how coordination between OBD program leadership and OFO BOSs could be improved, the most common suggestions were more consistent communication (7 respondents) and to

solicit input from BOSs prior to making program changes (6 respondents). When asked an open-ended question on how the process for developing 8(a) BD service policies and procedures could be improved, the strongest theme across all BOS and program leadership respondents was soliciting input from BOSs and DOs in general. Twenty-three BOS respondents suggested more input from BOSs or listening to BOSs to inform policies and procedures. Similarly, 28 program leadership respondents suggested soliciting greater input from DOs (15 of these respondents specified feedback from DO BOSs, while the other respondents did not identify specific roles within the DOs).

Overall suggestions. Finally, all survey respondents were asked an open-ended question to solicit any suggestions to improve the 8(a) program. As shown in Table 14, the three most common suggestions from BOSs were increased training opportunities (10 respondents), allowing BOSs to spend more time on BD rather than compliance or administrative tasks (8 respondents), and improving communication between OFO and HQ (6 respondents). As shown in Table 15, the three most common suggestions from leadership, were hiring additional staff (9 respondents), separating the annual review from other BD duties (5 respondents), and improving BOS training and motivation (4 respondents).

Table 14: Top three BOS suggestions to improve the 8(a) program

Theme	Count
More training opportunities for BOSs (including in-person BOS annual conferences or meetings [3 respondents])	10
Help BOSs spend more time on BD and less on administrative or compliance activities (including two separate types of BOS position, one for compliance and one for BD [3 respondents])	8
Improve communications between OFO and HQ	6

Table 15: Top three leadership suggestions to improve the 8(a) program

Theme	Count
Hire additional staff or improve staffing levels	9
Separate annual review and other BD duties (<i>conducted by separate BOSs or separate offices</i>)	5
Improve BOS training and motivation	4

In addition to the themes shown in the tables above, there are two themes worth highlighting from the open-ended responses across both surveys:

- *Staffing constraints.* While challenges related to staffing levels were raised by both BOSs and program leadership in response to open-ended survey questions, this was particularly notable for the program leadership survey. Leadership respondents reported that lack of appropriate staffing levels constrains the ability of BOSs to effectively provide BD services to 8(a) firms. This topic was raised by at least two respondents in 10 of the 21 open-ended survey questions. These responses were often not relevant to the specific survey question asked; this suggests it was an important topic to respondents, as they felt the need to ensure the topic was covered.
- *Separating BD and compliance roles.* One common suggestion across both BOSs (3 respondents) and program leadership (5 respondents) was to create separate BOS positions, one focused on providing BD services and the other focused on compliance tasks. The purpose of this suggestion is to allow BOSs to spend more time conducting BD services and conduct fewer of the time-intensive administrative or compliance tasks such as annual reviews and data entry, to better serve their 8(a) firms.





VSM. The VSM sessions yielded several suggestions for improvements to processes, procedures, coordination, and communication that would impact firm BD outcomes:

- *Process and procedure revision.* The future-state process map proposes that the annual field visit is conducted 6 to 8 months after the annual review, rather than immediately after. This shift is designed to provide an additional touch point between BOSs and firms (some of which may not reach out to their assigned BOS during the year) and ensure the business plan is discussed twice per year, thereby providing additional support for firms.
- *Coordination and communication effort.* Some BOSs raised recommendations around training needs, given high turnover in contracting roles. As respondents in one session noted, there is always a need for training. This provides an opportunity for increased coordination between OBD and OFO to identify training needs and ensure consistently offered trainings to both new and experienced BOSs. Meeting these needs will improve BOSs' abilities to service their firms, thereby improving firm BD outcomes.
- *Coordination and communication effort.* As discussed in RQ2a, there is occasionally confusion among BOSs on the most up-to-date procedures due to frequent changes to 8(a) policies and procedures. Additionally, as discussed above, some BOSs reported in open-ended survey questions that there is a lack of consistency in communicating program changes, and they sometimes hear about policy changes from their 8(a) firm or other external parties. Together, these findings suggest a need for more consistent communication of policy changes and a change log or central repository documenting all changes. This will improve consistency in BD service delivery, which may have an impact on firm BD outcomes.

Additionally, VSM participants highlighted several policy and procedure changes that were implemented with positive results. For example, the November 2020 change in which the SBA only approves Joint Ventures (JVs) for sole source 8(a) contracts—and not competitive 8(a) contracts—was seen as reducing BOS workloads, reducing processing time, and generally streamlining the JV approval process.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This evaluation has identified process variations that best serve 8(a) firms through tailored BD services that align with a firm’s business goals and needs. However, the evaluation also identified process variations that negatively impact BOSs administering the program and participating 8(a) firms. Additionally, documented pain points present challenges to BOSs providing crucial services to 8(a) firms. Addressing these challenges can improve BOSs’ ability to service their firms as well as improve firm outcomes and satisfaction with the program. The key findings detailed in the sections above can be summarized in six themes, presented below:

- **Most BD activities are conducted as needed.** Most BD activities are conducted by BOSs as needed based on the firm’s needs, rather than at predefined points in a sequential process with a designated order of steps. These activities include providing counseling and guidance (on a variety of topics based on the firm’s needs), providing Joint Venture partnership guidance, connecting firms to local and state supplier diversity partners, initiating and sending requirement letters, and many more. This finding reflects that much of the BOSs’ BD workload is based on firms’ specific needs. While only a small number of BD activities are predetermined steps conducted at designated times or frequencies, these activities are often complex and time-consuming (such as annual reviews).
- **BD services are tailored based on firm needs.** The business needs of 8(a) firms impact how services are provided more than other factors such as the firm–BOS geographic proximity, the BOS’s annual performance metrics, or the DO in which the BOS is located.
- **Process variations exist at the DO level.** Many of the identified process variations are at the DO level, rather than driven by specific factors such as firm–BOS geographic proximity. High caseloads were a contributing factor to many of these variations.
- **System pain points.** Significant pain points exist in the current systems, in particular with Certify. Pain points highlighted by BOSs included ineffective Certify notifications, technical issues with the system, the need to look up information from multiple sources, challenges accessing reviews from previous years, and the need for usability improvements.
- **Data on firm outcomes are lacking.** As discussed in the limitations section, the existing administrative data do not collect sufficient metrics to analyze firm outcomes. Although there are currently no SBA data that capture outcomes, several of our recommendations (including the new or revised metrics in the logic model) are designed to situate the SBA to begin collecting these data moving forward. This will allow the SBA to answer this research question in the future.
- **BOSs that are relatively new to the 8(a) program have different perceptions and experiences.** Throughout the findings discussion, we have highlighted any notable difference across BOS characteristics such as caseload, program tenure, and region. When looking holistically at the patterns reported, BOSs with shorter program tenures are more likely to look different from other groups. This is particularly notable for BOSs with less than 1 year of program tenure.¹⁰ As discussed throughout this report, this group of BOSs is:
 - More likely to report spending less time on BD activities than average;
 - More likely to report *always* using GMATT;
 - More likely to say that firm business goals and needs do not influence the reporting method used;

¹⁰ Although not a direct proxy for program experience, the finding that BDSs frequently rated their skill level across competencies 0.5 to 1 point lower than other roles may also be interesting contextual information.

- More likely to say that policy and procedure change implementation was very or somewhat effective;
- More likely to say that coordination between OBD and OFO was very or somewhat effective; and
- Less likely to use in-person meetings.

From these findings, the team made six recommendations. They are presented below, organized from highest to lowest impact. To the extent required by law and the collective bargaining agreement, the SBA will engage the Union to ensure compliance with the Master Labor Agreement (MLA) and to meet its bargaining obligations as relates to implementing these recommendations.

Recommendation 1. Incorporate evaluation findings into the design of a new system of record.

Relevant findings. Program staff reported notable pain points with existing systems—primarily with Certify, the existing system of record, but also with GMATT—which highlights opportunities for improvements. Additionally, the current system of record does not collect sufficient administrative data to reliably analyze firm post-graduation success. The forthcoming creation of a new system of record to replace Certify represents an opportunity to learn from existing pain points, improve usability, and add increased automation in the new system.

Impact: High
Implementation effort: High

Recommendation. Incorporate relevant evaluation findings in the design and implementation of a new system of record to better meet overall program needs (including data-tracking needs) and BOS needs. This includes:

- Incorporating proposed changes from the future-state process map (for example, automating the sending of the exit survey by the system of record 6 months before a firm’s graduation date);
- Adding capabilities to track outcome metrics identified in the revised logic model to enable future outcome evaluations; and
- Improving user-friendliness by addressing specific pain points raised by BOSs (for example, the ability to open PDFs directly within the system, rather than having to download to the desktop first).

Impact. Incorporating evaluation findings into the design and implementation of the new system of record will help reduce BOS pain points, reduce data entry duplication and overprocessing, improve data management and recordkeeping, and collect data needed for future outcome evaluations.

Recommendation 2. Solicit firm feedback throughout program tenure.

Relevant findings. During VSM sessions, program leadership discussed the importance of soliciting structured, qualitative feedback from participating 8(a) firms. However, the exit survey as it is currently operationalized is not a reliable source of this information. BOSs shared that the survey is not always sent to graduating firms in time for them to complete and return it, because it is often a lower priority for BOSs juggling high caseloads. In addition, the exit survey is frequently not completed by graduating

Impact: High
Implementation effort: Medium



firms. Because the existing administrative data do not include any information on firm satisfaction with or feedback on the 8(a) program, the exit survey is currently the only source of firm feedback, which compounds the challenge of its low completion rate.

Recommendation. Solicit firm feedback throughout their tenure in the program and automate the process by:

- Automatically sending the exit survey via the system of record and sending it to graduating firms 6 months before their graduation date (rather than 30 to 90 days); and
- Adding a brief firm feedback survey to the annual review package submitted by firms every year.

Impact. These changes will improve the frequency and response rates of firm feedback. Automating the sending of the exit survey earlier in the firm’s final year will (1) ensure the survey is always sent to graduating firms and (2) improve the likelihood firms complete and submit the survey by reaching them earlier in their graduating year when they are less likely to be “checked out” of the program. Additionally, adding firm feedback questions to the annual review will establish an annual trend line of feedback data, thereby making the SBA less reliant on the exit survey data alone.

It should be noted, however, that although the implementation effort for this recommendation is medium, this improvement does not end with implementing the process changes proposed above. The SBA will need to design a mechanism to ensure that data are reviewed on a scheduled basis to inform program changes; in other words, a continuous improvement feedback loop should be designed. This will ensure that increased data collection supports the SBA’s efforts to identify and implement program changes to meet the needs of participating firms.

Recommendation 3. Incorporate the annual review workbook into the new system of record.

Relevant findings. BOSs highlighted several pain points with the existing workbook, including its length and complexity and the need to look up information from multiple external sources. The current-state process map shows that evaluating the annual review has one of the highest delay times of any BD activity, which highlights an opportunity for improvement.

Impact: High
Implementation effort: High

Additionally, there are challenges related to data availability and progress tracking with the current workbook. Because the annual review workbook is not uploaded until the evaluation is completed and the BOS annual review workbook has been reviewed by a supervisor, there is currently no way to track the status of the annual review evaluation to understand whether an incomplete evaluation is almost complete or barely started. Furthermore, the workbook collects useful data (such as firm financial information) which were not available to Summit in an analyzable format; this represents an informative data source that is currently underutilized.

Finally, program leadership noted that the current Excel version of the annual review workbook was not intended to be a permanent solution. As noted in the OIG report, this means the workbook lacks capabilities such as the ability to “document progress from year-to-year.”

Recommendation. The design of a new system of record is an opportunity to incorporate the current annual review workbook into the new system for improved reporting and analytics.

Impact. The main benefits of this change would be increased automation, improved process tracking, and improved reporting and analytics.

- *Increased automation.* First, this change would enable the system of record to automatically fill in fields for both (1) the annual review package that firms fill out and (2) the annual review evaluation tool that BOSs use. The system could automatically fill data fields where data already exist in the system and roll over relevant information from the previous year’s annual review (such as number of employees), which can be confirmed or updated by the firm.
- *Improved progress tracking.* This change will also provide visibility into the annual review evaluation progress since it will be visible in the system rather than in a stand-alone workbook not accessible to DO leadership or program leadership. Given that delay times in completing the annual review evaluation may be extensive, this improved visibility would provide insight into causes of delay time (for example, whether annual review evaluations have not been started at all, or whether supervisor sign-off is the only pending step).
- *Improved reporting and analytics.* When these data fields are integrated into the system of record (rather than existing only in an uploaded Excel spreadsheet), they will be more accessible for analysis. For example, the SBA could generate summary statistics on firm financials (stratified by program year, business size, etc.) or summary statistics based on the competitive business mix (proportion of 8(a) to non-8(a) contracts). This will allow the SBA to create year-over-year trend lines for firms based on the information reported in the annual review package, facilitating future outcome evaluations.

Recommendation 4. Conduct future research on 8(a) firm program experience.

Relevant findings. The VSM sessions and survey results identified pain points and challenges experienced by BOSs that may impede their ability to effectively provide BD services to 8(a) firms. The BOSs’ ability to effectively

provide BD services to their firms influences the customer experience. Therefore, addressing identified pain points and challenges is an important component of improving customer service. However, data is currently lacking on pain points or challenges experienced by the 8(a) firms themselves. Understanding impediments experienced on both sides—by BOSs providing BD services and the 8(a) firms receiving those services—is crucial to a holistic understanding of opportunities to improve customer service.

Impact: High
Implementation effort: Medium

Recommendation. Conduct future research with active and graduated 8(a) firms to gather primary data (via interviews and surveys) on firm program experience. This data collection should focus on topics such as ease and pain points related to the delivery of BD services (including ease of communicating with their assigned BOS), the quality of BD services received, and how well BD services align with firm goals and needs.

Impact. Future research on 8(a) firm experiences in the program will determine what program components are currently working well for 8(a) firms and what challenges or pain points may impede their program participation, satisfaction with the program, and ability to grow their businesses. This data will enable the SBA to identify and implement program improvements, resulting in enhanced customer service.



Recommendation 5. Update and expand the program desk guide.

Relevant findings. BOSs exhibited some confusion around the most up-to-date processes for certain tasks, such as whether Certify allows firms to submit unsigned participation agreements. This confusion likely stems from how quickly the program is adapting and changing to meet participant needs. Some newer BOSs also felt like they did not have all the information they needed, and several noted they would like a central repository of resources (which the BD Corner is intended to be).

Impact: Medium
Implementation effort: Low

BOSs also raised a need for more consistent communication of program changes. While some BOSs reported that changes are sometimes communicated in monthly meetings, not all BOSs are able to attend each meeting. Some BOSs also reported finding out about program changes from their firms or from public announcements, rather than from internal messaging.

The existing desk guide has several good process visualizations for specific needs, but it is generally lacking in detail. In addition, the current version is outdated, as it focuses primarily on compliance processes (such as continuing eligibility process procedures for high-risk and ad hoc cases), not BD processes.

Recommendation. Update and expand the existing desk guide to include:

- Step-by-step processes for BD activities such as evaluating new business plans;
- Clear descriptions of roles and responsibilities;
- Links to resources (including specific locations in the BD Corner); and
- Integrate change management processes and protocols, including a change log documenting all process changes and effective dates.

An updated desk guide will also be a useful supplement to the formal SOP. Appendix 3A in the SOP (“Steps to Conducting a Site Visit to an 8(a) Participant”) provides a good example of the type of step-by-step instructions that would be useful for all relevant processes in an updated desk guide.

If the level of effort for updating and releasing a full desk guide at once is prohibitive, the desk guide can be completed over a schedule spanning 1 to 2 years. We propose the following order for updating the desk guide:

- Create the change log and begin the processing of documenting all policy and procedure changes moving forward.
- Create a table of contents to the BD Corner (and any other locations housing relevant documentation); to make this easier to update, this can be done at the folder level rather than the individual document level, with a list of relevant documents or document types within each folder.
- Add step-by-step instructions for processes with high delay times or pain points, such as evaluating the annual review.
- Write clear descriptions of roles and responsibilities for each position within the program.
- Add step-by-step instructions for all other processes.



Impact. Given how quickly the program is changing and evolving to meet 8(a) firms' needs, an updated desk guide will:

- Be a useful reference tool for new and experienced BOSs alike;
- Help standardize communication of program changes between HQ and the field; and
- Help reduce process variations through the change log and links to up-to-date materials.

Recommendation 6. Conduct future research on the distribution model.

Relevant findings. BOSs reported that high caseloads impacted their roles. High caseloads were a contributing factor in higher delay times among high-volume DOs, which led BOSs to prioritize activities that had monetary impacts (such as approving business plans) over purely BD activities. This was a contributing factor to undesirable process variations identified in this evaluation (for example, skipping supervisor review of the completed BOS annual review workbook). Program leadership survey respondents highlighted staffing level constraints as a challenge in 10 of 21 open-ended survey questions.

Impact: Low
Implementation effort: High

Recommendation. While the previous recommendations are intended to improve the BOS workload by reducing overwork and variation, the program may benefit from an examination of the distribution model to determine whether it is meeting program needs. Such an evaluation would also encompass competencies and skill sets of existing staff to understand workforce development needs that would influence the distribution model. Given that staffing and caseload are complex topics impacted by factors both within OFO and OBD as well as across the SBA, a full evaluation of this topic is needed to make impactful recommendations informed by all relevant factors. This examination may be especially insightful given the recent focal shift from compliance to BD.

Impact. An evaluation of the distribution model would help the SBA understand the extent to which the current distribution model meets needs. This would inform recommendations to directly address or balance workloads based on an understanding of what and where the needs are, how needs differ across different types of firms (individually owned or entity-owned), how required skill sets and proficiencies differ by factors, and more.



Appendix A ADDITIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE DATA TABLES

This appendix includes relevant tables generated using GMATT and Certify data. Not every variable in the datasets has a table in this appendix; some variables were excluded because they were not used in analysis.

Table 1: GMATT: Activity type groups

Activity (OData_8aActivityType)	Fiscal Year	Category
Annual Review Completed	2022, 2023	BD
Business Plan Completion/Updates	2022	BD
Change of Ownership/Structure	2022	Compliance
Change of Ownership/Structure Processed	2023	Compliance
Eligibility Review Referral	2022, 2023	Compliance
Firm Competitive Business Mix Contract Compliance Monitoring/Securing Non 8(a) Contracts	2022	Compliance
Firm Graduations	2022	BD
Firm Site Visits	2022, 2023	BD
Annual Field Visit	2023	BD
Visit*	2023	BD
Firm Terminations Submitted	2022	Compliance
Waivers	2022	Compliance
Waivers Processed	2023	Compliance
Primary NAICS Code change	2022	Compliance
Review of NAICS Code Appeal	2022	Compliance
Contract Release Request Processed	2022	Compliance
Firm 921 Processing	2022	Compliance
Business Plan Review	2022	BD
New Business Plan Evaluation	2023	BD
Remedial Action Plan Review	2022	BD
Sole Source Restriction	2022	Compliance
Sole Source Restriction Processed	2023	Compliance
Sole Source Restriction Lift	2022	Compliance
Sole Source Restriction Lift Processed	2023	Compliance
Acceptance Letter Review (Non-JV)	2022	BD
Acceptance Letter Completed (Non-JV)	2023	BD
Acceptance Letter Review (JV)	2022	BD
Acceptance Letter Completed (JV)	2023	BD
7j Classes offered	2022	BD
Referral to SBA Resource Partners including PTAC, WBC, VBOC SBDC, SCORE	2022	BD
Change of Address processed	2022	Compliance
8(a) Joint Venture Approval	2022	BD
8(a) Joint Venture/Addendum Processed	2023	BD
Search/Requirement letters	2022	BD
Search/Requirement Letters Sent	2023	BD
8(a) Orientation	2022, 2023	BD

Activity (OData_8aActivityType)	Fiscal Year	Category
Bonafide office review/processing	2022	Compliance
Bonafide office site visit	2022	Compliance
Compliance Site Visit	2023	Compliance
Surplus Property Eligibility Review/Approval	2022, 2023	Compliance
Business Development	2022	BD
Counseling and Technical Assistance*	2023	BD
Training*	2023	BD
Good Faith Effort Memo	2022	Compliance
Good Faith Effort Memo Processed	2023	Compliance
Novation	2022	Compliance
Contract Action: Adverse Impact Analysis Processed	2023	Compliance
Contract Action: Contract Release Request Processed/Novation Processed	2023	Compliance
Transfer of 8(a) Processed	2023	Compliance
Outreach*	2023	BD
Administrative*	2023	Compliance

*These activity types are derived from the TypeofEngagement variable rather than the OData_8aActivityType variable.

Table 2: GMATT: BD activity type counts

Activity Type (OData_8aActivityType)	Count	Percent
Annual Review Completed Retention*	4,846	32.5%
Acceptance Letter Review (Non-JV)	2,020	13.5%
Firm Site Visits	1,492	10.0%
Ad hoc BD (Counseling and Technical Assistance** + Business Development)	1,398	9.4%
Annual Field Visit	1,390	9.3%
Search/Requirement Letters (Sent)	1,351	9.1%
Annual Review Completed Exit Review*	516	3.5%
8(a) Orientation	340	2.3%
Business Plan Completion/Updates	271	1.8%
Annual Review Completed Termination*	267	1.8%
Annual Review Completed Voluntary Withdrawal*	232	1.6%
Acceptance Letter Completed (Non-JV)	142	1.0%
New Business Plan Evaluation	138	0.9%
Acceptance Letter Review (JV)	119	0.8%
Business Plan Review	73	0.5%
7j Classes offered	71	0.5%
8(a) Joint Venture Approval	70	0.5%
8(a) Joint Venture/Addendum Processed	63	0.4%
Annual Review Completed Voluntary Early Graduation*	43	0.3%
Remedial Action Plan Review	24	0.2%
Referral to SBA Resource Partners including PTAC, WBC, VBOC SBDC, SCORE	22	0.1%

Activity Type (OData_8aActivityType)	Count	Percent
Firm Graduations	11	0.1%
Acceptance Letter Completed (JV)	7	0.0%
Annual Field Visit Exit Review*	2	0.0%
Training**	1	0.0%
Total	14,908	100%

Notes: Outreach and Visit are excluded from this table because none of those records indicated an 8(a) firm name. Counts are across all SBA regions from FY 2022 Q1 to FY 2023 Q3 (ending June 8, 2023).

*Constructed from OData_8aActivityType and OData_8aActivitySubType variables.

**Constructed from TypeofEngagement variable.

Table 3: GMATT: Count of BD entries by each SBA region

SBA Region	Count	Percent
Region 1	320	2.1%
Region 2	807	5.4%
Region 3	3,342	22.4%
Region 4	2,787	18.7%
Region 5	1,155	7.7%
Region 6	2,401	16.1%
Region 7	577	3.9%
Region 8	623	4.2%
Region 9	1,922	12.9%
Region 10	974	6.5%
Total	14,908	100%

Note: Counts are from FY 2022 Q1 to FY 2023 Q3 (ending June 8, 2023).

Table 4: GMATT: Count of BD entries by fiscal year and quarter

Fiscal Year and Quarter	Count	Percent
FY 2022 Q1	656	4.4%
FY 2022 Q2	1,459	9.8%
FY 2022 Q3	2,452	16.4%
FY 2022 Q4	5,081	34.1%
FY 2023 Q1	1,465	9.8%
FY 2023 Q2	1,885	12.6%
FY 2023 Q3*	1,910	12.8%
Total	14,908	100%

Note: Counts are across all SBA regions from FY 2022 Q1 to FY 2023 Q3 (ending June 8, 2023).

*FY 2023 Q3 is a partial quarter (data end June 8, 2023).

Table 5: Certify: Count of 8(a) firm status

Status	Count	Percent
Active	4,843	79.9%
Graduated	782	12.9%
Withdraw	317	5.2%

Status	Count	Percent
Terminated	123	2.0%
Total	6,065	100%

Notes: Certify data dated 2010–May 2023. Counts are across all SBA regions.

Table 6: Certify: Count of active 8(a) firms in each SBA region

SBA Region	Count	Percent
Region 3	1,551	32.0%
Region 4	756	15.6%
Region 6	568	11.7%
Region 9	566	11.7%
Region 10	446	9.2%
Region 5	326	6.7%
Region 2	256	5.3%
Region 8	165	3.4%
Region 7	131	2.7%
Region 1	78	1.6%
Total	4,843	100%

Note: Certify data dated 2010–May 2023.

Table 7: Certify: Count of active 8(a) firm industries

Industry	Count	Percent
Professional and Business Services	3,035	62.7%
Construction	1,119	23.1%
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	199	4.1%
Manufacturing	137	2.8%
Education and Health Services	133	2.7%
Information	102	2.1%
Financial Activities	42	0.9%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	32	0.7%
Natural Resources and Mining	22	0.5%
Leisure and Hospitality	21	0.4%
NA (missing NAICS code)	1	0.0%
Total	4,843	100%

Notes: Certify data dated 2010–May 2023. Industry is based on the primary NAICS code of the firm; these NAICS codes were cross-walked with NAICS groupings published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics to get these industry categories.

Table 8: Certify: Count of active 8(a) firm ownership types

Ownership Type	Count	Percent
Individually Owned	4,177	86.2%
ANC	360	7.4%
AIT	223	4.6%
NHO	81	1.7%

Ownership Type	Count	Percent
CDC	2	0.0%
Total	4,843	100%

Notes: Counts are across all SBA regions. Certify data dated 2010–May 2023.

Table 9: Certify: Count of active 8(a) firm disadvantage types

Disadvantage Type	Count	Percent
Black American	1,565	32.3%
Hispanic American	967	20.0%
Subcontinent Asian American	670	13.8%
Asian Pacific American	441	9.1%
ANC	360	7.4%
Preponderance	288	5.9%
Native American	246	5.1%
AIT	223	4.6%
NHO	81	1.7%
CDC	2	0.0%
Total	4,843	100%

Notes: Counts are across all SBA regions. Certify data dated 2010–May 2023.

Table 10: Certify: Distances between DO and 8(a) firm office by SBA region

SBA Region	Average Distance (Miles)	Median Distance (Miles)	Maximum Distance (Miles)	Minimum Distance (Miles)
Region 1	61.3	27.0	407.5	0.3
Region 2	63.0	20.1	2,449.0	0.3
Region 3	43.2	17.5	4,827.6	0.1
Region 4	119.1	80.8	3,698.4	0.0*
Region 5	143.8	23.7	2,782.3	0.1
Region 6	133.3	21.1	3,715.1	0.1
Region 7	160.6	17.6	1,118.5	0.5
Region 8	142.8	35.7	2,394.1	0.3
Region 9	175.3	17.0	3,807.7	0.0*
Region 10	910.0	165.3	4,879.5**	0.1

*Several firms were located in the same building as their servicing DO.

**The greatest distance across the contiguous United States is roughly 2,700 miles.

Appendix B DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

VSM discussion guide

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion today. My name is Teresa, and I am a senior consultant with Summit Consulting. I am joined by my colleague Antonia, another senior consultant.

The SBA has contracted Summit to conduct an evaluation on 8(a) business development (BD) service delivery. We understand how crucial this program is, and our evaluation aims to understand where there are pain points and opportunities to improve the crucial work that is done.

The goals of this evaluation are to:

1. Better understand the 8(a) processes, procedures, communication, and reporting strategies used;
2. Identify areas to improve consistency and BD delivery service; and
3. Determine how the SBA can invest in the development and needs of the BOSs who deliver business development assistance to the 8(a) Program Participants.

As part of this evaluation, we are conducting value-stream mapping (VSM) sessions with program leadership and BOSs. VSM is a lean-management method for defining the current state of a process, identifying any waste or inefficiencies, and developing or designing the desired future state.

During today's session, we'll review a preliminary process map, which shows the steps involved in providing BD services to 8(a) firms. The preliminary process map was developed using program documentation (primarily the SOP). The goal for today's discussion is to:

- Gain a better understanding of the current state of BD service delivery, including how long each step takes, who is responsible for each step, challenges and pain points, and opportunities to improve; and
- Understand what drives variation at each step.

With everyone's permission, I would like to record today's discussion. This helps us ensure we don't miss anything important that you say. Only Summit staff working on this project will have access to the recording. Do I have everyone's permission to record our discussion today?

Before we begin, does anyone have any questions?

Background

- To kick us off, let's go around the group and have everyone introduce yourself and tell us how long you have served in your current role in the 8(a) BD program.

Current process

Screen share the preliminary process map. For each step on the process map:

- Who is primarily responsible for conducting this step?
- How long does this take:
 - In terms of the actual touch time excluding interruptions, called process time (PT)?
 - *Follow-up to understand variations*
 - How much delay time (DT) is there when the task is delayed or not touched?
 - What is the cause of this DT?
 - What is the total time required to complete this step (Lead time = PT + DT)?
- IF NEEDED, How often do you complete this step per firm?
 - *Follow-up to understand variations*
- Do you complete data entry after this step (i.e., using GMATT or Certify)?
- Are there any tools that you use to complete this step (such as checklists or guides)?

For each category:

- Are there specific challenges or pain points you face when completing the steps in this category?
- Are any additional actions triggered by the steps in this category (such as BOS/LBOS/SBOS review, revisions, etc.)?

General questions

- Are there any key steps missing from the process map? Is anything in the wrong order?
- Which steps are currently working well?
- Which steps could be streamlined?
- At what points in the process do things tend to get stuck or significantly delayed?
 - What causes these delays?
 - What is the effect or impact of these delays?
- What changes to BD service delivery process have already been implemented?
 - What were the results?
- How would you suggest changing the BD service delivery process, to have a greater impact on firm outcomes?

Additional questions (if time)

- Are you familiar with the SOP?
 - Do you reference the SOP, or are there other sources of information you use?
- What other sources of information on the program are available to you?
- How did you learn to conduct these steps?
 - Is there training available on these topics?

Business Opportunity Specialist (BOS) survey instrument

Introduction

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your responses provide valuable input for the evaluation of service delivery in the SBA's 8(a) Business Development (BD) Program.

The goal of this survey is to:

1. Better understand the 8(a) processes, procedures, communication, and reporting strategies used;
2. Identify areas to improve consistency and BD delivery service; and
3. Determine how the SBA can invest in the development and needs of the BOSs who deliver business development assistance to the 8(a) Program Participants.

This survey is anonymous. This means that all data will be reported in the aggregate, with no individually identifiable data being reported or discussed. We want to emphasize that your information will not be provided to supervisors and will not be used for any personnel decisions.

Survey instructions

This survey was designed to take approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete, but please take the time you need to complete the survey to your satisfaction.

Please answer the questions as honestly as possible based on your firsthand knowledge and experience. There are no right or wrong answers—we are interested in your experience and opinions. Remember that your responses will be kept confidential.

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your feedback is important!

To begin the survey, click "Next."

Background questions

1. In which SBA office do you currently work?
 - a. Office of Business Development (OBD)
 - b. Office of Field Operations (OFO)
 - c. Other -> *Ineligible, go to screen-out page*
2. What is your current role in the 8(a) BD Program?
 - a. Business Opportunity Specialist (BOS) or Lead Business Opportunity Specialist (LBOS),
 - b. Business Development Specialist (BDS)
 - c. Supervisory Business Opportunity Specialist (SBOS)
 - d. Program leadership including Associate Administrator, Deputy Associate Administrator, Director, District Director, Deputy District Director, or other Program Lead role -> *Go to leadership redirect page*
 - e. Other (specify)

3. How long have you worked in the 8(a) BD Program?
 - a. Less than 1 year
 - b. Between 1 and 3 years
 - c. Between 3 and 5 years
 - d. Between 5 and 10 years
 - e. More than 10 years
 - f. I do not work in the 8(a) BD Program -> *Ineligible, go to screen-out page*

4. In which region do you currently work?
 - a. SBA HQ (all Offices)
 - b. Region 1
 - c. Region 2
 - d. Region 3
 - e. Region 4
 - f. Region 5
 - g. Region 6
 - h. Region 7
 - i. Region 8
 - j. Region 9
 - k. Region 10

5. What is your current grade level?
 - a. GS-7
 - b. GS-8
 - c. GS-9
 - d. GS-10
 - e. GS-11
 - f. GS-12
 - g. GS-13
 - h. GS-14
 - i. GS-15
 - j. SES

6. *[If GS-13]* Which is the most accurate description of your current position?
 - a. Business Opportunity Specialist
 - b. Lead/Senior Business Opportunity Specialist
 - c. Senior Area Business Opportunity Specialist
 - d. Supervisory Business Opportunity Specialist
 - e. Prefer not to respond

7. To how many 8(a) firms are you currently assigned? [RQ1a]
- I am not assigned to any firms
 - Less than 30 firms
 - 30–50 firms
 - More than 50 firms
 - Not applicable

Ineligible Screen-out page

IF DO NOT WORK IN 8(a) PROGRAM (Q1 = c OR Q3 = f)

Based on your response to the previous question, this survey is not applicable to you. Thank you for your time and willingness to participate.

[End survey]

Leadership Redirect page

If not an OFO BDS or BOS [Q1 = a OR (Q1 = b AND Q2 = d)], or if an SBOS without any assigned firms [Q2 = c AND Q7 = a] OR (RQ6 = d AND RQ7 = a)].

Based on your responses, the leadership survey is more relevant for your experiences. Please use this link [*insert leadership survey link*] to take the leadership version of this survey. Thank you for your time and willingness to participate.

[End survey]

Time spent providing 8(a) BD services

BD services and activities include:

- Conducting 8(a) orientation for new program participants
- Conducting annual reviews (including business plan review and financial review)
- Conducting field visits
- Managing and servicing contracts including offer/acceptance review
- Working with procuring activities to identify requirements, forward 8(a) capability statements, and identify new 8(a) firms
- Monitoring firm success in securing non-8(a) contract opportunities
- Providing access to 7(j) assistance, such as training
- Providing referrals to SBA Resource Partners and PTAC/APEX accelerators
- Providing training, guidance, or advice to program participants
- Joint Venture counseling
- Mentor-protégé counseling

8. How much time per week do you spend providing business development (BD) services to 8(a) firms? Please only include BD services and activities from the list above. *[RQ1a]*
 - a. Less than 5 hours
 - b. 5–10 hours
 - c. 11–20 hours
 - d. 21–30 hours
 - e. 31–40 hours
 - f. More than 40 hours
 - g. Not applicable

9. Please rank the following activities by the amount of time you spend conducting each, from most to least time spent. (Drag and drop each activity to change its position.) *[RQ1b]*
 - a. Conducting 8(a) orientation for new program participants
 - b. Conducting annual reviews (including business plan review and financial review)
 - c. Conducting field visits
 - d. Managing and servicing contracts including offer/acceptance review
 - e. Working with procuring activities to identify requirements, forward 8(a) capability statements, and identify new 8(a) firms
 - f. Monitoring firm success in securing non-8(a) contract opportunities
 - g. Providing access to 7(j) assistance, such as training
 - h. Providing referrals to SBA Resource Partners and PTAC/APEX accelerators
 - i. Providing training, guidance, or advice to program participants
 - j. Joint Venture counseling
 - k. Mentor-protégé counseling

10. Which, if any, of the following BD services or activities would you like to be able to spend more time on to improve 8(a) firms' BD outcomes? Select all that apply. *[RQ1b, RQ5]*
 - a. Conducting 8(a) orientation for new program participants
 - b. Conducting annual reviews (including business plan review and financial review)
 - c. Conducting field visits
 - d. Managing and servicing contracts including offer/acceptance review
 - e. Working with procuring activities to identify requirements, forward 8(a) capability statements, and identify new 8(a) firms
 - f. Monitoring firm success in securing non-8(a) contract opportunities
 - g. Providing access to 7(j) assistance, such as training
 - h. Providing referrals to SBA Resource Partners and PTAC/APEX accelerators
 - i. Providing training, guidance, or advice to program participants
 - j. Joint Venture counseling
 - k. Mentor-protégé counseling

11. Beyond the BD services listed on the previous page, what additional BD services do 8(a) firms request from you? *[Open-ended] [RQ5]*
12. Beyond the BD services listed on the previous page, are there additional services that should be provided to 8(a) firms to help them meet their BD goals? *[Open-ended] [RQ5]*

Tailoring BD services for 8(a) firms

13. Does the **8(a) firm’s specific business goals and needs** influence how you tailor BD services for that firm? *[RQ1c]*
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
14. *[If answered Yes to Q13]* How much does **the 8(a) firm’s specific business goals and needs** influence each of the following BD services you provide to that firm? *[RQ1c]*

	Does not influence this service	Influences this service a little	Influences this service somewhat	Influences this service a lot
Conduct 8(a) orientation for new program participants				
Conduct annual reviews (including business plan review and financial review)				
Conduct field visits				
Manage and service contracts including offer/acceptance review				
Work with procuring activities to identify requirements, forward 8(a) capability statements, and identify new 8(a) firms				

	Does not influence this service	Influences this service a little	Influences this service somewhat	Influences this service a lot
Monitor firm success in securing non-8(a) contract opportunities				
Provide access to 7(j) assistance, such as training				
Provide referrals to SBA Resource Partners and PTAC/APEX accelerators				
Provide training, guidance, or advice to program participants				
Joint Venture counseling				
Mentor-protégé counseling				

15. Does **the distance from the servicing district office to the 8(a) firm office** influence how you tailor BD services for that firm? [RQ1c]

- a. Yes
- b. No

16. [If answered Yes to Q15] How much does **the distance from the servicing district office to the 8(a) firm office** influence each of the following BD services you provide to that firm? [RQ1c]

	Does not influence this service	Influences this service a little	Influences this service somewhat	Influences this service a lot
Conduct 8(a) orientation for new program participants				

	Does not influence this service	Influences this service a little	Influences this service somewhat	Influences this service a lot
Conduct annual reviews (including business plan review and financial review)				
Conduct field visits				
Manage and service contracts including offer/acceptance review				
Work with procuring activities to identify requirements, forward 8(a) capability statements, and identify new 8(a) firms				
Monitor firm success in securing non-8(a) contract opportunities				
Provide access to 7(j) assistance, such as training				
Provide referrals to SBA Resource Partners and PTAC/APEX accelerators				
Provide training, guidance, or advice to program participants				

	Does not influence this service	Influences this service a little	Influences this service somewhat	Influences this service a lot
Joint Venture counseling				
Mentor-protégé counseling				

17. Does the **8(a) firm participation stage (developmental years 1 through 4, versus transitional years 5 through 9)** influence how you tailor BD services for that firm? [RQ1c]
- Yes
 - No

18. [If answered Yes to Q17] How much does the **8(a) firm participation stage** influence each of the following BD services you provide to that firm? [RQ1c]

	Does not influence this service	Influences this service a little	Influences this service somewhat	Influences this service a lot
Conduct 8(a) orientation for new program participants				
Conduct annual reviews (including business plan review and financial review)				
Conduct field visits				
Manage and service contracts including offer/acceptance review				



	Does not influence this service	Influences this service a little	Influences this service somewhat	Influences this service a lot
Work with procuring activities to identify requirements, forward 8(a) capability statements, and identify new 8(a) firms				
Monitor firm success in securing non-8(a) contract opportunities				
Provide access to 7(j) assistance, such as training				
Provide referrals to SBA Resource Partners and PTAC/APEX accelerators				
Provide training, guidance, or advice to program participants				
Joint Venture counseling				
Mentor-protégé counseling				

8(a) processes and procedures

For the following questions, please think about the 8(a) BD processes and procedures defined in the SOP, desk guide, and other OFO or OBD guidance.

19. Please rate the extent to which each of the following factors influence how **8(a) BD processes and procedures** are used. [RQ2d, RQ2e]

	Not at all	A moderate amount	A great deal	I don't know
The 8(a) firm's specific business goals and needs				
The distance from the servicing district office to the 8(a) firm office				
8(a) firm participation stage (developmental years 1 through 4, versus transitional years 5 through 9)				

20. To the best of your knowledge, does variation in **8(a) BD processes and procedures** lead to different outcomes across 8(a) firms? (Firm outcomes may include the number of 8(a) or non-8(a) contracts won, revenue, or other goals set in the firm's business plan.) [RQ4]

- a. No, no difference in firm outcomes
- b. Yes, some difference in firm outcomes
- c. Yes, a lot of difference in firm outcomes
- d. I don't know

7(j) Management and Technical Assistance Program

21. How frequently do you connect your assigned 8(a) firms with business guidance and development support through the 7(j) Management and Technical Assistance Program? [RQ1d]

- a. Connect **all** of my firms
- b. Connect **most** of my firms
- c. Connect **some** of my firms
- d. Connect **a few** of my firms
- e. Connect **none** of my firms
- f. I am not familiar with the 7(j) program -> skip to mentor-protégé section
- g. Not applicable

22. In your opinion, how effective is the business guidance and development support provided by 7(j) vendors to 8(a) firms? [RQ1d]

- a. I don't know
- b. Very effective
- c. Somewhat effective

- d. Not very effective
- e. Not at all effective

Mentor-Protégé Program

23. How many of your assigned 8(a) firms enter the Mentor-Protégé program? [RQ1d]
- a. **All** of my firms
 - b. **Most** of my firms
 - c. **Some** of my firms
 - d. **A few** of my firms
 - e. **None** of my firms
 - f. I am not familiar with the Mentor-Protégé program -> *skip to tools and technology section*
 - g. Not applicable
24. In your opinion, how helpful is the Mentor-Protégé relationship for 8(a) firms? [RQ1d]
- a. I don't know
 - b. Very helpful
 - c. Somewhat helpful
 - d. Not very helpful
 - e. Not at all helpful

Tools and technology

25. How frequently do you enter completed BD activities into GMATT? [RQ3a]
- a. Always
 - b. Usually
 - c. Sometimes
 - d. Rarely
 - e. Never
 - f. I am not familiar with GMATT
 - g. Not applicable
26. How frequently do you use the BOS Annual Review Workbook when conducting an annual review? [RQ3a]
- a. Always
 - b. Usually
 - c. Sometimes
 - d. Rarely
 - e. Never
 - f. I am not familiar with the BOS Annual Review Workbook
 - g. Not applicable



For the following questions, please think about the tools and technology used in the 8(a) BD program, including GMATT, the BOS Annual Review Workbook, and any other tools or technology you use to track or support BD services (such as the BD Corner).

27. What other tools or technology do you use to support or track your BD services and activities?
[Open-ended] [RQ3a]

28. To the best of your knowledge, does variation in the **tools and technology** used by BOSs lead to different outcomes across 8(a) firms? (Firm outcomes may include the number of 8(a) or non-8(a) contracts won, revenue, or other goals set in the firm’s business plan.) [RQ4]
 - a. No, no difference in firm outcomes
 - b. Yes, some difference in firm outcomes
 - c. Yes, a lot of difference in firm outcomes
 - d. I don’t know

29. How could the available tools and technology for supporting or tracking BD services and activities be improved? [Open-ended] [RQ3a]

Coordination and communication

For the following questions, please think about the tools you use for coordinating and communicating with 8(a) firms.

30. Which of the following coordination and communication tools do you use to provide BD services? Select all that apply. [RQ3a, 3c]
 - a. In-person meetings
 - b. Virtual meetings (using an online platform such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom)
 - c. Phone calls
 - d. Text messaging
 - e. Email
 - f. Outlook, Gmail, iCal, or another ready-made calendar tool
 - g. Other (specify)
 - h. None of the above

31. Please rate the extent to which each of the following factors influence the **coordination and communication tools** you use to support BD services. [RQ3b]

	Not at all	A moderate amount	A great deal	I don’t know
The 8(a) firm’s specific business goals and needs				
The distance from the servicing district office to the 8(a) firm office				

	Not at all	A moderate amount	A great deal	I don't know
8(a) firm participation stage (developmental years 1 through 4, versus transitional years 5 through 9)				

32. To the best of your knowledge, does variation in **coordination and communication tools** lead to different outcomes across 8(a) firms? (Firm outcomes may include the number of 8(a) or non-8(a) contracts won, revenue, or other goals set in the firm's business plan.) [RQ4]
- No, no difference in firm outcomes
 - Yes, some difference in firm outcomes
 - Yes, a lot of difference in firm outcomes
 - I don't know

Reporting methods

For the following questions, please think about the reporting methods that you use to track BD services, such as GMATT, emails, meeting minutes, or others.

33. Which of the following do you use to track the BD services you provide to your 8(a) firms? Select all that apply. [RQ3a, 3c]
- Meeting minutes
 - Formal reports
 - Email
 - GMATT
 - BOS Annual Review Workbook
 - Other (specify)
 - None of the above

34. Please rate the extent to which each of the following factors influence the **reporting methods** you use to track BD services. [RQ3b]

	Not at all	A moderate amount	A great deal	I don't know
The 8(a) firm's specific business goals and needs				
The distance from the servicing district office to the 8(a) firm office				
8(a) firm participation stage (developmental years 1 through 4, versus transitional years 5 through 9)				



35. To the best of your knowledge, does variation in **reporting methods** lead to different outcomes across 8(a) firms? (Firm outcomes may include the number of 8(a) or non-8(a) contracts won, revenue, or other goals set in the firm’s business plan.) [RQ4]
- No, no difference in firm outcomes
 - Yes, some difference in firm outcomes
 - Yes, a lot of difference in firm outcomes
 - I don’t know

Program policies and procedures

36. Who is **involved** in the development of 8(a) BD Program policies and procedures (such as suggesting changes, drafting procedures, reviewing policies, etc.)? Select all that apply. [RQ2a]
- GCBD/OBD program leadership
 - OFO program leadership
 - OFO BOSs
 - Other (specify)
 - I don’t know
37. Who is **primarily** responsible for developing 8(a) BD Program policies and procedures? [RQ2a]
[Only show responses selected in previous question; also show “other” and “I don’t know”]
- GCBD/OBD program leadership
 - OFO program leadership
 - OFO BOSs
 - Other (specify)
 - I don’t know
38. How could the process for developing 8(a) BD service policies and procedures be improved?
[Open-ended] [RQ5]
39. In your opinion, are changes to policies or procedures **communicated** effectively across the 8(a) BD Program? [RQ5]
- Yes, very effectively
 - Yes, somewhat effectively
 - No, not very effectively
 - No, not at all effectively
40. [IF NO TO PREVIOUS QUESTION] How could the process for communicating changes to policies or procedures be improved? *[Open-ended] [RQ5]*
41. In your opinion, are policy and procedure changes **implemented** effectively across the 8(a) BD Program? [RQ5]
- Yes, very effectively
 - Yes, somewhat effectively
 - No, not very effectively



- d. No, not at all effectively
42. [IF NO TO PREVIOUS QUESTION] How could the process for implementing changes to policies or procedures be improved? [Open-ended] [RQ5]
43. Do you believe coordination between OBD program leadership and OFO BOSs is effective? [RQ5]
- a. Yes, very effective
 - b. Yes, somewhat effective
 - c. No, not very effective
 - d. No, not at all effective
44. [IF NO TO PREVIOUS QUESTION] How could coordination between OBD program leadership and OFO BOSs be improved? [Open-ended] [RQ5]
45. In your opinion, which is the **primary goal** of the 8(a) BD program? [RQ5]
- a. Provide participating businesses with training and technical assistance to enhance their ability to compete effectively for contract awards
 - b. Increase small businesses' contract awards during their time in the program
 - c. Increase participating businesses' contract awards after program graduation
 - d. Support participating firms in achieving their business objectives
 - e. Increase participating businesses' revenue during their time in the program
 - f. Increase participating businesses' revenue after their graduation from the program
 - g. Other (specify)
 - h. I don't know

Skills and training

46. Do you feel you have the skills necessary to effectively provide BD services to 8(a) firms? [RQ2c]
- a. Yes, completely
 - b. Yes, mostly
 - c. Yes, somewhat
 - d. No, not very much
 - e. No, not at all

For the next question, please refer to the following proficiency scale:

Level 5 – Expert: Applies the competency in exceptionally difficult situations; Serves as a key resource and advises others

Level 4 – Advanced: Applies the competency in considerably difficult situations; Generally requires little or no guidance

Level 3 – Intermediate: Applies the competency in difficult situations; Requires occasional guidance

Level 2 – Basic: Applies the competency in somewhat difficult situations; Requires frequent guidance

Level 1 – Awareness: Applies the competency in the simplest situations; Requires close and extensive guidance

47. Please rate your proficiency level across the following competencies: [RQ2c]

Competency	Level 5 Expert	Level 4 Advanced	Level 3 Intermediate	Level 2 Basic	Level 1 Awareness	I don't know
Building coalition and communication						
Business finance						
Business acumen						
Business coaching						
Business writing and written communication						
Conflict management						
Creativity and innovation						
Economic development						
Government contracting and procurement						
Influencing and negotiating						
Knowledge of SBA business						
Leading change						
Leading people						
Legal, government, and jurisprudence interpretation						
Leveraging diversity						
Oral communication						
Project/program management						
Research analysis						



Competency	Level 5 Expert	Level 4 Advanced	Level 3 Intermediate	Level 2 Basic	Level 1 Awareness	I don't know
Results-driven						
SBA marketing and outreach						

48. How are trainings provided on policies and procedures related to 8(a) BD services? Select all that apply. [RQ2b]

- a. Live via Microsoft Teams or other web-conferencing service
- b. Live in-person
- c. Prerecorded video sessions or presentations
- d. Distributed handouts, job aids, and other reference materials
- e. Other (specify)
- f. None of the above

49. Overall, how would you rate the effectiveness of the trainings provided on policies and procedures related to 8(a) BD services? [RQ2b]

- a. Excellent
- b. Very good
- c. Good
- d. Fair
- e. Poor

50. [IF D OR E TO PREVIOUS QUESTION] In your opinion, why are the current trainings only fair or poor? [Open-ended] [RQ2b]

51. What additional training topics would help you improve the BD services you provide to 8(a) firms? [Open-ended] [RQ2b]

Suggestions for improvements

52. Finally, do you have any suggestions to improve the 8(a) BD Program? [Open-ended] [RQ5]

Closing screen

Thank you for participating!

Program leadership survey instrument

Introduction

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your responses provide valuable input for the evaluation of service delivery in the SBA's 8(a) Business Development (BD) Program.

The goal of this survey is to:

1. Better understand the 8(a) processes, procedures, communication, and reporting strategies used;
2. Identify areas to improve consistency and BD delivery service; and
3. Determine how the SBA can invest in the development and needs of the BOSs who deliver business development assistance to the 8(a) Program Participants.

This survey is anonymous. This means that all data will be reported in the aggregate, with no individually identifiable data being reported or discussed. We want to emphasize that your information will not be provided to supervisors and will not be used for any personnel decisions.

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Please answer the questions as honestly as possible based on your firsthand knowledge and experience. There are no right or wrong answers—we are interested in your experience and opinions. Remember that your responses will be kept confidential.

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your feedback is important!

To begin the survey, click "Next."

Background questions

1. In which SBA office do you currently work?
 - a. Office of Business Development (OBD)
 - b. Office of Field Operations (OFO)
 - c. Other -> *Ineligible, go to screen-out page*
2. What is your current role in the 8(a) BD Program?
 - a. Business Opportunity Specialist (BOS) or Lead Business Opportunity Specialist (LBOS),
 - b. Business Development Specialist (BDS)
 - c. Supervisory Business Opportunity Specialist (SBOS)
 - d. Program leadership including Associate Administrator, Deputy Associate Administrator, Director, District Director, Deputy District Director, or other Program Lead role
 - e. Other (specify)



3. In which region do you currently work?
 - a. SBA HQ (all Offices)
 - b. Region 1
 - c. Region 2
 - d. Region 3
 - e. Region 4
 - f. Region 5
 - g. Region 6
 - h. Region 7
 - i. Region 8
 - j. Region 9
 - k. Region 10

Ineligible Screen-out page

IF DO NOT WORK IN 8(a) PROGRAM (Q1 = c OR Q2 = e)

Based on your response to the previous question, this survey is not applicable to you. Thank you for your time and willingness to participate.

[End survey]

OFO BOS Redirect page

IF OFO BDS OR BOS (Q1 = b AND Q2 = a or b) and after answering Q3 (any answer)

Please use this link [*insert BOS survey link*] to take the OFO BOS version of this survey. Thank you for your time and willingness to participate.

[End survey]

BOS/BDs Time spent providing 8(a) BD services

For the following questions, please refer to the BD services and activities provided by BOSs below. This list is based on information from the SOP, BOS Annual Review Workbook, and GMATT.

BD services and activities provided by BOSs include:

- Conducting 8(a) orientation for new program participants
- Conducting annual reviews (including business plan review and financial review)
- Conducting field visits
- Managing and servicing contracts including offer/acceptance review
- Working with procuring activities to identify requirements, forward 8(a) capability statements, and identify new 8(a) firms
- Monitoring firm success in securing non-8(a) contract opportunities
- Providing access to 7(j) assistance, such as training
- Providing referrals to SBA Resource Partners and PTAC/APEX accelerators
- Providing training, guidance, or advice to program participants
- Joint Venture counseling
- Mentor-protégé counseling

4. Which, if any, of the following BD services or activities should BOSs spend more time on to improve 8(a) firms' BD outcomes? Select all that apply. *[Open-ended] [RQ1b, RQ5]*
 - a. Conducting 8(a) orientation for new program participants
 - b. Conducting annual reviews (including business plan review and financial review)
 - c. Conducting field visits
 - d. Managing and servicing contracts including offer/acceptance review
 - e. Working with procuring activities to identify requirements, forward 8(a) capability statements, and identify new 8(a) firms
 - f. Monitoring firm success in securing non-8(a) contract opportunities
 - g. Providing access to 7(j) assistance, such as training
 - h. Providing referrals to SBA Resource Partners and PTAC/APEX accelerators
 - i. Providing training, guidance, or advice to program participants
 - j. Joint Venture counseling
 - k. Mentor-protégé counseling

5. Beyond the BD services listed above, are there any other BD services or activities you believe BOSs should provide to 8(a) firms to help them meet their BD goals? *[Open-ended] [RQ5]*



Tailoring BD services for 8(a) firms

The following questions are designed to gather information to aid in understanding what is important and should be considered in tailoring BD services for 8(a) firms.

6. Which of the following **should** influence **how BOSs tailor BD services for each 8(a) firm**? Select all that apply. [RQ1c]
 - a. The 8(a) firm's specific business goals and needs
 - b. The distance from the servicing district office to the 8(a) firm office
 - c. The district office's annual goaling metrics (e.g., number of annual reviews)
 - d. The district office in which the BOS is located (due to differences in volume, type of firm serviced, etc.)
 - e. 8(a) firm participation stage (developmental years 1 through 4, versus transitional years 5 through 9)
 - f. None of the above
 - g. Other (specify)
7. [If answered A to Q6] How should BOSs tailor BD services based on **the 8(a) firm's specific business goals and needs**? [Open-ended] [RQ1c]
8. [If answered B to Q6] How should BOSs tailor BD services based on **the distance from the servicing district office to the 8(a) firm office**? [Open-ended] [RQ1c]
9. [If answered C to Q6] How should BOSs tailor BD services based on **the district office's annual goaling metrics** (e.g., number of annual reviews)? [Open-ended] [RQ1c]
10. [If answered D to Q6] How should BOSs tailor BD services based on **the district office in which the BOS is located** (due to differences in volume, type of firm serviced, etc.)? [Open-ended] [RQ1c]
11. [If answered E to Q6] How should BOSs tailor BD services based on **the 8(a) firm participation stage (developmental years 1 through 4, versus transitional years 5 through 9)**? [Open-ended] [RQ1c]
12. Please describe any other factors that should influence how BOSs tailor BD services for their 8(a) firms. [Open-ended] [RQ1c]



8(a) processes and procedures

For the following questions, please think about the 8(a) BD processes and procedures defined in the SOP, desk guide, and other OFO or OBD guidance.

13. Please rate the extent to which each of the following factors **should** influence how **8(a) BD processes and procedures** are used. [RQ2d, RQ2e]

	Not at all	A moderate amount	A great deal	I don't know
The 8(a) firm's specific business goals and needs				
The distance from the servicing district office to the 8(a) firm office				
The district office's annual goaling metrics (e.g., number of annual reviews)				
The district office in which the BOS is located (due to differences in volume, type of firm serviced, etc.)				
8(a) firm participation stage (developmental years 1 through 4, versus transitional years 5 through 9)				

14. To the best of your knowledge, does variation in **8(a) BD processes and procedures** lead to different outcomes across 8(a) firms? (Firm outcomes may include the number of 8(a) or non-8(a) contracts won, revenue, or other goals set in the firm's business plan.) [RQ4]

- a. No, no difference in firm outcomes
- b. Yes, some difference in firm outcomes
- c. Yes, a lot of difference in firm outcomes
- d. I don't know

15. [IF YES TO PREVIOUS QUESTION] Please explain how variation in 8(a) BD processes and procedures leads to different outcomes across 8(a) firms. [Open-ended] [RQ4]

7(j) Management and Technical Assistance Program

16. In your opinion, how effective is the business guidance and development support provided by 7(j) vendors to 8(a) firms? [RQ1d]

- a. I don't know
- b. Very effective
- c. Somewhat effective
- d. Not very effective
- e. Not at all effective



17. *[IF NOT VERY OR NOT AT ALL EFFECTIVE TO PREVIOUS QUESTION]* In your opinion, why is the business guidance and development support provided by 7(j) vendors not effective? *[Open-ended]* *[RQ1d]*

Mentor-Protégé Program

18. In your opinion, how helpful is the Mentor-Protégé relationship for 8(a) firms? *[RQ1d]*
- I don't know
 - Very helpful
 - Somewhat helpful
 - Not very helpful
 - Not at all helpful
19. *[IF NOT VERY OR NOT AT ALL EFFECTIVE TO PREVIOUS QUESTION]* In your opinion, why is the Mentor-Protégé relationship not helpful? *[Open-ended]* *[RQ1d]*

Tools and technology

For the following questions, please think about the tools and technology used in the 8(a) BD program, including GMATT, the BOS Annual Review Workbook, and any other tools or technology used to track or support BD services (such as the BD Corner).

20. To what extent should the use of **tools and technology** for supporting or tracking BD services and activities **vary** across district offices? *[RQ3b, RQ5]*
- Not at all
 - A moderate amount
 - A great deal
 - I don't know
21. *[IF MODERATE OR GREAT DEAL TO PREVIOUS QUESTION]* Please explain how the use of tools and technology should vary across district offices. *[Open ended]* *[RQ3b, RQ5]*
22. To the best of your knowledge, does variation in the **tools and technology** used by BOSs lead to different outcomes across 8(a) firms? (Firm outcomes may include the number of 8(a) or non-8(a) contracts won, revenue, or other goals set in the firm's business plan.) *[RQ4]*
- No, no difference in firm outcomes
 - Yes, some difference in firm outcomes
 - Yes, a lot of difference in firm outcomes
 - I don't know
23. How could the available tools and technology for supporting or tracking BD services and activities be improved? *[Open-ended]* *[RQ3a]*



Coordination and communication

For the following questions, please think about the tools that BOSs use to coordinate and communicate with 8(a) firms.

24. Please rate the extent to which each of the following factors **should** influence the **coordination and communication tools** BOSs use to support BD services. [RQ3b, RQ5]

	Not at all	A moderate amount	A great deal	I don't know
The 8(a) firm's specific business goals and needs				
The distance from the servicing district office to the 8(a) firm office				
The district office's annual goaling metrics (e.g., number of annual reviews)				
The district office in which the BOS is located (due to differences in volume, type of firm serviced, etc.)				
8(a) firm participation stage (developmental years 1 through 4, versus transitional years 5 through 9)				

25. To the best of your knowledge, does variation in **coordination and communication tools** lead to different outcomes across 8(a) firms? (Firm outcomes may include the number of 8(a) or non-8(a) contracts won, revenue, or other goals set in the firm's business plan.) [RQ4]

- a. No, no difference in firm outcomes
- b. Yes, some difference in firm outcomes
- c. Yes, a lot of difference in firm outcomes
- d. I don't know

26. [IF YES TO PREVIOUS QUESTION] Please explain how variation in coordination and communication tools leads to different outcomes across 8(a) firms. [Open-ended] [RQ4]

Reporting methods

For the following questions, please think about the reporting methods that BOSs use to track BD services, such as GMATT, emails, meeting minutes, or others.

27. Please rate the extent to which each of the following factors **should** influence the **reporting methods** BOSs use to track BD services. [RQ3b, RQ5]

	Not at all	A moderate amount	A great deal	I don't know
The 8(a) firm's specific business goals and needs				
The distance from the servicing district office to the 8(a) firm office				
The district office's annual goaling metrics (e.g., number of annual reviews)				
The district office in which the BOS is located (due to differences in volume, type of firm serviced, etc.)				
8(a) firm participation stage (developmental years 1 through 4, versus transitional years 5 through 9)				

28. To the best of your knowledge, does variation in **reporting methods** lead to different outcomes across 8(a) firms? (Firm outcomes may include the number of 8(a) or non-8(a) contracts won, revenue, or other goals set in the firm's business plan.) [RQ4]

- f. No, no difference in firm outcomes
- g. Yes, some difference in firm outcomes
- h. Yes, a lot of difference in firm outcomes
- i. I don't know

29. [IF YES TO PREVIOUS QUESTION] Please explain how variation in reporting methods leads to different outcomes across 8(a) firms. [Open-ended] [RQ4]

Program policies and procedures

30. Who is **involved** in the development of 8(a) BD Program policies and procedures (such as suggesting changes, drafting procedures, reviewing policies, etc.)? Select all that apply. [RQ2a]
- a. GCBD/OBD program leadership
 - b. OFO program leadership
 - c. OFO BOSs
 - d. Other (specify)
 - e. I don't know
31. Who is **primarily** responsible for developing 8(a) BD Program policies and procedures? [RQ2a]
[Only show responses selected in previous question; also show "other" and "I don't know"]
- f. GCBD/OBD program leadership
 - g. OFO program leadership
 - h. OFO BOSs
 - i. Other (specify)
 - j. I don't know
32. How could the process for developing 8(a) BD service policies and procedures be improved?
[Open-ended] [RQ5]
33. In your opinion, are changes to policies or procedures **communicated** effectively across the 8(a) BD Program? [RQ5]
- e. Yes, very effectively
 - f. Yes, somewhat effectively
 - g. No, not very effectively
 - h. No, not at all effectively
34. *[IF NO TO PREVIOUS QUESTION]* How could the process for communicating changes to policies or procedures be improved? *[Open-ended] [RQ5]*
35. In your opinion, are policy and procedure changes **implemented** effectively across the 8(a) BD Program? [RQ5]
- e. Yes, very effectively
 - f. Yes, somewhat effectively
 - g. No, not very effectively
 - h. No, not at all effectively
36. *[IF NO TO PREVIOUS QUESTION]* How could the process for implementing changes to policies or procedures be improved? *[Open-ended] [RQ5]*



37. Do you believe coordination between OBD program leadership and OFO BOSs is effective? [RQ5]
- e. Yes, very effective
 - f. Yes, somewhat effective
 - g. No, not very effective
 - h. No, not at all effective
38. [IF NO TO PREVIOUS QUESTION] How could coordination between OBD program leadership and OFO BOSs be improved? [Open-ended] [RQ5]
39. In your opinion, which is the **primary goal** of the 8(a) BD program? [RQ5]
- a. Provide participating businesses with training and technical assistance to enhance their ability to compete effectively for contract awards
 - b. Increase small businesses’ federal contract awards during their time in the program
 - c. Increase participating businesses’ federal contract awards after program graduation
 - d. Support participating firms in achieving their business objectives
 - e. Increase participating businesses’ revenue during their time in the program
 - f. Increase participating businesses’ revenue after their graduation from the program
 - g. Other (specify)
 - h. I don’t know

BOS/BDS Skills and training

For the next question, please refer to the following proficiency scale:

Level 5 – Expert: Applies the competency in exceptionally difficult situations; Serves as a key resource and advises others

Level 4 – Advanced: Applies the competency in considerably difficult situations; Generally requires little or no guidance

Level 3 – Intermediate: Applies the competency in difficult situations; Requires occasional guidance

Level 2 – Basic: Applies the competency in somewhat difficult situations; Requires frequent guidance

Level 1 – Awareness: Applies the competency in the simplest situations; Requires close and extensive guidance

40. For each competency, please rate the level of expertise a BOS needs to successfully provide BD support to 8(a) firms. [RQ2c]

Competency	Level 5 Expert	Level 4 Advanced	Level 3 Intermediate	Level 2 Basic	Level 1 Awareness	I don't know
Building coalition and communication						
Business finance						
Business acumen						



Competency	Level 5 Expert	Level 4 Advanced	Level 3 Intermediate	Level 2 Basic	Level 1 Awareness	I don't know
Business coaching						
Business writing and written communication						
Conflict management						
Creativity and innovation						
Economic development						
Government contracting and procurement						
Influencing and negotiating						
Knowledge of SBA business						
Leading change						
Leading people						
Legal, government, and jurisprudence interpretation						
Leveraging diversity						
Oral communication						
Project/program management						
Research analysis						
Results-driven						
SBA marketing and outreach						



41. In your opinion, which two competencies are the **strongest** across all BOSs? Select up to **two**.

[RQ2c]

- a. Building coalition and communication
- b. Business finance
- c. Business acumen
- d. Business coaching
- e. Business writing and written communication
- f. Conflict management
- g. Creativity and innovation
- h. Economic development
- i. Government contracting and procurement
- j. Influencing and negotiating
- k. Knowledge of SBA business
- l. Leading change
- m. Leading people
- n. Legal, government, and jurisprudence interpretation
- o. Leveraging diversity
- p. Oral communication
- q. Project/program management
- r. Research analysis
- s. Results-driven
- t. SBA marketing and outreach

42. In your opinion, which two competencies have the **biggest opportunities for growth** across all BOSs? Select up to **two**. [RQ2c]

- a. Building coalition and communication
- b. Business finance
- c. Business acumen
- d. Business coaching
- e. Business writing and written communication
- f. Conflict management
- g. Creativity and innovation
- h. Economic development
- i. Government contracting and procurement
- j. Influencing and negotiating
- k. Knowledge of SBA business
- l. Leading change
- m. Leading people
- n. Legal, government, and jurisprudence interpretation
- o. Leveraging diversity
- p. Oral communication
- q. Project/program management
- r. Research analysis
- s. Results-driven



- t. SBA marketing and outreach
43. Overall, how would you rate the effectiveness of the current trainings provided on policies and procedures related to 8(a) BD services? *[RQ2b]*
- a. Excellent
 - b. Very good
 - c. Good
 - d. Fair
 - e. Poor
44. *[IF D OR E TO PREVIOUS QUESTION]* In your opinion, why are the current trainings only fair or poor? *[Open-ended] [RQ2b]*
45. What additional training topics would help BOSs improve the BD services they provide to 8(a) firms? *[Open-ended] [RQ2b]*

Suggestions for improvements

46. Finally, do you have any suggestions to improve the 8(a) BD Program? *[Open-ended] [RQ5]*

Closing screen

Thank you for participating!

Appendix C CURRENT-STATE PROCESS MAP

Overview

This current-state process map is informed by informational meetings with program leadership, the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the Office of Business Development (OBD), and value-stream mapping (VSM) sessions with Business Opportunity Specialists (BOS) and program leadership. Fourteen VSM sessions were conducted with six groups of BOSs and leadership, with each group participating in two 90-minute sessions.

The current-state process map documents each BD activity, responsibility for conducting each activity, process time (PT) and delay time (DT) for each activity, the frequency with which each activity occurs, and pain points and areas of inefficiency or waste. A separate, detailed process map report delivered to the SBA documents each of the above in greater detail and also documents pain points and waste or inefficiencies in the current processes. BD activities are grouped by categories developed by Summit; this categorization was informed by review of relevant program documentation (such as the SOP) and informational meetings with program leadership.

Position acronyms

BDS – Business Development Specialist






BOS – Business Opportunity Specialist

DD – District Director






DDD – Deputy District Director

LBOS – Lead Business Opportunity Specialist






Category 1: Program onboarding

 Action	 Role	 PT Time	 DT Time	 Frequency
BOS assigned to firm	LBOS, SBOS, DD, or DDD	5–60 min.	1 day–2 weeks	1–3 times during firm tenure
Send welcome letter (and other materials)	BOS, LBOS, SBOS, or DDD	15–60 min.	1 day–1 month	Once
Schedule orientation session • Schedule as individual or group	BOS	15 min.	None–several weeks	Once
Conduct orientation session	BOS	1.5–3 hrs.	N/A	Once
Confirm participation agreement has been signed	BOS	5 min.	None–several days	Once
Review and approve business plan	Review: BOS Approve: LBOS, SBOS, DD, or DDD	1.5–4 hrs.	1 week–2 months	Annually (program entry and annual review)






Category 2: Annual review evaluating firm BD needs

 Action	 Role	 PT Time	 DT Time	 Frequency																									
Confirm annual review notifications are sent by Certify	BOS	10–15 min.	None–2 weeks	Annually																									
Screen firm’s annual review for completeness • Includes financial statements, tax returns, and other documents to make file current	BOS	1–3 hrs.	1–3 weeks	Annually																									
<i>If complete</i>																													
Return to firm for updates	BOS	30 min.	1–2 weeks	As needed																									
Evaluate annual review (using BOS Analysis Workbook) • Make recommendation in workbook to retain	BOS	2–4 hrs.	3 days–2 weeks	Annually																									
Review of completed BOS Analysis Workbook	LBOS, SBOS, DD, or DDD	30 min.–2 hrs.	1–2 weeks	Annually																									
Process Financial Statement Waiver	BOS or DD	30–60 min.	Several weeks	As needed																									
<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg); font-weight: bold; margin-right: 10px;">Annual field visit</div> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="250 863 751 919"> Schedule annual field visit </td> <td data-bbox="760 863 951 919">BOS</td> <td data-bbox="959 863 1101 919">10–20 min.</td> <td data-bbox="1109 863 1248 919">1–2 weeks</td> <td data-bbox="1256 863 1425 919">Annually</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="250 930 751 987"> Prepare for annual field visit </td> <td data-bbox="760 930 951 987">BOS</td> <td data-bbox="959 930 1101 987">20 min.–2 hrs.</td> <td data-bbox="1109 930 1248 987">2 days–2 weeks</td> <td data-bbox="1256 930 1425 987">Annually</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="250 997 751 1119"> Conduct annual field visit at firm’s office location or virtually • Discuss with firm areas for improvement based on annual review findings </td> <td data-bbox="760 997 951 1119">BOS</td> <td data-bbox="959 997 1101 1119">In person: 4–8 hrs. Virtual: 20 min.–2 hrs.</td> <td data-bbox="1109 997 1248 1119">None–15 min.</td> <td data-bbox="1256 997 1425 1119">Annually</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="250 1129 751 1186"> Send follow-up to firm summarizing the meeting </td> <td data-bbox="760 1129 951 1186">BOS</td> <td data-bbox="959 1129 1101 1186">15–20 min.</td> <td data-bbox="1109 1129 1248 1186">1 day–1 week</td> <td data-bbox="1256 1129 1425 1186">Annually</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="250 1197 751 1297"> Complete field visit report </td> <td data-bbox="760 1197 951 1297">BOS</td> <td data-bbox="959 1197 1101 1297">5–60 min.</td> <td data-bbox="1109 1197 1248 1297">None–1 week</td> <td data-bbox="1256 1197 1425 1297">Annually</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div>					Schedule annual field visit	BOS	10–20 min.	1–2 weeks	Annually	Prepare for annual field visit	BOS	20 min.–2 hrs.	2 days–2 weeks	Annually	Conduct annual field visit at firm’s office location or virtually • Discuss with firm areas for improvement based on annual review findings	BOS	In person: 4–8 hrs. Virtual: 20 min.–2 hrs.	None–15 min.	Annually	Send follow-up to firm summarizing the meeting	BOS	15–20 min.	1 day–1 week	Annually	Complete field visit report	BOS	5–60 min.	None–1 week	Annually
Schedule annual field visit	BOS	10–20 min.	1–2 weeks	Annually																									
Prepare for annual field visit	BOS	20 min.–2 hrs.	2 days–2 weeks	Annually																									
Conduct annual field visit at firm’s office location or virtually • Discuss with firm areas for improvement based on annual review findings	BOS	In person: 4–8 hrs. Virtual: 20 min.–2 hrs.	None–15 min.	Annually																									
Send follow-up to firm summarizing the meeting	BOS	15–20 min.	1 day–1 week	Annually																									
Complete field visit report	BOS	5–60 min.	None–1 week	Annually																									






Category 3: Providing guidance to support firm capacity growth

	 Action	 Role	 PT Time	 DT Time	 Frequency
	Inform 8(a) firms of upcoming 7(j) training opportunities	BOS	5 min.	None–2 days	As needed
Joint Venture	Provide Joint Venture partnership guidance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advise on participation Respond to firm questions Meet with firm and potential partner (if requested) 	BOS	30–60 min.	1 day–1 week	As needed
	Review Joint Venture checklist, complete BOS Joint Venture checklist	BOS	30–60 min.	2 days–2 weeks	As needed
	↓				
	Approve Joint Venture	LBOS/SBOS, DD, and DDD	10–60 min.	1–3 days	As needed
MPP	Provide Mentor-Protégé participation guidance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advise on participation Respond to firm questions and refer to resources Provide guidance for evaluating potential mentors 	BOS	30–60 min.	None–4 weeks	As needed
	Review capability statements	BOS	5–20 min.	1–2 days	As need and during annual review
	Provide counseling and guidance to 8(a) firms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ad hoc or scheduled meetings Coordination and referrals to SBA resource partners for training or technical assistance Sessions about potential eligibility impacts, such as change of ownership or affiliation, outside employment, or highest compensation Sessions about contractual support, financial support, business growth, marketing, profitability, and workforce Sessions about NAICS change 	BOS	20 min.–2.5 hrs.	1 day–2 weeks	As needed

Category 4: Facilitate contract development

	 Action	 Role	 PT Time	 DT Time	 Frequency
	Share 8(a) capability statements and firm information with procuring activities	BOS	20–60 min.	1–3 days	As needed
	Connect firms to local and state supplier diversity partners	BOS	30–45 min.	None	As needed
If BAT not met	Review and approve Remedial Action Plan	BOS	1–3 hrs.	3 days–3 weeks	As needed
	Process request for waivers of sole source prohibition	BOS	1–8 hrs.	1 day	As needed
Letters	Initiate and send search letters	BOS	30–120 min.	None–2 weeks	As needed (rarely)
	Initiate and send requirement letters	BOS	30–60 min.	Less than 1 day	As needed
	Receive offering letter and process determination of eligibility (acceptance letter)	BOS	2.5–12 hrs.	2 days–3 weeks	As needed

Category 5: Exit review




	 Action	 Role	 PT Time	 DT Time	 Frequency
	Identify graduating firm	BOS	5 min.	None	Once
	Send exit survey to graduating firm	BOS	10–30 min.	None–1 week	Once
	Conduct exit review 30 to 90 days before end of participant's program term	BOS	1–3 hrs.	1 day–2 weeks	Once
	Sign off on exit review	DDD/DD	30–60 min.	1 day–1 week	Once

Appendix D FUTURE-STATE PROCESS MAP

Overview

This future-state process map documents proposed improvements to the processes depicted in the current-state process map in Appendix C. Not all proposed future-state changes are visible within the process map screenshots, as some impact processes not shown in the process map (such as changes to data entry or eliminating process variations among a minority of District Offices). All proposed future-state changes are summarized in a narrative description within each category.

Category 1: Program onboarding

 Action	 Role	 Frequency
BOS assigned to firm • System of record automatically sends message to firm and BOS	LBOS, SBOS, DD, or DDD	1–3 times during firm tenure
Send resources for firm (such as resource guide and participation guide)	BOS	Once
Schedule orientation session (individual or group)	BOS	Once
Conduct orientation session	BOS	Once
Confirm participation agreement has been signed	BOS	Once
Review and approve business plan	Review: BOS Approve: LBOS, SBOS, DD, or DDD	Annually (program entry and annual review)




BOS assigned to firm. Once the BOS assignment is made in the system of record, the system will automatically send a welcome message to both the new firm and the assigned BOS. Automating this process will ensure both parties are notified as soon as the assignment has been made and allow the BOS to begin the next activity.

Send resources for firm (such as resource guide and participation guide). Upon receiving the automated notification from the system of record, the BOS will send a standardized set of resources to their new firm (such as a resource guide and participation guide). Although the exact list of resources should be defined by OBD and OFO, DOs may customize these materials as needed. This approach will reduce variation in which materials are sent, but still allows for DO-level customization as appropriate.

Review and approve business plan. A standardized business plan template will be integrated into the system of record. Firms will complete the business plan within the system, which will increase consistency of business plan content and format, increase ease of this review and approval step, and reduce process time for this step.

The system will automatically send reminders in the following scenarios: (1) a reminder will be sent to the assigned BOS if the business plan has not been approved within 30 days of submission, (2) a reminder will be sent to the firm if the business plan has not been submitted within thirty days of program entry, (3) a second reminder will be sent to the firm if the business plan has not been submitted within sixty days of program entry.

Category 2: Annual review evaluating firm BD needs

 Action	 Role	 Frequency
Confirm annual review notifications are sent by system of record	BOS	Annually
Screen firm’s annual review for completeness • Includes financial statements, tax returns, and other documents to make file current	BOS	Annually
<i>If complete</i> ↓ <i>If not complete</i> ↓ Return to firm for updates	BOS	As needed
Evaluate annual review in system of record • Make recommendation to retain	BOS	Annually
Review of completed annual review evaluation	LBOS, SBOS, DD, or DDD	Annually
Process Financial Statement Waiver	BOS or DD	As needed
Inform firm of annual review results and recommendations	BOS	As needed

Screen firm’s annual review for completeness. The future-state version of this activity will remove the variation in which some BOSs begin conducting the evaluation with the BOS Analysis Workbook, create a list of missing information as they go, and then return the annual review to the firm to solicit missing information. Instead, this activity will be standardized as a standalone action which will be completed before Deficiency Letters are sent or the BOS begins evaluating the firm’s annual review. This change will reduce delay time in two ways: 1) it will minimize the amount of time spent waiting for firms to respond with updates, as they will only receive one Deficiency Letter, and 2) it will reduce the number of times a BOS is interrupted when evaluating the annual review (as missing information is one cause of interruption). BOSs noted that it was cognitively difficult to return to an annual review evaluation after an interruption.

The future-state version will also reflect the following change implemented in June 2023 (after VSM data collection was complete): the information required from firms when submitting their annual review packages will be updated to include information only the firm can provide, but which BOSs are required to enter in the Annual Review Workbook. For example, this includes the firm’s number of employees, revenue, and whether any 7(j) courses were taken over the previous year. In addition to these changes implemented in June 2023, the annual review package will be updated to include the number of 7(j) courses taken over the previous year.




Using the existing exit survey as a guide, add two to three questions into the firm’s annual review package to collect feedback on the program and the BD guidance received in the past year. This will collect an annual data point from all 8(a) firms, creating a trend line and making the program less reliant on data collected during the exit review (which has a low response rate).

Evaluate annual review in system of record. In the future-state, the annual review evaluation will be integrated into the system of record, rather than existing in a standalone spreadsheet. When required annual review data already exists within the system, the system will prefill the relevant evaluation fields. DOs with BDSs available will assign a BDS to look up required information from other data sources (such as Certify, SAM.gov, DSBS, and USASpending) and enter this information into the relevant annual review fields. These changes will reduce BOS delay time and process time, by reducing the pain points related to the need to reference multiple data sources. This shift will also provide more transparency into annual review evaluation progress, as the filled and unfilled fields will be visible; in the current process, the annual review evaluation is either not done or completely done from a tracking standpoint, as there is no way to track progress during the annual review evaluation.

Review of completed annual review evaluation. The future-state version of this activity removes the variation in which one DO does not involve the LBOS in this step unless there is a problem. As noted by program leadership, this variation represents an internal control issue.

Process Financial Statement Waiver. A new activity will be added at the end of this category: “Inform firm of annual review results and recommendations.” This addition results from the annual field timing shift (described in the category below), as the field visit previously served as this step. BOSs already notify their firm when the annual review is complete; in this new activity, BOSs will provide their recommendations for training or other types of development at the same time. This information can be provided by email or phone call, depending on the BOS and the firm’s individual needs and preferences.

Category 3: Annual field visit

 Action	 Role	 Frequency
Schedule annual field visit	BOS	Annually
<div style="text-align: center;">↓</div> Prepare for annual field visit	BOS	Annually
<div style="text-align: center;">↓</div> Conduct annual field visit at firm’s office location or virtually <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss with firm areas for improvement based on annual review findings 	BOS	Annually
<div style="text-align: center;">↓</div> Complete field visit report in system of record (submitted report automatically sent to firm)	BOS	Annually

Annual field visit category. In the program future-state, the annual field visit will not be conducted immediately after the annual review (as reflected in the future-state process map by moving the annual field visit to its own category). Instead, it will be conducted 6-8 months after the annual review and will

include a discussion (but not update) of the firm's business plan. This shift is designed for several purposes:




- Ensure the business plan is discussed twice per year, instead of once during the annual review (based on feedback that ideally the business plan would be reviewed more than once). The business plan will not be updated by the firm or reviewed by the BOS at this point (which would represent a larger additional workload burden). Instead, the existing business plan will be discussed with the firm to identify needs for additional support or training.
- Ensure an additional, standardized check-in between firms and their BOSs. While some firms regularly reach out to their BOSs, others do not. Some BOSs reported their DOs used to have standing monthly calls with each firm "when we were fully staffed." This update will ensure that all firms have at least two touch points with their BOS (adding more frequent standardized check-ins is likely unfeasible, given the additional burden and workload it would create for BOSs).
- The timing of this activity (6-8 months after the annual review) should be mandated to ensure this shift occurs. If the timing is not mandated, most BOSs are likely to continue conducting the field visit as the final step of the annual review process. One way to operationalize this schedule is to automate timing through the system of record, which would send the BOS an automated notification five months after submission and approval of the annual review, indicating the field visit should be conducted in the next 1-3 months.

As implementation effort will vary across DOs (for example, effort may be higher in high-volume DOs or DOs with multiple position vacancies), SBA could consider a slow implementation of this change across a period of three years. At each year, an increased percentage of 8(a) firms would have their annual field visit on the proposed schedule.

Conduct annual field visit at firm's office location or virtually. The future-state process will retain the flexibility to conduct the annual field either virtually or in-person, depending on firm location and BOS or firm preference. This will standardize a process change made during the pandemic that VSM participants recognized as extremely beneficial.




Complete field visit report in system of record. The future-state process will eliminate duplication by combining the last two activities in this category: completing the field visit report and sending a follow-up message to the firm summarizing the meeting (an update which is already being discussed by program leadership). The BOS will complete a field visit report template in the system of record. Upon submission of the field visit report, the system of record will automatically send the report to the firm.

Category 4: Providing guidance to support firm capacity growth

	 Action	 Role	 Frequency
	Inform 8(a) firms of upcoming 7(j) training opportunities	BOS	As needed
Joint Venture	Provide Joint Venture partnership guidance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advise on participation Respond to firm questions Meet with firm and potential partner (if requested) 	BOS	As needed
	Review Joint Venture checklist, complete BOS Joint Venture checklist	BOS	As needed
	↓		
	Approve Joint Venture	LBOS/SBOS, DD, and DDD	As needed
MPP	Provide Mentor-Protégé participation guidance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advise on participation Respond to firm questions and refer to resources Provide guidance for evaluating potential mentors 	BOS	As needed
	Review capability statements	BOS	As need and during annual review
	Provide counseling and guidance to 8(a) firms	BOS	As needed
	Including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ad hoc or scheduled meetings Coordination and referrals to SBA resource partners for training or technical assistance Sessions about potential eligibility impacts, such as change of ownership or affiliation, outside employment, or highest compensation Sessions about contractual support, financial support, business growth, marketing, profitability, and workforce Sessions about NAICS change 		




Approve Joint Venture. The future-state process will eliminate the variation in which some DOs continue to require District Council sign-off on the JV, despite the change in requirements. Eliminating this variation will remove an unnecessary step and reduce DT.

Category 5: Facilitate contract development

	 Action	 Role	 Frequency
	Share 8(a) capability statements and firm information with procuring activities	BOS	As needed
	Connect firms to local and state supplier diversity partners	BOS	As needed
If BAT not met	Review and approve Remedial Action Plan	BOS	As needed
	Process request for waivers of sole source prohibition	BOS	As needed
Letters	Initiate and send search letters	BOS	As needed (rarely)
	Initiate and send requirement letters	BOS	As needed
	Receive offering letter and process determination of eligibility (acceptance letter)	BOS	As needed

There were no changes to this category in the future-state process map.

Category 6: Exit review

	 Action	 Role	 Frequency
	System of record sends exit survey to graduating firms six months before graduation date	<i>Automated</i>	Once
	Conduct exit review 30 days before end of participant's program term	BOS	Once
	↓		
	Sign off on exit review	DDD/DD	Once

System of record sends exit survey to graduating firm six months before graduation date. In the future-state process, the first two activities in this category from the current-state process map will be combined into one: "Certify sends exit survey to graduating firms six months before graduation date." This change will implement several improvements:

- Automated sending of the exit survey via the system of record, which will 1) minimally reduce BOS workload by removing the responsibility for identifying graduating firms and sending the survey and 2) ensure surveys are sent on time as scheduled.
- Earlier exit survey timing (six months before graduation rather than 30 to 90 days) which may improve response rates by 1) giving the graduating firm more time to respond to the survey and 2) requesting feedback earlier in the firm's final program year, when they are likely more engaged with the program.

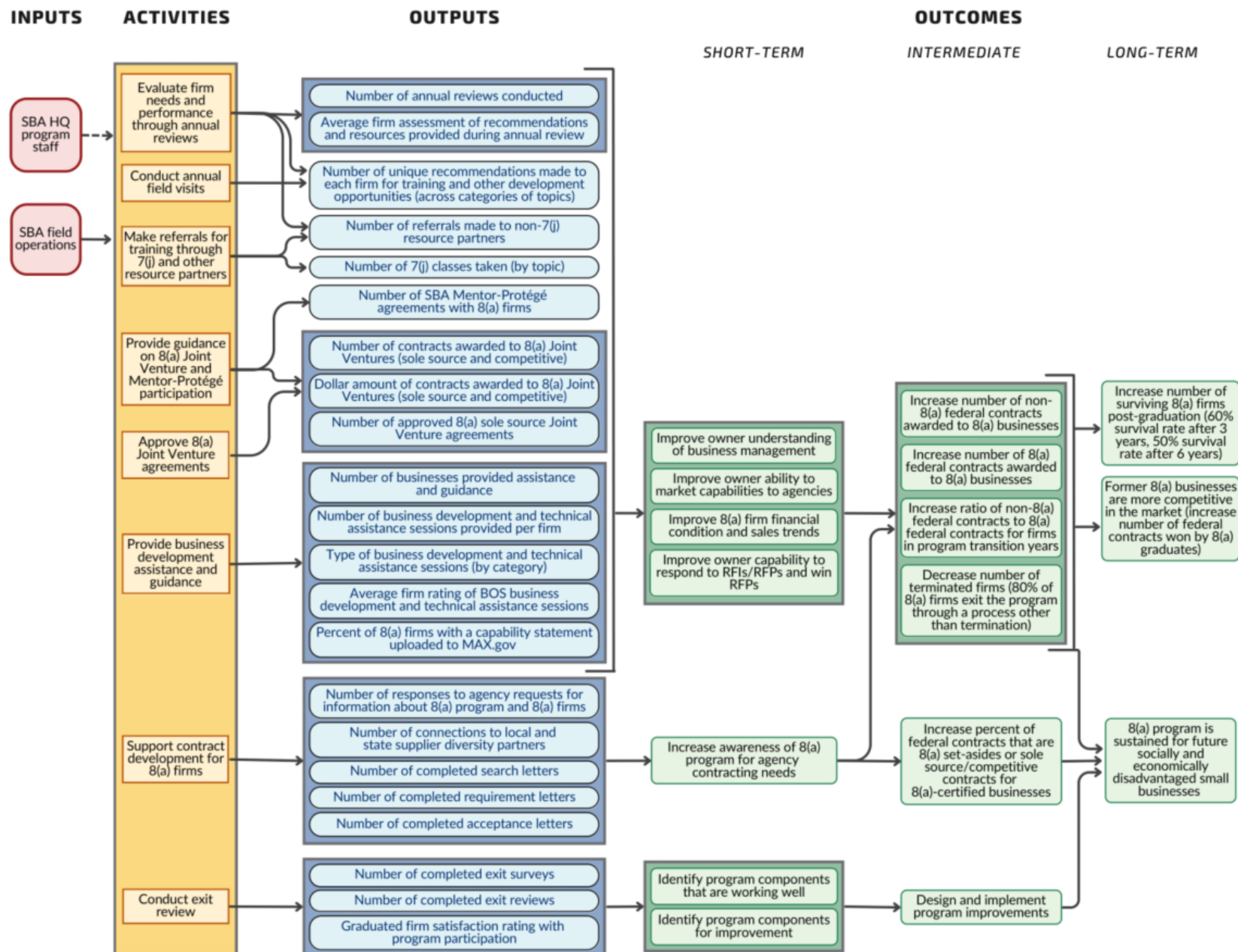
While this change may improve response rates to the exit survey, the updates in the annual review category will also allow the SBA to be less reliant on the exit survey as the single source of firm feedback. The introduction of firm feedback questions during the annual review creates an annual trend line, which the exit survey continues.

Conduct exit review 30 days before end of participant's program term. In the future-state process, the BOS will gather the required exit review information (total contracts received, training received, JV agreements, MPP agreements, and surplus property received) 30 days prior to the firm's graduation, regardless of whether the firm has completed the exit survey. Removing the dependency on the exit survey means this data will be collected more consistently. Shifting this step to occur 30 days before firm graduation ensures the most up-to-date information is reported.

Appendix E REVISED PROGRAM LOGIC MODEL

Logic models help define a program’s intended impact and goals and identify whether there is a logical link from program inputs and activities to anticipated outcomes. This makes logic models a useful design and implementation tool for programs. The existing 8(a) program logic model shows all inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes of the program. Summit understands the current logic model may not be in frequent usage within the program and stakeholders may not all be aware of its existence.

In this appendix, Summit presents a revised version of the program logic model, focusing only on the business development (BD) servicing activities. (Other activities depicted in the existing logic model are outside this project’s scope.) The refinements to the logic model will allow the SBA to create continuous improvement opportunities and organize structural and procedural changes around the identified outcomes. More specifically, the logic model identifies new outputs that are not easily measurable in the current program structure; this information will help the SBA identify additional needed metrics to continually measure program success and identify areas for improvement.



Appendix F SUMMARY OF DATA ENTRY FOR BD ACTIVITIES

The VSM sessions gathered information on what data entry actions are taken for each BD activity identified in the process map. Table F-1 summarizes data entry for each activity.

Table F-1: Summary of data entry for BD activities

BD Activity	Data Entry Step
Program onboarding	
<i>BOS assigned to firm.</i>	This step is completed in Certify, so no additional data entry is required within that system. Most DOs conduct internal data entry using a DO-level tracker (often in a spreadsheet or SharePoint), where they document new firms and the firm's assigned BOS.
<i>Send welcome letter (and other materials).</i>	There was no data entry associated with this action.
<i>Schedule orientation session.</i>	Although program leadership reported that GMATT entry happens at this point, no BOSs reported conducting data entry at this step.
<i>Conduct orientation session.</i>	There was not consistent reporting of data entry following the orientation session. One DO reported entering the firm's attendance in Certify, while participants in two VSM sessions reported that participation is recorded in GMATT.
<i>Confirm participation agreement has been signed.</i>	There was no data entry associated with this action.
<i>Review and approve business plan.</i>	This action is entered into GMATT upon business plan approval and considered a compliance action. However, one DO reported not entering this action into GMATT. This action can also be entered into Certify (with the business plan uploaded) but is not consistently completed.
Annual review evaluating firm BD needs	
<i>Confirm annual review notifications are sent by Certify.</i>	There was no data entry associated with this action.
<i>Screen firm's annual review for completeness.</i>	There was no data entry associated with this action.
<i>Return to firm for updates.</i>	There was no data entry associated with this action.
<i>Evaluate annual review (using BOS Analysis Workbook).</i>	The completed BOS Analysis Workbook is uploaded to both GMATT and Certify.
<i>Review of completed BOS Analysis Workbook.</i>	The completed BOS Analysis Workbook is uploaded to both GMATT and Certify. Upon supervisory approval of the workbook and the associated recommendation to retain the firm, BOSs enter the recommendation to retain in Certify.
<i>Process financial statement waiver.</i>	A Certify entry is made when the waiver is requested and when the waiver is approved. A GMATT entry is made when this action is completed. Some DOs also track this action in DO-specific trackers.
Annual field visit	
<i>Schedule annual field visit.</i>	There was no data entry associated with this action; data entry for the annual field visit is not conducted until all steps are complete.
<i>Prepare for annual field visit.</i>	There was no data entry associated with this action.

BD Activity	Data Entry Step
<i>Conduct annual field visit at firm’s office location or virtually.</i>	There was no data entry associated with this action.
<i>Send follow-up to firm summarizing the meeting.</i>	There was no data entry associated with this action.
<i>Complete field visit report.</i>	A GMATT entry is made once the field visit is complete. Some DOs upload the field visit report into GMATT, but this is not consistent across all DOs. While most DOs did not report data entry into Certify, some BOSs reported uploading either the field visit report, the summary letter, or both into Certify. Additionally, many DOs track field visit progress in DO-level trackers.
Providing guidance to support firm capacity growth	
<i>Inform 8(a) firms of upcoming 7(j) training opportunities.</i>	There is no data entry associated with the 7(j) program, as BOSs do not track whether firms take classes.
<i>Provide Joint Venture partnership guidance.</i>	There was no data entry associated with this action.
<i>Review Joint Venture checklist, complete BOS Joint Venture checklist.</i>	There was no data entry associated with this action.
<i>Approve Joint Venture.</i>	Most DOs make a GMATT entry when this step is complete, although one DO makes a GMATT entry once the BOS JV checklist is completed (previous step) and another does not record anything in GMATT related to this activity. One DO reported entering the approved JV into Certify only (and not GMATT), while one reported entering the approved JV into both systems. Most DOs also have an internal tracking spreadsheet, list of JVs, or repository of relevant materials where the JV is recorded. DOs also reported emailing “JV Actions” when the JV is approved so that it shows up on SAM.gov and DSBS.
<i>Provide Mentor-Protégé participation guidance.</i>	There was a lack of consistency regarding whether any data entry occurs after this action. Participants in two VSM sessions reported no data entry. Participants in one VSM session reported entering this action as a counseling session under the “BD” category in GMATT, while participants in another session reported they may make this GMATT entry depending on “how we are on our GMATT goals.”
<i>Review capability statements.</i>	There was no data entry associated with this action.
<i>Provide counseling and guidance to 8(a) firms.</i>	There was variation in whether BOSs record this action in GMATT. This is largely due to how frequently BOSs are providing guidance and counseling to their firms; as one BOS noted, “it’s just too much” to track all actions in GMATT. Some DOs reported not entering this information into GMATT, while others reported that they do make GMATT entries. One BOS noted that HQ’s guidance is to enter these activities into GMATT if they last longer than 30 minutes.
Facilitate contract development	
<i>Share 8(a) capability statements and firm information with procuring activities.</i>	There was no data entry associated with this action.
<i>Connect firms to local and state supplier diversity partners.</i>	There was no data entry associated with this action.
<i>Review and approve Remedial Action Plan.</i>	The Remedial Action Plan is entered into both Certify and GMATT. DOs also track this in DO-level trackers, so other BOSs know the firm is not currently eligible for sole source contracts.

BD Activity	Data Entry Step
<i>Process request for waivers of sole source prohibition.</i>	Waivers of sole source prohibition are entered into GMATT for OFO awareness.
<i>Initiate and send search letters.</i>	Some DOs enter search letters in GMATT, but this is not done consistently.
<i>Initiate and send requirement letters.</i>	Some DOs enter requirement letters in GMATT, but this is not done consistently. One DO reported entering these letters in Certify.
<i>Receive offering letter and process determination of eligibility (acceptance letter).</i>	Offering letters are recorded in Certify when the requirement number for the acceptance letter is generated. Some DOs reported recording this action in GMATT, although this is no longer a requirement.
Exit review	
<i>Identify graduating firm.</i>	There was no data entry associated with this action.
<i>Send exit survey to graduating firm.</i>	There was no data entry associated with this action.
<i>Conduct exit review 30 to 90 days before end of participant's program term.</i>	Once this step is completed, the action is entered into GMATT. This action is entered in lieu of a final-year annual review (and therefore counts toward the current fiscal year annual review count in GMATT). Participants in one VSM session noted data entry must be completed before the firm's graduation, because documents cannot be uploaded after a firm has graduated. DO-specific tracking includes archiving the firm's folder in the DO's internal SharePoint site and updating the master list of firms.
<i>Sign off on exit review.</i>	There was no data entry associated with this action.