

2024

Annual REPORT



July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025

San Diego, Orange, Imperial APEX Accelerator

Mike Sabellico
Regional Director
July 2025

msabellico@swccd.edu
619.216.6671 X4933

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Hosted by: **Southwestern College / Southwestern College Foundation**

Who We Are

The San Diego, Orange & Imperial APEX Accelerator helps small businesses win and perform on federal, state, and local government contracts, especially within the Defense Industrial Base (DIB). As part of the national APEX Accelerators network managed by the Department of Defense Office of Small Business Programs (OSBP), we provide no-cost education, market intelligence, and one-on-one advising that turns potential into performance. Our work is also supported by the California Office of the Small Business Advocate (CalOSBA).

Our mission: Empower small businesses to thrive in the DIB and beyond by accelerating innovation, fostering ingenuity, and building resilient, diverse supply chains.

FY 2024 Highlights

- **\$905.4M** in total contract awards to APEX-assisted small businesses
- **\$627.5M (69%)** in **federal** awards
- **~6,036 jobs** created or retained
- **4,151** active small-business clients served
- **3,539** counseling sessions delivered to **816** clients (including **396 new**)
- **3,580** total advising hours
- **133** webinars, workshops, and outreach events reaching **14,058** participants

Performance: We exceeded all federal and state APEX metrics for **training, counseling, and outreach** in FY 2024. A huge thank you to our clients' engagement and the continued generosity of our sponsors and partners.

What We Do (No-Cost Services)

- **Readiness & Compliance:** SAM.gov, small-business certifications, cyber/CMMC basics, quality & performance readiness.
 - **Market Access:** Bid matching, opportunity pipeline development, agency/prime introductions, matchmaking, and capture strategies.
 - **Proposal Support:** Solicitations debrief, proposal reviews, pricing basics, and compliance checklists.
 - **Performance Support:** Subcontracting strategies, supplier diversity alignment, contract administration fundamentals, and proposal debriefing.
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Client Experience & Satisfaction

In our most recent quarterly survey (**May 2025**):

- **834** clients invited: **79** responses (~**9.5%** response rate)
- **93.6%** composite satisfaction rating

“APEX helped us translate our capabilities into a compliant, competitive proposal and introduced us to the right agency buyers.”

Why It Matters

A stronger, more diverse supplier base increases **readiness, resilience, and innovation** across the national supply chain. Our APEX lowers barriers to entry, equips firms to compete, and helps public agencies and primes meet their small-business goals with qualified, award-ready partners.

Looking Ahead (FY 2025 Priorities)

- **Deeper DIB Readiness:** Expand sector-specific training (manufacturing, construction, IT/services) and CMMC readiness support.
- **High-Value Matchmaking:** More curated introductions to buyers and primes aligned to real and active requirements.
- **Metrics that Matter:** Track outcomes across awards, jobs, and supply-chain resiliency; share transparent quarterly updates with sponsors.
- **Equity & Access:** Targeted outreach to underserved communities and rural firms across San Diego, Orange, and Imperial Counties.

Thank You to Our Sponsors & Partners

Your investment fuels training, advising, and outreach that convert into measurable outcomes for small businesses and our region’s economy. We are grateful for your continued support and partnership.

Get Involved

- **Small Businesses:** Engage with an advisor, attend a workshop, or request a solicitation review, or help with creating a capability statement and a marketing strategy.
- **Agencies & Primes:** Co-host training webinars on upcoming opportunities, share forecasts, and partner on supplier development.
- **Funders & Sponsors:** Support scalable programs that produce verified outcomes.

This report reflects FY 2024 outcomes and the May 2025 client satisfaction snapshot as reported by the APEX Accelerator serving San Diego, Orange, and Imperial Counties.

Success Story



BLACK BOX SAFETY, INC.

THE RISE OF BLACK BOX SAFETY, INC.



Black Box Safety, Inc. was founded on April 8, 2017, combining industrial supplies with tactical safety gear. The company formed a strong partnership with Grainger for industrial supplies. Inspired by the Veterans First Program and Shark Tank, Jackson Dalton, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran, aimed to create his own business. With 10 years of experience at 3M, he had the drive and intellect to build something greater, initially expecting the VA to be his main customer. What began as a bold idea quickly evolved into a fast-growing safety solutions provider.

Inspiration Behind the Business: Jackson Dalton was inspired to start a business after learning about the Veterans First Program and watching Shark Tank. As a U.S. Marine Corps veteran, he initially expected the VA to be their primary customer. With 10 years of experience at 3M, Jackson pursued his dream of business ownership.

Overcoming Challenges with APEX: In its early stages, Black Box Safety focused on securing government contracts and setting up the necessary structural framework. APEX played a pivotal role in refining the company's capability statement, identifying areas for improvement, and providing hands-on support. Jackson worked closely with multiple APEX Accelerators, including fixing their SAM.gov registry and researching SDVOSB status rules, ensuring a strong foundation for future growth.

The Impact of APEX's Support: APEX's guidance has been instrumental in Black Box Safety's growth. Since its launch in 2017, the company has reached \$33 million in annual revenue by 2024. It expanded to a team of 15 employees, including three veterans, and became an official DoD SkillBridge provider, offering career transition opportunities for service members. APEX's support helped lay a foundation for long-term success and sustainable expansion.

Black Box Safety, Inc. exemplifies entrepreneurial success in the veteran community. Thanks to Jackson's determination, strategic partnerships, and APEX's unwavering support, the business continues to thrive, serving both government and private sector clients with innovative safety solutions.



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