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The Readiness Gap

What 146 supplier assessments reveal about why introductions do not become contracts

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At a glance

91%	**62%**	**64%**
scored in the lowest readiness tier	pursue government and corporate markets at once	have no governance structure in place

Why this brief exists

Institutions across the procurement ecosystem share a common problem. They have supplier bases, member networks, and program pipelines full of businesses that want government and corporate contracts. Most of those businesses will not win one.

The prevailing assumption is that the barrier is access: introduce the supplier to the buyer and the contract follows. The data does not support that assumption.

This brief reports what a structured readiness assessment found across five dimensions that enterprise and government buyers evaluate before they award.

What was measured

The assessment scores businesses across five dimensions. Respondents are placed into three readiness tiers, routed to a primary pursuit track, and flagged on specific, checkable failures.

Executive Leadership	Governance and Risk	Digital Systems	AI Readiness	Market Positioning

Sample and method

312	**146**	**47%**	**5**
assessments started	completed and scored	completion rate	sections measured

Limitations, stated plainly

312 people began the assessment and 146 completed it. Every figure in this brief describes those 146.

Respondents were self selecting rather than randomly sampled, which biases the group toward businesses already motivated to pursue contracts. That bias makes these findings more striking, not less. These are the ones who are trying.

One record returned a score above the 100-point maximum and is retained. Excluding it changes no figure by more than one tenth of a percentage point. The dataset continues to grow.

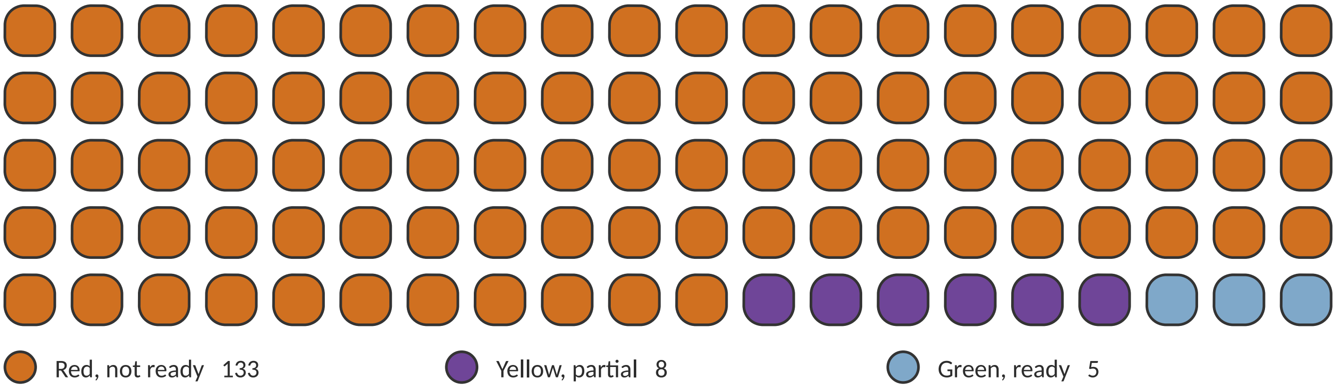
Who took it

Respondents were small and mid-size businesses recruited through procurement-adjacent channels: supplier development programming, chamber and association networks, and contract readiness events. All had already identified themselves as pursuing contracts.

Of the 312 who began, 166 abandoned before completion. That 47 percent completion rate is itself a finding.

Finding one: readiness failure is near universal

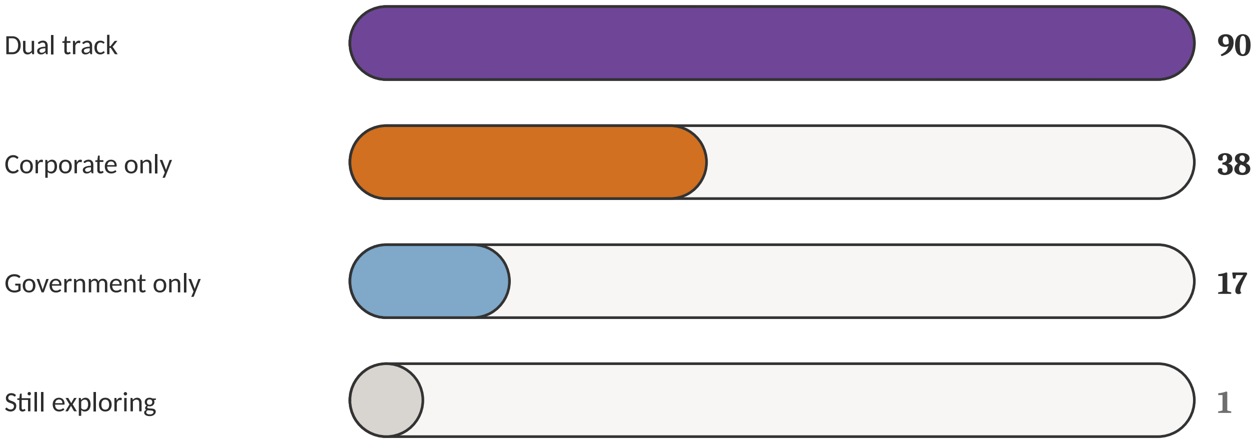
Distribution across readiness tiers, n = 146. Each square is one percent, rounded.



Five businesses of 146 reached the top readiness tier. When 91 percent of a motivated supplier population scores in the lowest tier, matchmaking events and introduction programs are being deployed against a population that cannot convert an introduction into an award.

Finding two: most suppliers have no defined lane

Primary pursuit track selected, n = 146.



Sixty-two percent of respondents are pursuing government and corporate markets at the same time. These are structurally different sales motions with different qualification requirements, cycle lengths, and compliance regimes. A business without the infrastructure to succeed in one market is unlikely to succeed by pursuing two. This pattern predicts diffuse effort and stalled pipelines, and it is invisible to any program that measures activity rather than readiness.

Finding three: the failures are specific and nameable

The most common readiness failures, share of 146 completed assessments.

64%	58%	43%
No governance structure	**No code of ethics**	**AI with no policy**
Required by Fortune 500 and federal buyers before award	Non-negotiable for enterprise and government contracting	Using AI tools with no governance policy. Real IP leakage risk.

A further 51 percent had no succession plan and 24 percent were running on spreadsheet-only financials. Only 15 of 146 respondents triggered no flags at all, and the average respondent failed 2.4 of these checks.

These are not vague capability gaps. They are named, checkable items that a buyer will find during qualification. Most supplier development programming is built above this layer rather than at it.

What follows from this

1 Access-based programming targets the wrong constraint

Introductions convert only when the supplier can withstand qualification. Readiness has to precede access, not follow it, or the introduction is wasted on both sides.

2 Cohort intervention outperforms one-to-one advisory at scale

When most of a population fails the same short list of checks, individually tailored advisory is the most expensive possible way to fix it.

3 Readiness has to be measured, not assumed

A program that cannot report a readiness delta cannot demonstrate impact to funders, boards, or corporate sponsors. Diagnostic instrumentation is what turns activity into evidence.

How would your population score?

The same instrument used in this study is open, in three versions. Four minutes, a tiered result, and your specific gaps. Free.

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About the author

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Citation and data note

Assessment data collected March through July 2026. Figures describe the 146 completed assessments as noted in the method section. Findings are descriptive and are not presented as generalizable to all supplier populations. Internal and test submissions were excluded before analysis.