



Key Takeaways from the 2025 SAME Federal Small Business Conference

By Scott Higgins, PE

Last week, several MBP team members attended the 2025 Society of American Military Engineers (SAME) Small Business Conference in Phoenix, Arizona. We look forward to this conference every year as it consistently provides valuable insight into the federal market and the challenges agencies are working to solve. Hearing directly from program leaders and decision-makers helps us stay informed about shifting priorities, funding expectations, and emerging needs across federal facilities and infrastructure.

This year's sessions covered a wide range of topics, including modernization efforts, digital tools, changing budget environments, and the growing need for strong planning and dependable program structures. Below is a summary of my key takeaways:

1. FEDERAL INFRASTRUCTURE OUTLOOK AND PROGRAM DEMAND

The 2025 SAME Small Business Conference highlighted a federal construction environment in the midst of significant change. Agencies across the Department of Defense and civilian sectors reported similar conditions, including tight execution windows, aging infrastructure, workforce constraints, and evolving mission requirements. The result is a capital program strategy that builds on what was driving the 2025 budgets, with steadier execution in 2026, and expanded modernization and resilience investments in 2027.

The message from agency leaders was consistent. Even as budgets fluctuate, the needs of mission-driven facilities continue to rise. Key priorities include shipyard modernization, strategic nuclear force modernization, Pacific deterrence projects, energy resilience, upgrades to Veterans Affairs medical centers, and modernization and adaptive use changes to federal buildings. Mega-programs such as the Navy's Shipyard Infrastructure Optimization Program (SIOP), the Sentinel program, missile defense infrastructure, Homeland Security expansions, GSA's facility realignment requirements, and Columbia-class submarine support projects are reshaping federal capital strategies at an unprecedented scale. These efforts influence every phase of delivery and require early planning clarity, integrated design strategies, and construction approaches that can manage complex sequences, elevated network security requirements, and long-duration phasing.

2. LIFECYCLE AND DELIVERY CONSIDERATIONS ACROSS FEDERAL PROGRAMS

These drivers affect the full lifecycle. Planning efforts must consider mission agility and resilience. Design teams must account for evolving security and sustainment expectations. Construction delivery must balance cost

management, changes in federal emphasis on domestically produced products, workforce constraints, regulatory requirements, and schedule pressure. Increasingly, program management, construction management agent support, commissioning, cost and schedule controls, and risk-informed portfolio planning will play a larger role as agencies balance complex program loads with limited internal staffing.

3. ACQUISITION MODERNIZATION AND CYBER REQUIREMENTS

Acquisition modernization was another central theme. The ongoing Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) rewrite, which is expected to roll out in phases beginning in 2026, aims to clarify evaluations, streamline documentation, simplify Organizational Conflicts of Interest (OCI) determinations, and integrate digital procurement standards. Cybersecurity also featured prominently. With Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification (CMMC) 2.0 nearing implementation, agencies emphasized the need for contractors to maintain the cyber hygiene and documentation practices required to protect sensitive project information and ensure continuity of operations.

4. DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND ENTERPRISE-WIDE DATA ALIGNMENT

Digital platforms continue to shape how programs are executed. The adoption of an agency-wide, common project management software across federal agencies offers clear advantages in unified reporting and data standardization. However, teams noted that effective use still requires consistent onboarding and disciplined workflow alignment. As modules mature, the platform has the potential to significantly enhance visibility across the planning, design, and construction phases when applied consistently.

5. INCREASED NEED FOR DOCUMENTATION, ADVISORY SUPPORT, AND MISSION-FOCUSED DELIVERY

For federal clients, current trends indicate a future where consistent documentation, clearer program structures, and more specialized technical support will be essential for delivering mission-critical facilities. Agencies are managing larger and more complex program loads while relying on limited internal staffing, which increases the importance of early planning, reliable cost and schedule information, and strong coordination across planning, design, construction, and sustainment.

There is also a growing need for support teams who can help agencies navigate shifting federal requirements, evolving security expectations, data and reporting standards, and the expanding use of digital tools. As programs grow in scale and complexity, many agencies are placing a greater emphasis on well-defined governance, proactive risk identification, and processes that support sound and timely decision-making. These efforts are becoming increasingly central to keeping projects on track and ensuring that facilities meet their long-term needs.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As always, the discussions at this year's conference provided a clear view of how rapidly federal program needs are evolving and the pressure agencies face as they balance growing mission demands with limited internal resources. SAME's Small Business Conference remains one of the best opportunities to hear directly from the leaders and practitioners who are closest to the work and understand what is changing on the ground. The insights shared this year point to a future where strong preparation, adaptability, and steady coordination will be essential as agencies move forward with some of the largest and most complex facility programs in recent years.

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