

“We stand for the sovereign rights of nations... and... we must rebuild an economy in which prosperity is broadly based and widely shared... with a gainfully employed citizenry—with no one sitting on the sidelines—who take satisfaction from knowing that their work is essential to the prosperity of our nation.” –President Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy*, page 13

America First, Measured in Jobs

What the 8(a) Program Actually Delivers

The 2025 National Security Strategy frames economic policy as inseparable from national security, emphasizing the need to prioritize American workers, domestic industry, and a gainfully employed citizenry. In this framework, federal contracting programs should be evaluated not by abstract claims about competition or ideology, but by whether they structurally align federal dollars with American labor and national security–relevant work.

The relevant question for the Small Business Administration’s 8(a) Business Development Program is therefore straightforward: as actually implemented, does the program advance an America First labor standard?

This paper evaluates that question using five years of federal contracting data, focusing on two concrete measures: the nature of the work performed and the location of the jobs supported. Methodology available at https://www.8afacts.org/america_first

The Work Mix: 8(a) Is Structurally “Hire American”

Across FY2020–FY2024, the overwhelming majority of 8(a) contract dollars are tied to work where U.S. citizenship is required or strongly implied by federal contracting rules.

Over this five-year period:

- 91.2 percent of 8(a) contract dollars fall into citizenship-constrained work categories.
- The comparable figure for non-8(a) awards is 81.4 percent.

This difference is consistent year over year and persists across changes in administration. The gap is also more pronounced when weighted by dollars rather than transaction count, indicating that higher-value work is more likely to carry citizenship constraints—and that 8(a) firms are disproportionately engaged in that work.

The implication is not that 8(a) firms make discretionary hiring choices different from other small businesses. Rather, the federal government itself determines the labor profile of the program through the nature of the work it assigns. Defense, security, engineering, IT

systems, and federal facilities work inherently limit the use of non-citizen labor, regardless of contractor preference.

Employment Impact: Where the Jobs Actually Are

From FY2020 through FY2024, the 8(a) program supported substantial U.S. employment, measured in job-years.

(A job-year is a standard way to measure employment over time. One job-year equals one full-time job sustained for one year. One person employed full-time for one year = 1 job-year; Two people employed full-time for one year = 2 job-years, etc.)

Breakdown:

- Democratic-held districts: approximately 2.41 to 3.62 million job-years
- GOP-held Safe districts: approximately 754,000 to 1.13 million job-years
- GOP-held Vulnerable districts: approximately 188,000 to 282,000 job-years
- All GOP-held districts combined: approximately 943,000 to 1.41 million job-years

These figures demonstrate that nearly one million job-years supported by the 8(a) program are located in Republican-held districts, with a meaningful share concentrated in politically competitive seats.

The jobs supported by the program are not diffuse or incidental. They are disproportionately tied to defense, infrastructure, logistics, engineering, and federal services work—sectors where employment effects are locally significant and closely tied to national security and domestic capacity.

Policy and Political Implications

Evaluated against America First objectives, these findings matter for three reasons.

First, worker alignment. The 8(a) program is structurally concentrated in work that requires or strongly favors U.S. citizen labor, limiting reliance on foreign or unauthorized workers by design, not by assertion.

Second, geographic reality. The employment footprint of the program extends well beyond Democratic districts. Republican-held districts—and especially vulnerable GOP seats—capture a substantial share of the job-years supported by 8(a).

Third, risk of disruption. Abrupt elimination or severe contraction of the program would not produce neutral effects. It would:

- Reduce employment in GOP districts;
- Increase economic volatility in competitive seats;
- Shift work toward larger incumbents with greater ability to offshore functions or rely on visa-based labor.

Those outcomes would conflict with stated priorities around domestic employment, industrial resilience, and national security-aligned economic policy.

Conclusion

Measured in job-years rather than rhetoric, the 8(a) Business Development Program advances core America First objectives. It channels federal dollars into work that structurally requires American labor, supports substantial employment in Republican-held districts, and aligns closely with national security workforce constraints.

Oversight, fraud enforcement, and program integrity are necessary and appropriate. Wholesale dismantling is not.

An America First approach points toward targeted reform and preservation—strengthening accountability while retaining a program that already operates within, and contributes to, the labor priorities articulated in national security policy.