Small Business Assistance
The U.S Small Business Administration (SBA) helps Americans start, build, and grow businesses. The agency has become the government’s most cost-effective instrument for economic development. About 3,000 businesses currently are certified as SDBs, and another 9,000 companies participate in the SBA’s 8(a) program, which provides sole-source contracts and restricted-competition contracts to minority-owned businesses. More than 12,000 companies are self-certified as small disadvantaged businesses (SDBs) on the federal government’s contracting database, says Calvin Jenkins, the SBA’s associate administrator for government contracting.

As-Is Inefficiencies
To apply for the 8(a) and SDB status, the SBA utilized an e-Application module and paper-based processes for application submissions. This required receiving paper-based applications from organizations and then manually entering data into the e-Application system. While the system automated much of the 8(a) and SDB certification application process, the manual processing of documents proved to be very tedious and time-consuming for SBA personnel.

Multiple deficiencies were identified in regards to the e-Application module and related business processes, including: inefficient document routing and management, no support for back office activities and required annual reviews, lack of compliance with SBA Enterprise Architecture (EA) and e-Gov requirements, and poor alignment with the requirements of the supported business processes.

In order to meet these pressing needs, the SBA required an integrated system that offers the ability to manage the 8(a) and SDB programs, to include certification of firms into each program, managing annual reviews of firms to ensure continued eligibility, and supporting SBA field personnel in managing their assigned firms.

Re-engineering the Process
Pyramid Systems, Inc. (Pyramid) provided a framework that ensured business functions were supported, and SBA’s strategic direction for the management of the 8(a) and SDB programs were being met through an integrated process and information technology environment. Pyramid took into account the improvements and other changes in both the IT environment and the organizational structure of the Office of Government Contracting and Business Development, and conducted various business process re-engineering studies and collaborative sessions to identify process gaps and points of inefficiency.

Vital Statistics
Organization:
U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)

Quick Facts:
- Since 1953, nearly 20 million small businesses have received direct or indirect help from an SBA program
- SBA’s current business loan portfolio of roughly 219,000 loans is worth more than $45 billion
- In FY 2006, SDBs received more than 269,000 contracts totaling nearly $23 billion -- nearly 7 percent of all federal contracting dollars

Impetus for Business Process Optimization
Engagement:
Need for a more efficient and streamlined 8(a)/SDB application, certification and annual review process

Benefits Gained:
increased speed in application processing, reduction of manual entry and error rates, maximization of human resource and technology, improved business intelligence capability and customer service, reduced maintenance costs for the Office of Government Contracting and Business Development (GCBD).

Business Partners:
Pyramid Systems, Inc.

Web Site:
http://www.sba.gov
After evaluating the current status of the SBA 8(a) and SDB Application, Certification, and Annual Review Processes, Pyramid identified the following solutions to promote a streamlined logical and intuitive process:

- **Pre-Qualification Assessment** - To best utilize human resources, a prequalification assessment ensures that only qualified applicants continue in the application process.
- **Data Field Pre-Population** - To reduce redundancy and error, information supplied by the applicant is used to pre-populate many of the data fields contained in the OMB-approved forms.
- **Additional User IDs and Passwords** - To promote efficiency, applicants are presented with the option of establishing additional User IDs and Passwords if other than the “Official Applicant” would be entering information into the forms.
- **Dropdown List of Forms** - To ensure completeness, the system creates a drop down menu listing all the forms and supplemental information that needs to be filled out and submitted online. Also, all fields will be required to be complete in order for the applicant to complete each form.
- **Data Imported into Fillable Forms** - To ensure consistency of data, pre-population of form information occurs for fields where the information is imported from a database or from already completed forms.
- **Form Entry Auditing** - An audit record is created when the form is completed, showing the unique identification of the form, principal owner, business entity, the field (both before and after entries) and recording the date, and time and User ID of the person making the entry.
- **Enhancement of 413 Form** - To assist customers, detailed explanations are included for each item to be entered as well as examples. An on-line calculation capability is also provided.
- **Supplemental Documents** - As forms are completed on-line, additional supplemental items or forms are added to the drop down menu list of requirements.
- **Mailing and Submitting** - To ensure completeness, a check list is generated when the applicant completes the on-line forms and chooses to submit specifying all required supplemental documentation and SBA forms (with signature) that must be included within the mail-in package.
- **Annual Review** - Implement the e-Annual Review pilot module which was recently developed, but was never subjected to User Acceptance Testing or deployed.
- **Automated Email Notifications for Annual Review** - To increase efficiency, automated notifications significantly cut back on the arduous task of reminding all 8(a) firms that their annual review is due.
- **Help Desk** - An established Customer Care Center Help Desk greatly reduces the burden of SBA employees and allows them to focus their time on reviewing and processing applications instead of making and receiving numerous phone calls.
- **Update SBA Forms** - SBA forms posted to the SBA website are updated.

**A Revolutionized Application Process**

With Pyramid recommendations from the BPR effort as a guide, the SBA developed a much more efficient and streamlined 8(a)/SDB application, certification, and annual review process. This led directly to the unveiling of a new online application, which allows for program certification directly from SBA’s website. “The newly launched 8(a) online application will allow small businesses to apply for 8(a) and SDB certification directly from the SBA’s Web site, and ensure more small businesses are able to successfully compete for federal contracting opportunities,” SBA Administrator, Hector V. Barreto, said. “This user-friendly application represents another accomplishment of this Administration in developing e-Gov tools that make access to information less cumbersome for small business.”