

Resilient Assistance: Using Agentic AI to Empower Small Businesses Amid Resource Partner Cuts

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Small businesses pursuing government contracts often contend with persistent bureaucratic hurdles, complex regulations, and insufficient personalized support. Historically, SBA resource partners (such as SCORE mentors, Small Business Development Centers, Women's Business Centers, and others) have guided entrepreneurs through these formidable challenges. However, a recent federal reorganization now threatens to significantly reduce SBA's workforce by approximately 43% and eliminate funding for nearly all entrepreneurial development programs. These critical programs include Women's Business Centers (WBCs), SCORE, the State Trade Expansion Program (STEP), and Veterans Business Outreach Centers (VBOCs). Such sweeping cuts risk critically widening the gaps in vital technical assistance available to small businesses, leaving many to struggle alone. Paradoxically, the federal government simultaneously prioritizes enhancing customer experience (CX) and streamlining regulations, aiming to make agency interactions "simple, seamless, and secure" while cutting the red tape that burdens small firms. This presents a unique opportunity to leverage innovative solutions.

Executive Summary

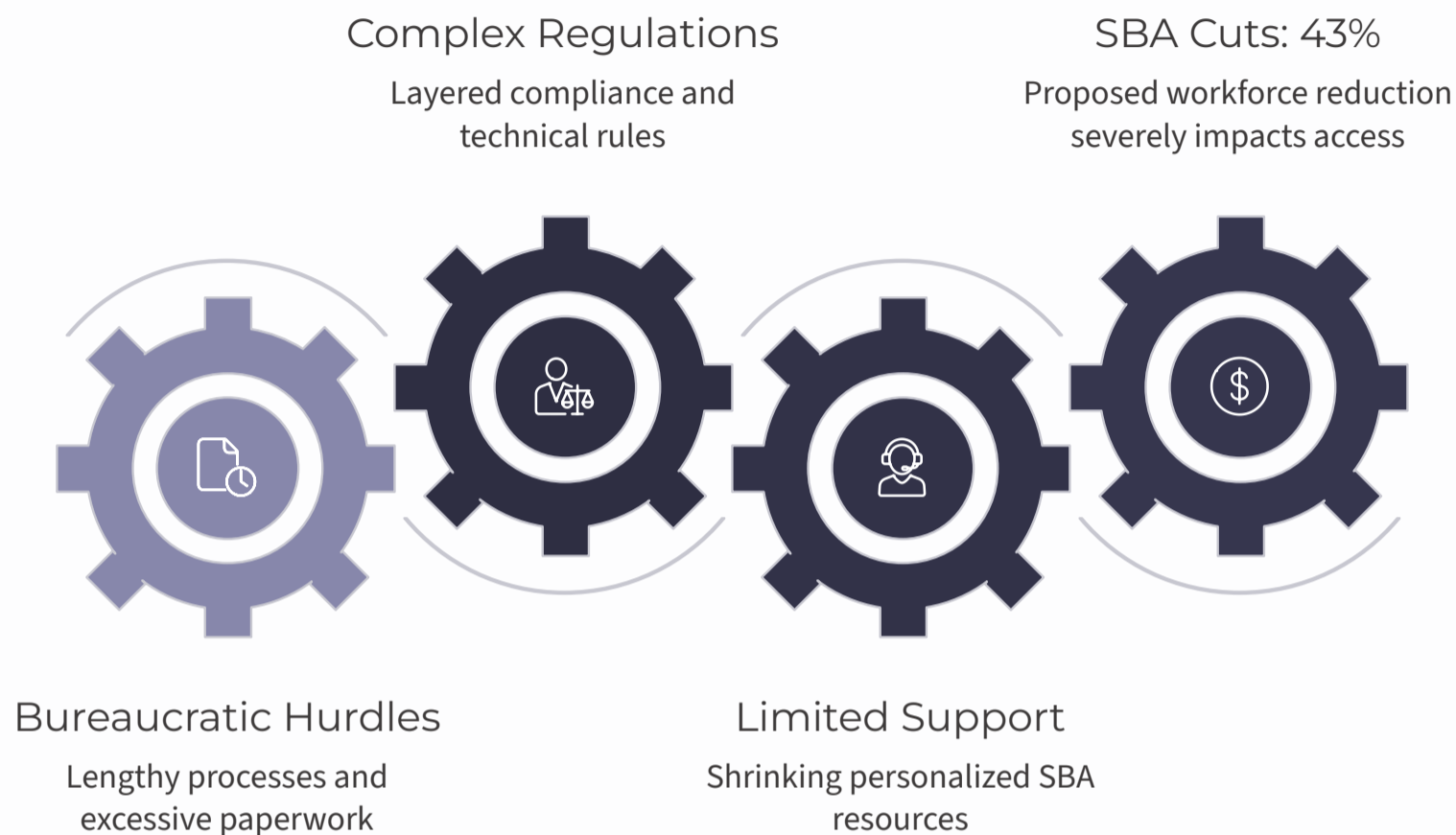
This white paper explores how agentic AI – intelligent software agents and chatbots – can revolutionize support for small business contractors. By strategically deploying AI-driven assistants, the SBA and other agencies can dramatically simplify processes and eliminate friction in interactions between small businesses and government systems. This approach not only maintains but expands crucial support in a cost-effective, equitable way, seamlessly complementing ongoing digital service modernization and vital regulatory reform efforts.

Key Recommendations for Action

- **Pilot AI solutions:** Implement AI-based technical assistance programs first in underserved and rural areas to maximize impact and equity.
- **Integrate AI strategically:** Seamlessly embed AI tools into the SBA's modernization initiatives, ensuring robust funding and governance safeguards.
- **Forge vital partnerships:** Collaborate with experts and stakeholders to guarantee the highest content quality and accuracy for AI-driven information.
- **Innovate for public good:** Actively leverage innovation programs to accelerate the development and deployment of cutting-edge, public-facing AI solutions.

These proactive steps will empower entrepreneurs with consistent, accessible service delivery – anytime, anywhere – even amidst tightening resource constraints. This strategy perfectly aligns with core federal priorities: elevating customer experience, streamlining regulations, and fostering the responsible adoption of AI technologies across government.

Context: Challenges Facing Small Businesses



Small businesses seeking government contracts consistently encounter significant obstacles: formidable bureaucratic hurdles, complex regulatory landscapes, and increasingly limited personalized support. For years, dedicated SBA resource partners have empowered entrepreneurs by providing crucial guidance and mentorship, helping them navigate these intricate challenges.

⊗ Critical Funding Cuts Loom

A recent federal reorganization proposes a drastic 43% reduction in the SBA's workforce and the complete elimination of funding for nearly all vital entrepreneurial development programs. This includes essential initiatives like Women's Business Centers (WBCs), SCORE, the State Trade Expansion Program (STEP), and Veterans Business Outreach Centers (VBOCs).

These severe cuts threaten to dramatically widen the existing gaps in technical assistance available to small businesses. The impact will be particularly devastating for those in underserved communities and rural areas, who already face significant, entrenched barriers to accessing lucrative government contracting opportunities. Urgent action is needed to prevent this setback for entrepreneurial growth.

Federal Priorities for Small Business Support

Customer Experience (CX) Enhancements

The federal government actively champions enhanced customer experience, passionately committing to make interactions with agencies "simple, seamless, and secure."

This vital priority is clearly outlined in Executive Order 14058 and the President's Management Agenda.

These bold initiatives directly transform how small businesses engage with government services, making essential processes remarkably more intuitive and easily accessible.

Regulatory Streamlining Initiatives

Concurrent efforts aggressively cut through the bureaucratic red tape that burdens small firms, exemplified by the impactful Revolutionary FAR Overhaul (RFO) announced in August 2025.

These crucial reforms proactively simplify the often-complex regulatory landscape small businesses must navigate to successfully secure government contracts.



A Scalable Solution: Agentic AI & Chatbots



24/7 Availability

AI assistants offer instant, round-the-clock guidance, eliminating the scheduling constraints and frustrating wait times that hinder traditional support models.



Unmatched Geographic Reach

Digital solutions extend vital support to entrepreneurs in rural and underserved areas, effectively bridging gaps where in-person resources are scarce or unavailable.



Consistent, High-Quality Guidance

AI systems deliver standardized, accurate information across every interaction, ensuring consistent quality and reliability in all guidance provided.

Agentic AI represents intelligent software designed to understand user needs, navigate complex information systems, and deliver personalized guidance. For small businesses, these powerful AI assistants can adeptly interpret intricate regulations, streamline certification processes, and proactively identify relevant contracting opportunities. This capability transforms tasks traditionally performed by human advisors at resource partner organizations, making essential support more accessible and efficient for entrepreneurs.

Empowering Small Business Contractors with AI



Information Discovery

AI actively scouts and identifies relevant contracting opportunities across diverse government platforms, saving businesses valuable time.



Process Navigation

It expertly guides entrepreneurs through intricate processes, from registration and certification to comprehensive bidding procedures.



Personalized Recommendations

AI delivers tailored contract recommendations, aligning opportunities with specific business capabilities and proven performance records.



Deadline Management

Never miss a critical step again. AI proactively alerts businesses to impending opportunities and crucial submission deadlines.

Bringing AI to Life: Real-World Applications

To maximize accessibility and impact, AI assistants can be seamlessly deployed across various channels, meeting small businesses precisely where they operate:

- Web-based chatbots deeply integrated into SBA.gov, SAM.gov, and other essential government platforms.
- Intuitive mobile applications providing on-the-go assistance and essential resources.
- Responsive, voice-activated assistants offering convenient, hands-free guidance.
- Intelligent email-based systems designed to swiftly respond to inquiries with precise, relevant information.

Driving Innovation: Key Policy Recommendations for AI Integration

01

Launch Targeted AI Assistance Pilots in Underserved Areas

Initiate focused pilot programs in regions most impacted by resource partner reductions, specifically targeting rural and underserved communities. These pilots must incorporate robust evaluation frameworks to rigorously measure their effectiveness and pinpoint areas for ongoing enhancement.

03

Cultivate Strategic Partnerships for Enhanced Content Quality

Forge strong collaborations with industry associations, leading academic institutions, and existing resource partners. These alliances are crucial for ensuring that AI systems access accurate, comprehensive, and up-to-date information regarding government contracting processes.

02

Integrate AI Tools into SBA's Modernization Initiatives

Seamlessly embed AI assistants within ongoing digital transformation efforts, such as the MySBA platforms. Establish essential funding mechanisms and robust governance safeguards to ensure the responsible and ethical deployment of AI technologies.

04

Harness Innovation Programs to Accelerate AI Development

Leverage established innovation vehicles, including SBIR/STTR programs, to fund the creation of cutting-edge, public-facing AI solutions. These solutions should be specifically engineered to empower small business contractors.

Crucial Implementation Considerations

Achieving success demands meticulous implementation. We must actively build trust through unwavering accuracy and fairness, diligently protect data privacy, and ensure clear, accessible pathways to human support whenever needed.

Alignment with Federal Priorities

Enhanced Customer Experience

AI assistants transform government interactions for small businesses, making them **simple, seamless, and secure** – a direct alignment with Executive Order 14058's ambitious goals.

Proactive Regulatory Streamlining

Empowering entrepreneurs to navigate complex regulations, AI tools decisively complement broader federal efforts to simplify the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR).

Responsible AI Deployment

Thoughtful implementation will showcase how the government can deploy AI responsibly, embedding appropriate safeguards for privacy, security, and equity.

With proper safeguards and collaborative partnerships, AI-driven assistants can become an indispensable part of the small business support infrastructure – one that remains resilient to funding fluctuations and capable of evolving with policy changes.

Conclusion

America's small businesses drive innovation and fuel economic growth, yet they struggle to access the essential support needed to effectively pursue government opportunities. The traditional approach of in-person, labor-intensive technical assistance faces immense pressure – it is increasingly unsustainable amidst budget cuts, even as entrepreneurs desperately need help navigating complex bureaucratic processes.

Agentic AI presents a timely and transformative solution, fundamentally reshaping how we deliver this critical assistance. By harnessing intelligent automation, we can empower every small business owner – from bustling city centers to quiet rural Main Streets – with immediate, always-available guidance on how to register, certify, and successfully compete for government contracts. This crucial shift simultaneously lessens our reliance on a fragmented human service model and actively complements ongoing reforms designed to simplify the entire system.

The recommendations outlined in this paper provide a clear roadmap to responsibly pilot and scale AI solutions. With robust safeguards and strategic partnerships, AI-driven assistants can become an indispensable component of the small business support infrastructure – a resilient framework capable of adapting to funding fluctuations and evolving with policy changes. In doing so, the SBA and its partner agencies can not only mitigate the impact of resource partner cuts but also actively advance the broader goals of enhancing customer experience and streamlining regulation.

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