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Prompt Payment: Not Just Another Pretty Contract Clause

In recent months, audits conducted by GSA's Office of Inspector General have uncovered a number of invoices submitted by Multiple Award Schedule (MAS) contractors that do not contain negotiated prompt payment discount terms.

Please be aware that any negotiated prompt payment discount terms in MAS contracts are binding for all orders placed under the contract. In the absence of discount terms incorporated into the contract, discounts can also be offered on individual invoices and are binding only for the particular invoice on which the discount is offered (GSAM 552.232-8 Discounts for Prompt Payment).

In both cases, it is required that all invoices include the terms of any discount for prompt payment. Including this requisite information on each invoice ensures that the government obtains the discount offered if payment is made within the discount period specified. In connection with any discount offered for prompt payment, time is computed from the date of the invoice. For the purpose of computing the discount earned, payment is considered to have been made on the date that appears on the payment check or the date on which an electronic fund transfer is made.

In sum, please honor any offered prompt payment discount terms, and make certain that discounts are clearly outlined on each invoice. Complying with the terms and conditions of your MAS contract is a central performance requirement that helps you to become and remain a successful GSA business partner. If you have any questions concerning the prompt payment discount terms in your contract, please contact your Procurement Contracting Officer (PCO).

Annual Business Partner Survey for 2006 and the Results for 2005

Each year, GSA surveys our business partners to gauge their satisfaction with various aspects of the GSA contract processes and service. GSA is deeply committed to better meeting the needs of its customers through its partnerships with private sector businesses. To that end, GSA is conducting our annual satisfaction survey measuring business partners' perceptions of its services through the MAS program. This year's survey will be provided to all GSA business partners in late May and early June 2006.

GSA uses survey information to make operational improvements to our day-to-day activities as well as to help guide strategic direction. In 2005, GSA used your survey responses to complete various improvement activities.

Following are just a few of the actions we have taken based on your feedback:

- Completed various e-tool improvements in GSA Advantage, SIP, e-Buy and soon-to-be-released changes in e-Library. Enhanced training modules were also developed to support each e-tool improvement.
- Completed a service-wide project to standardize the format and content of GSA Acquisition Center web pages located on www.gsa.gov.

- Helped communicate GSA's role in marketing via the new MAS cover letter to be provided with all MAS solicitations.
- Improved offer/mod processing times. On average, our Acquisition Centers processed new offers in 90 days and modifications in 21 days. Both timelines exceeded our internal performance measure targets.
- Established a tracking measure to monitor vendors' satisfaction with how their offer/mod was processed. This measure will roll out this summer and will be fully described in the next Steps newsletter.

Please be sure to take part in this year's survey. We care, we listen and we take improvement actions based on your recommendations. You are our business partners and we want the partnership to be a win-win situation. Thanks for your participation.

GSA uses survey information to make operational improvements to our day-to-day activities as well as help guide direction.

Electronic Payment Is Now Available for GWAC Contracts

Did you know that you can pay your Contract Access Fee (CAF) online? GSA is pleased to announce that GWAC contractors now have the option of paying the CAF online via electronic check (direct debit) or credit card. It's fast, it's easy to do and it's secure.

Paying online benefits both GSA and contractors by eliminating:

- 1) The expense of processing paper checks.

- 2) The delays inherent in sending checks through the mail.
- 3) The need for post-payment research due to incorrect payment amounts or incorrect allocation of payments to the proper contract and report period.

Pay Online Now

Pay Online Later

After you report your sales online, you will be given two choices: Pay Online Now and Pay Online Later. If you are ready to pay and you have your bank account or credit card information ready, click Pay Online Now. Enter the appropriate information and you're done. It's as simple as that! If you are not ready to pay, or if someone else in your company handles payments, click Pay Online Later. Using this option will save the sales you just reported and will allow you (or another company representative) to return to the website to pay at a later time. Just remember that the payment is due within 30 days after the end of the quarter.

Either way you choose, you just saved the time it takes to write, mail and process a paper check! Also remember that neither GSA nor the Department of Treasury will retain any account data entered into the CAF payment process.

For more info, and to report sales online and pay CAF online, check out: <https://gwac.gsa.gov>

Section 508 Update

In 1998, Congress amended the Rehabilitation Act to require federal agencies and the U.S. Postal Service to make their Electronic and Information Technology (EIT) accessible to

persons with disabilities. Section 508 was enacted to eliminate barriers in information technology, to make available new opportunities for people with disabilities and to encourage development of technologies that will help achieve these goals. The law applies to all Federal agencies when they "develop, procure, maintain, or use" EIT.

For acquisitions that are subject to Section 508, participants in the federal acquisition process are required by Federal Acquisition Regulations to:

- 1) Determine the specific provisions of the Section 508 standard that are applicable to the acquisition.
- 2) Include as part of market research an assessment of the availability of EIT that meets all or part of the applicable accessibility standards.

GSA has sponsored the development of a tool to help federal buyers with these responsibilities. The Buy Accessible Wizard helps them determine the applicable provisions, and the Buy Accessible Data Center (imbedded within the tool) helps to point them to vendor-provided accessibility information about EIT products and services. Federal buyers can use information they find in the Data Center as part of their market research.

What does this mean for EIT vendors?

Vendors can easily register with the Buy Accessible Data Center and include information about their companies and the accessibility of their products and services. The Buy Accessible Data Center is a central location of pointers, which vendors provide, to product or service accessibility information maintained on their websites. This process greatly facilitates market research, making it easier for federal buyers to find accessibility information and

making it easier for vendors to maintain accessibility information as new products become available to the marketplace. Participating in the Buy Accessible Data Center provides every vendor the opportunity to let buyers know exactly how their products conform to the standard. By using “voluntary product accessibility templates” (the most common of which is the VPAT™, a trademark of The Information Technology Industry Council and used with their permission), vendors can clearly communicate product accessibility information in the Buy Accessible Wizard consistent with the way federal buyers will be looking for this information. Since the Buy Accessible Wizard directs buyers to the Buy Accessible Data Center for market research information, those vendors who register with the Buy Accessible Data Center will have a distinct advantage. In addition, the Buy Accessible Data Center is fast becoming the primary source of market research information for micro purchases.

How can a vendor register in the Buy Accessible Data Center?

Any vendor that provides EIT to the federal marketplace can register at <http://emgbaw.altarum.org/DataCenter>. There is a registration link on the log-in page; start there to get an ID and password. Need more information? E-mail us at section.508@gsa.gov or call 202.501.4906.

GSA Tracking Measure

“Percent of Surveyed Vendors Satisfied with Offer/Mod Process”

The GSA Office of Commercial Acquisition manages key operational and associate performance through performance measures linked to strategic goals. Using the balanced scorecard approach,

these measures help direct individual performance toward achieving these goals. In 2006, a new tracking measure “Percent of Surveyed Vendors Satisfied with Offer/Mod Process,” was instituted as a measure of accomplishment for associates. The following questions and answers are provided to share more information about the measure:

1. What is a tracking measure?

GSA uses tracking measures to track progress of operational processes and performance. GSA management use tracking measure results to guide performance, focus change and make operational improvements. In some cases, tracking measures become incentivized performance measures.

2. What is the purpose of this particular measure and how did it come about?

Office of Commercial Acquisition Vendor Satisfaction Survey results have indicated room for improvement in the responsiveness and quality of interaction provided to vendor partners. Results also indicate that improvements are necessary in operational procedures and processes associated with the solicitation process and the processing of offers and modifications. In 2005, Business Support and Application/Solicitation Process were among the two lowest scoring areas of the survey. These areas also represent the areas where incremental improvements can make the greatest overall effect on satisfaction.

The purpose of the tracking measure, “Percent of Surveyed Vendors Satisfied with Offer/Mod Process” is to serve as a mechanism to:

- Identify potential areas for improved interaction and support
- Uncover and substantiate areas for improvement in the contract offer/mod process
- Identify and share best practices across all Acquisition Centers
- Identify training opportunities

3. How will the measure's process work?

A task order has been established with the CFI Group, the firm that conducts GSA's annual customer and business partner satisfaction surveys, to administer the tracking measure survey.

On a monthly basis, GSA will provide the CFI Group a report that contains all contract award/modification actions, contractor names and e-mail addresses. CFI will send these contractors an e-mail containing a link inviting them to visit a website to complete a satisfaction survey.

Survey data will be collected continuously updated on a weekly basis on an aggregate level. CFI will provide a report of results to GSA on a weekly, monthly and quarterly basis. GSA management will utilize this data to make operational improvements.

4. What types of contract actions will be surveyed?

At present, the following contract actions will be surveyed:

- Offers/Options Awarded, Rejected or Withdrawn
- Modifications Awarded, Rejected or Withdrawn. This includes the following mod types as listed in FSS-19: Administrative Changes, Add SIN(s), Terminate SIN(s), Cancel SIN(s), Add Products, Delete Products, Price Reduction, Economic Price Adjustment, Exercise Option and Other Changes.

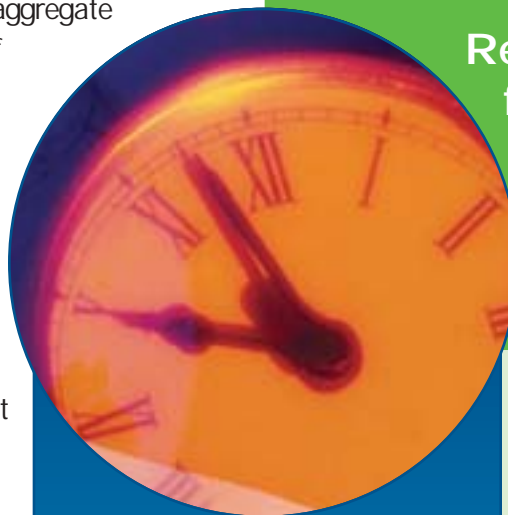
5. When will the new tracking measure become effective?

The first contract action report

will be provided to CFI in June 2006. Surveys will be issued to all vendors who completed an offer, option, mod, etc., during the previous month. In order to build the baseline of results, we are also considering issuing the survey to vendors who completed contract actions since the beginning of fiscal year 2006.

6. Where can I learn more about the new tracking measure?

Additional information can be obtained from your GSA Contracting Officer.



*GSA management
utilizes survey data
collected continuously
and updated on a
weekly basis on an
aggregate level to
make operational
improvements.*

Real-Time Answers from GSA Personnel via Monthly Online Chat Sessions!

Hopefully, you've already registered for and have viewed the New Contractor Orientation webcast. Doing so allows you to participate in monthly online chat sessions that will give you the opportunity to ask questions and receive real-time answers from GSA personnel. To register, go to <http://vsc.gsa.gov>, click on "Vendor Training" and select "New Contractor Orientation Webcast." After you register to view the webcast, you will get periodic e-mails alerting you of upcoming chat sessions. We're looking forward to talking to you soon!