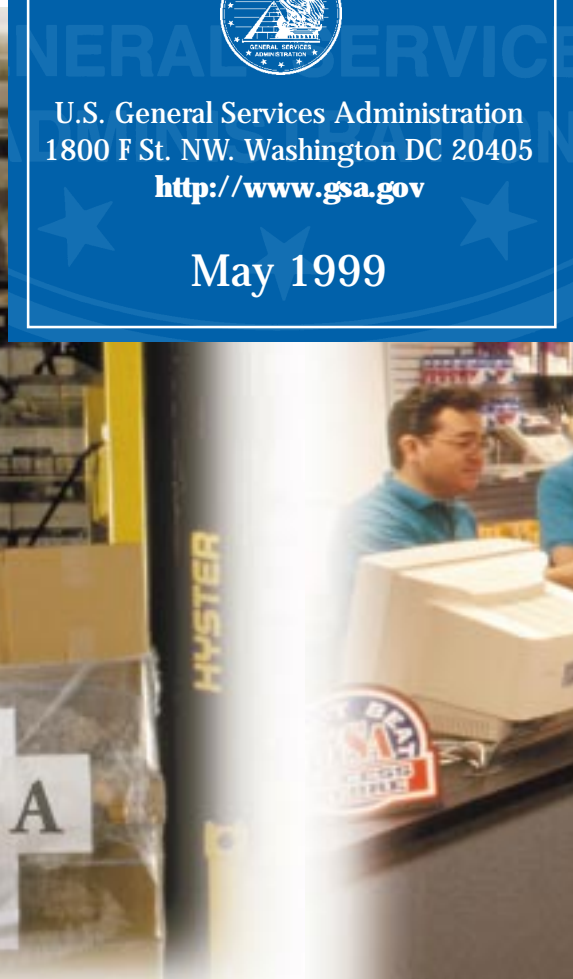


DOING
BUSINESS
WITH
GSA



U.S. General Services Administration
1800 F St. NW. Washington DC 20405
<http://www.gsa.gov>

May 1999



MESSAGE TO NEW AND PROSPECTIVE GSA CONTRACTORS



To all small, small disadvantaged, women-owned small, and HUBZone small businesses, this booklet is our personal invitation to enter the door and explore contracting opportunities at the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA). It's a door worth entering. As the Government's chief acquisition agency, GSA spends billions of dollars annually on products and services and also helps Federal agencies purchase them directly from vendors. Because we buy and leverage so much and use taxpayer dollars, GSA has a special responsibility to obtain the best quality and value possible for money spent.

GSA awards a fair share of its contracts to small businesses. This is its goal and its promise. This is not only the right thing to do; it is also good for our Nation's economic growth, since small businesses generate the majority of new jobs and contribute so much to the Nation's economy.

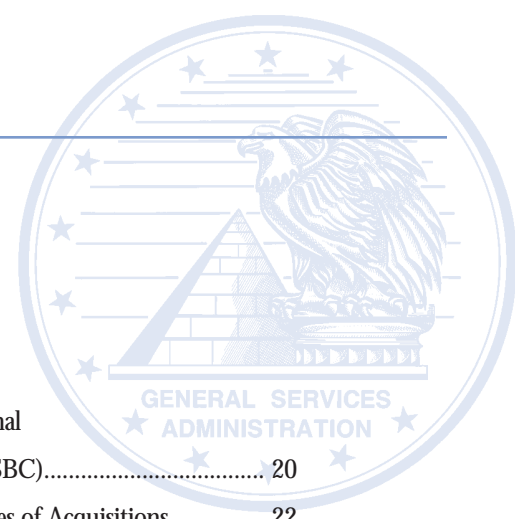
This booklet was prepared by GSA's Office of Enterprise Development (OED), whose role is to help expand the share of GSA prime contracts and subcontracts going to the small business community. Although directed to small businesses in particular, this booklet should be useful to all companies interested in learning more about GSA contracting offices and procedures.

Doing Business With GSA explains in plain language how to find contracting opportunities with GSA, how to take advantage of them, and how to make the most of the services offered by OED's Regional Small Business Centers—the "front doors" to GSA contracting.

Doing business with you is important to us. We hope this information will be your key to locating prime contracts and subcontracting opportunities at GSA. *Doing Business With GSA* is also available on our website at www.gsa.gov/oed.

Associate Administrator
Office of Enterprise Development
U.S. General Services Administration

TABLE OF CONTENTS



Chapter 1

GSA—Uncle Sam’s Buyer

What GSA Buys.....	1
How GSA Buys.....	2
GSA Offices That Buy	2
Where To Start	2
What GSA Sells	3

Chapter 2

Small Business Programs

Office of Enterprise Development	5
Regional Small Business Centers.....	5
Small Business Technical Advisors.....	6
Small Business Programs	6
Who Is Eligible for Small Business Programs.	8
Small Business Administration Efforts.....	9

Chapter 3

GSA Procurement Activities

How GSA Is Organized	10
Federal Supply Service.	10
Federal Technology Service.	14
Public Buildings Service	15
Other Activities	17
Electronic Commerce.....	17

Chapter 4

How To Identify Contracting Opportunities

Marketing To GSA.....	19
-----------------------	----

How To Contact a Regional

Small Business Center (SBC).....	20
Register To Receive Notices of Acquisitions	22
Use Marketing Resources.....	22

Chapter 5

Contracting Regulations, Requirements, and Specifications

Procurement Regulations.	24
General Contracting Requirements	24
Metric Conversion	26
Specifications, Standards, and Commercial Item Descriptions.	26

Chapter 6

GSA’s Simplified Acquisition Program

What Is a Simplified Acquisition?.....	28
Simplified Acquisitions	
Reserved for Small Businesses	28
Where GSA Makes Purchases.....	28
Competition Requirements.....	28
Purchase Orders	29
Blanket Purchase Agreements	29

Chapter 7

Sealed Bid Purchases

Sealed Bid Purchasing	30
Sealed Bid Solicitation.....	30
Requesting an Invitation for Bid (IFB).....	31
Preparing Your Bid.....	31

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Submitting Your Bid	32
Bid Opening and Contract Award.....	32
Responsive and Responsible Bidders.....	33
Sealed Bid Checklist.....	33

Chapter 8

Negotiated Procurements

What Is Negotiation?	35
What Is a Request for Proposal (RFP)?	35
How Contractors Are Selected and Evaluated.....	36
Qualifying for Consideration.....	36
Debriefing of Offerors.....	37
Architect/Engineer Selection Process	37

Chapter 9

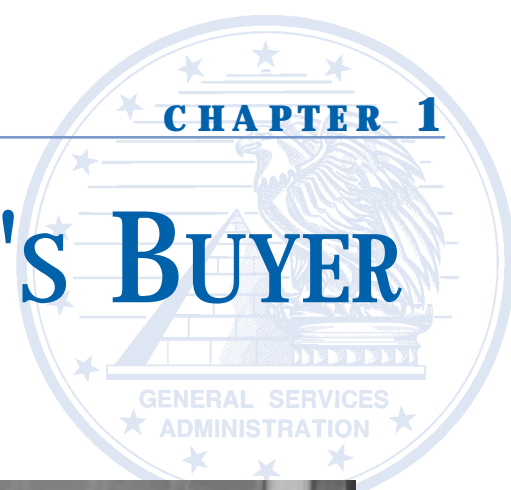
Contract Performance and Completion

Operating Requirements	39
Performance Review.....	39
Submitting Your Invoice	40
Contract Appeals.....	40
Contract Award Tips.....	40
Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).....	41

Appendix

Glossary of Terms.....	42
Answers to Most Frequently Asked Questions.	44

GSA—UNCLE SAM'S BUYER



Dietra Ford, Associate Administrator, Office of Enterprise Development, addresses an audience at a small business conference on the Federal Supply Schedules Program.

If you have a product or service to sell, it's probably something that the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) buys. Each year, GSA—the Federal Government's business manager, buyer, real estate developer, telecommunications manager, and computer solutions provider—contracts for billions of dollars worth of products and services. Because it provides the workspace, supplies, equipment, and support that other agencies need to do their jobs, GSA is one of the Federal Government's biggest buyers.

What GSA Buys

GSA rents, builds, furnishes, and maintains Government offices and buys products ranging from pens to state-of-the-art computers. GSA also contracts for services as varied as trash removal and information technology. Here are a few examples of the thousands of products and services the agency buys.

General-Purpose Supplies, Equipment, and Services

GSA operates the worldwide purchase and distribution system that other Federal agencies use to buy billions of dollars' worth of products and services for day-to-day operations. Most GSA contracts are for standard services and "commercial off-the-shelf" (COTS) products and equipment.

Typical contracts are for:

- Office supplies, furniture, and equipment.
- Motor vehicles and motor vehicle parts.
- Hand and power tools.
- Paints, waxes, adhesives, and brushes.
- Lawn and garden equipment.
- Light fixtures and bulbs.
- Travel arrangements and travel reservations.
- Moving of household goods.
- Laundry and dry cleaning.
- Carpets, drapes, and blinds.

Building Construction, Repair, and Maintenance

GSA, the Federal Government's architect and builder, offers contracting opportunities for building design, construction, repairs, remodeling, and maintenance. The agency frequently contracts for:

- Architectural and engineering services.
- Construction of new buildings and facilities.
- Alteration of office space.
- Paving and concrete work.
- Elevator installation and repair.
- Asbestos assessment and removal.
- Air conditioning and heating repair and maintenance.
- Roof installation and repair.
- Landscaping.
- Interior design and decorating.
- Demolition.
- Pest control.
- Cleaning and custodial work.
- Building security.
- Trash removal.
- Property management.

Federal Information Technology Solutions and Network Services

GSA directs and coordinates Federal purchases of equipment and services for information resource management, office automation, and telecommunications systems and support. Contracting opportunities include:

- Consolidated and individual systems acquisition, installation, maintenance, operation, and trouble reporting.
- Telephone answering and facsimile equipment.
- Audio and video equipment.
- Computers, printers, and modems.
- Computer hardware and software.
- Engineering feasibility studies.
- Systems studies and designs.
- Programming and networking.
- Data entry and computer operations.
- Technical support.
- Long-distance and international telephone service.
- Wireless communications.
- Information security.

How GSA Buys

GSA buys products and services through a variety of procurement programs carried out according to established Federal and GSA procurement regulations. Doing business with GSA requires knowledge of these basic rules and procedures.

GSA Offices That Buy

GSA buys through contracts issued by its offices throughout the country. Some contracts are for local or regional delivery, and some call for deliveries anywhere in the United States or overseas. GSA actively seeks small businesses able to provide local or nationwide services in areas where there are a number of Federal installations. Managers of Federal buildings also purchase products and services. Contracting officers are likely to order purchases of less than \$25,000 from the GSA Federal Supply Schedules Program (see chapter 3). Small businesses should actively market to these contracting officers rather than waiting for an announcement of a procurement, which GSA routinely advertises in the *Commerce Business Daily (CBD)* (see chapter 4).

(See chapter 3 for a discussion of GSA's major contracting organizations and what they buy.)

Where To Start

Read this booklet and then contact one of GSA's 12 Regional Small Business Centers. The centers are located in GSA's regional offices, which also have procurement offices and other key contact points. The activities of the Regional Small Business Centers are spelled out in chapters 2 and 4; their addresses and telephone numbers are in chapter 4.

The following is a synopsis of what you'll find in *Doing Business With GSA*.

In **chapter 2**, you'll learn about the roles of the Office of Enterprise Development and the Regional Small Business Centers. This chapter also covers the ways in which GSA and the Small Business Administration assist small, small disadvantaged, women-owned small, and HUBZone businesses.

Chapter 3 looks at GSA's organizational structure; specific programs and requirements of GSA's three major contract-

ing organizations (Federal Supply Service, Federal Technology Service, and Public Buildings Service); and the use of electronic commerce in Government contracting.

Chapter 4 provides information on finding contracting opportunities, how to market to the agency, and marketing resources that can help you pinpoint contracting opportunities.

Chapter 5 discusses contract requirements and procurement regulations that you will encounter in doing business with GSA.

Chapter 6 provides detailed information on simplified acquisition procedures and requirements.

Chapter 7 discusses sealed bid procedures and gives pointers on preparing and submitting bids.

Chapter 8 examines negotiation procedures and explains how these procedures are used.

Chapter 9 explains the responsibilities and rights of contractors, including obligations under a contract, payment terms, and appeal procedures.

Doing Business With GSA also includes a glossary of terms and answers to frequently asked questions.

What GSA Sells

Just as GSA buys the supplies other Federal agencies need to do their work, it also sells property no longer needed by those agencies. Land, buildings, and almost every kind of product that GSA buys can be purchased at scheduled, widely publicized sales.

Commonly sold items include:

- Automobiles and trucks.
- Airplanes and boats.
- Computers, typewriters, and other office machines.
- Desks, chairs, and other office furniture.
- Industrial equipment.
- Plumbing and heating fixtures.
- Residences and building lots, warehouses and office buildings, and land for commercial development.

Equipment and supplies (personal property) are sold through on-site auctions, spot bids where buyers submit

written bids on site, and sealed bids in response to advertised invitations for bids.

Land, buildings, and other structures (real property) are often sold by sealed bid. Real property is also sold at auctions. Sales are made to the highest bidders when bids are at or near fair market value. If you want more information on GSA sales, available publications include:

How You Can Buy Used Federal Personal Property is available free of charge from the U.S. General Services Administration, Federal Supply Service (FBPS), Washington, DC 20405.

U.S. Real Property Sales List, published bimonthly, lists upcoming real property sales, includes a form to send in to receive notices of future sales, and tells how to access the Sales List on Internet at <http://www.gsa.gov/pbs/pr/prhome.htm>.

For a free copy of the Sales List, write to: Properties—S, Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, CO 81009. You may also request a copy from any of GSA's Property Disposal Offices listed in this chapter. Write or call the office that serves your State.

Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, Vermont, Wisconsin, U.S. Virgin Islands

Property Disposal (1PR)
10 Causeway Street, 9th Floor
Boston, MA 02222
(617) 565-5700; (800) 755-1946

Alabama, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia

Property Disposal (4PR)
Peachtree Summit Building
401 W. Peachtree Street, Room 2928
Atlanta, GA 30365-2550
(404) 331-5133; (800) 473-7836

CHAPTER 1

Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri,
Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota,
Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Wyoming

Property Disposal (7PR)
819 Taylor Street, Room 9A33
Ft. Worth, TX 76102
(817) 334-2331; (800) 833-4317

Alaska, Arizona, California, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho,
Nevada, Oregon, Washington

Property Disposal (9PR)
450 Golden Gate Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94105
(800) 421-7848

SMALL BUSINESS PROGRAMS



Administrator Dave Barram and Associate Administrator Dietra Ford (second from left) with women-owned small business owners and participants in the annual women's small business program in observance of Women's History Month.

The U.S. General Services Administration is committed to the fullest possible participation of small, small disadvantaged, women-owned small, and HUBZone businesses in its procurement programs. The responsibility for helping to meet this goal is centered in the Office of Enterprise Development and its Regional Small Business Centers.

Office of Enterprise Development

The Office of Enterprise Development (OED), located at GSA headquarters in Washington, DC, has nationwide responsibility for GSA's small business programs. OED has Regional Small Business Centers in each of GSA's 11 regional headquarters. In carrying out its mission, OED focuses on policy, programs, and outreach to the small business community. OED helps to develop legislation, regulations, small business programs, and subcontracting requirements

that ensure a fair share of GSA business for small, small disadvantaged, women-owned small, and HUBZone firms. It publicizes and explains these programs through conferences and seminars, educational activities, and small-business-targeted publications about GSA contracting procedures and opportunities. OED also provides liaison services on small business matters between GSA, Congress, the Small Business Administration, and other Federal agencies. Information on procurement events, networking sessions, and other activities is available on the Internet through OED's homepage. The address is <http://www.gsa.gov/oed>.

Regional Small Business Centers

The Regional Small Business Centers should be your first point of contact. Specialists in each center will assist you in identifying your appropriate marketing avenues and in obtaining forms and other required documents. Specialists

will advise you, provide key contacts related to your firm's products and services, and help you market your company to agency contacts.

GSA's 11 Regional Small Business Centers and OED's national office work together to locate contracting opportunities for small businesses of all types. The Regional Small Business Centers carry out OED's mission by:

- Helping small businesses locate GSA buyers for their products or services and understand GSA contracting rules and procedures; and
- Monitoring local GSA contracting programs to ensure that small firms get a fair share of GSA contracts and subcontracts and find ways of expanding their participation.

(See chapter 4 for the address of the Small Business Center in your region.)

Small Business Technical Advisors

Each of GSA's major buying activities—Federal Supply Service (FSS), Federal Technology Service (FTS), and Public Buildings Service (PBS)—has a designated Small Business Technical Advisor (SBTA). They are experts on small business contracting within their particular buying activities. They, too, will provide you with counseling and guidance on contracting procedures and procurement opportunities within their Services' specialties. Contact the SBTA in your area of expertise at Internet address <http://www.gsa.gov/oed/advise.htm> or

Federal Supply Services
Office of Acquisition (FC)
1941 Jefferson Davis Hwy.
Alexandria, VA 22202
Tel: (703) 305-5591
Fax: (703) 305-3783

Federal Technology Service
Office of Acquisition (TQ)
7525 Colshire Drive
McLean, VA 22101
Tel: (703) 610-2411
Fax: (703) 610-1664

Public Buildings Service
Office of Business Performance (PX)
1800 F Street, NW.
Washington, DC 20405
Tel: (202) 501-0971
Fax: (202) 501-3257



GSA, Deputy Administrator Thurman M. Davis, Sr. (fourth from left), Associate Administrator for Enterprise Development Dietra Ford (next to Mr. Davis), and Commissioner Dennis Fischer of the Federal Technology Service (right), with prime contractors during an FTS Procurement Networking Session with small businesses.

Small Business Programs

GSA, like all Federal agencies, has established goals for awarding contracts to small, small disadvantaged, women-owned small, and HUBZone businesses. To meet these goals, GSA uses "small business programs."

Most small business programs include outreach activities, both to inform small businesses about what GSA has to offer, and to help in locating and working with GSA procurement offices. Some small business programs also have "set asides" under which certain contracts are reserved for competition among small or small disadvantaged businesses.

These small business programs, which are described in the following sections, are among the Government's most effective ways of increasing the number of contracts awarded to

small, small disadvantaged, women-owned small, and HUBZone businesses. Information concerning new small business programs may be found in the *Federal Register* and the *Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR)*.

Small Business Set Aside Program

Under this program, certain acquisitions are partially or totally set aside for small businesses when there is a reasonable expectation that (1) offers will be obtained from at least two responsible small businesses and (2) awards will be made at fair market prices.

If the requirement has an anticipated contract value of \$100,000 or less, simplified acquisition procedures are used (see chapter 6). Only small businesses are allowed to compete for these contracts. If the anticipated value exceeds \$100,000, the requirement will be solicited under other contracting procedures (see chapter 7).

The 8(a) Program

Section 8(a) of the Small Business Act empowers the Small Business Administration (SBA) to enter into prime contracts with other Federal agencies for products and services. SBA then subcontracts the actual performance of the work to socially and economically disadvantaged small businesses that have been certified by SBA as eligible and competent to receive these contracts. The selection of an 8(a) subcontractor can be either on a sole source or a competitive basis. SBA also offers managerial, technical, and financial support to 8(a) firms.

GSA is one of a few agencies that have the authority to contract directly with 8(a) firms. This authority was delegated from SBA to GSA through a memorandum of understanding.

For more information on 8(a) set-asides, contact one of the Regional Small Business Centers or an SBA office.

Women-Owned Small Business Program

Although not authorized to give preferences to women-owned small firms, GSA does have goals for the award of contracts to women-owned small businesses each year. OED makes a special effort to advise women on contracting opportunities within GSA and to encourage their participation in competitive procurement programs. For additional information concerning the Women-Owned Small Business

Program, contact the Office of Women's Business Ownership at (202) 205-6673 or U.S. Small Business Administration at 1-800-8-ASK SBA or visit the website at Internet address <http://www.sba.gov/womeninbusiness>.

Small Disadvantaged Business Program

As a means of ensuring small disadvantaged businesses the maximum practicable opportunity to compete for and receive Federal procurement opportunities, small businesses certified as small disadvantaged businesses can receive up to a 10-percent price evaluation credit when competing for certain requirements as determined by the U.S. Department of Commerce. On a case-by-case basis, SBA is authorized to determine who qualifies. FAR 19.001 provides a more detailed definition of a small disadvantaged business. For additional information concerning the Small Disadvantaged Business Program, contact the U.S. Small Business Administration at (202) 401-1850 or by fax at (202) 401-8283, or visit the website at Internet address <http://www.sba.gov/sdb>.

Historically Underutilized Business Zone (HUBZone) Program

The HUBZone Act of 1997, Title VI of Public Law 105-135, created the HUBZone Program. This program provides Federal contracting opportunities for certain qualified small business concerns located in distressed communities. This is an effort to promote private-sector investments and employment opportunities in urban and rural communities. Small businesses eligible to participate in the HUBZone Program may seek certification by submitting an application and other required information to SBA. For additional information on the HUBZone Program, visit the SBA website at Internet address <http://www.sba.gov/hubzone>.

Very Small Business Program

On September 2, 1998, SBA issued a final rule establishing a Very Small Business Set-Aside Pilot Program. The program is being implemented as a pilot in only 10 locations and is targeted to businesses that have historically experienced limited participation in the Federal marketplace. Under the program, a very small business (VSB) is defined as any business with 15 or less employees and with average receipts that do not exceed \$1 million. The purpose of the program is to improve access to Federal Government con-

tracting opportunities for businesses that are substantially below SBA's size standards by reserving certain procurements for competition among such VSB's.

The program will permit VSB's to receive loan application support and assistance. The pilot program will expire on September 30, 2000, unless it is extended through legislation.

Mandatory Source Programs

The Federal Government must purchase certain products and services when they are offered at competitive prices from workshops for the blind and severely disabled and from Federal Prison Industries, Inc. For information on

how to participate in the program for the blind and severely disabled, contact a Regional Small Business Center. (See chapter 4 for the address of the Small Business Center in your region.)

Subcontracting Program

Firms with large Government contracts are required by law to establish goals for awarding subcontracts to qualified small, small disadvantaged, women-owned small, and HUBZone small businesses. Each prime contract of \$500,000 or more (\$1 million for construction) must include subcontracting goals and a plan for meeting those goals. This subcontracting requirement, however, does not apply to contractors who qualify as small businesses.

Who Is Eligible for Small Business Programs?

The Federal Government encourages full participation in its contracting activities through small business programs for groups that otherwise might not be able to compete on equal terms with large businesses. The following are abbreviated definitions used by the Government to determine if a group is eligible for a small business program.

Small business. A firm that is organized for profit, has a place of business in the United States, is not dominant in its field, and meets size standards and other criteria set by the Small Business Administration (SBA). Size standards vary from industry to industry. They are spelled out in SBA publications and reprinted in Part 19.102 of the *Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR)*.

Small disadvantaged business (SDB). An SDB is a small business that is at least 51-percent owned by one or more socially and economically disadvantaged individuals or stockholders. One or more disadvantaged individuals must also control the management and daily operations. African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Pacific Americans are groups that may qualify. SBA is authorized to determine who else qualifies, on a case-by-case basis. FAR 19.001 provides a more detailed definition of an SDB.

(IMPORTANT NOTICE: The Small Business Administration now requires businesses seeking "small disadvantaged business" status to undergo a certification process with the SBA. This new certification process will categorize a small business as "disadvantaged" *only if an SBA review finds the firm to be so*. Companies participating in SBA's 8(a) Business Development Program are already considered SDB's and will not be required to undergo a second review.)

Woman-owned small business. A small business that is at least 51-percent owned by a woman or women who are U.S. citizens, and who also control and operate the business.

HUBZone Program. HUBZone small businesses must be 100-percent owned and controlled by U.S. citizens, and the firm must have its principal office in the HUBZone. The principal office must be the location where the greatest number of the company's employees works at any one location. Also, at least 35 percent of the small business' employees must reside in the HUBZone.

Workshop for the Blind or Workshop for the Severely Handicapped. These workshops are nonprofit agencies that have been approved by the Committee for Purchase from People Who Are Blind or Severely Handicapped to produce a commodity for, or provide a service to, the U.S. Government.

One avenue to assist small businesses seeking subcontracting opportunities with GSA's contractors is through GSA's Office of Enterprise Development. OED publishes the *GSA Subcontracting Directory* twice a year. The *Subcontracting Directory* lists prime contractors alphabetically by GSA region, products and services, addresses, points of contact and telephone numbers. The directory is free of charge from your Regional Small Business Center (see chapter 4 for the address of the Small Business Center in your region.) You may also access the *Subcontracting Directory* from OED's homepage. The address is <http://www.gsa.gov/oed>; click on Publications, then click on Subcontracting Directory.

Other Programs

GSA has several other programs for small, small disadvantaged, and women-owned small businesses:

The Minority Bank Deposit Program is a GSA initiative using minority banks for business transactions.

The Small Business Demonstration Program tries to increase contracting with small businesses in targeted industries where small businesses have been under-represented in the past.

The Rural Area Business Development Enterprise Program is a GSA plan for assisting development of rural area businesses.

The Comprehensive National Energy Policy Act Contracting Program requires that at least 10 percent of GSA dollar obligations under the Act go for competitive contracting with small disadvantaged businesses, women-owned small businesses, historically Black colleges and universities, or colleges and universities with significant Hispanic or Native American enrollments.

Mentor-Protégé Program

The Office of Enterprise Development is developing a pilot Mentor-Protégé Program. The program enhances the business and technical capabilities of women-owned small businesses so that they can effectively compete for Federal Government and commercial contracting and subcontracting opportunities. It also assists in developing productive, long-term strategic relationships between large and women-owned small businesses.

Small Business Administration Efforts

The Small Business Administration (SBA) is the Federal Government's advocate for small, small disadvantaged, women-owned small, and HUBZone small businesses. It works closely with the contracting offices of GSA and other Federal agencies to develop policies and procedures that will increase contract awards to small businesses. SBA's business opportunity specialists work to increase procurement set-asides under the Section 8(a) Program. They maintain portfolios of eligible 8(a) firms; verify the technical, management, and financial capabilities of such firms; and monitor acquisitions to see if they are suitable for the 8(a) Program. For additional information on other small business programs, view SBA's homepage at <http://www.sbaonline.sba.gov/>.

The PRO-Net

The SBA's PRO-Net system is a contractor registration program on an electronic procurement-information system that includes access to the *Commerce Business Daily*, Federal agency homepages, and sources of procurement opportunities. Participating firms can update their own profiles, link their homepages to their profiles, and receive and ask questions about procurement opportunities. To register and/or learn more about PRO-Net, access its Internet site at <http://pro-net.sba.gov/>.

Certificate of Competency Program

At times Government purchasing offices may doubt that a small business is capable of meeting contract requirements. The SBA Certificate of Competency (COC) Program provides an appeal procedure for a small business that faces rejection of a bid or offer for a Government contract. For more information on the COC Program, see chapter 8.

GSA PROCUREMENT ACTIVITIES

GENERAL SERVICES
ADMINISTRATION



Federal Supply Schedules Program is not mandatory; however, it is the preferred method of procurement and is used by most Government agencies. Many small businesses are eager to obtain a Federal Supply Schedule contract.

GSA contracts for billions of dollars worth of products and services each year. Most of the agency's buying is handled by its three major procurement Services: the Federal Supply Service (FSS), the Federal Technology Service (FTS), and the Public Buildings Service (PBS). However, there are administrative and support operations and regional offices other than the major services, that also procure office supplies, equipment, and services. Specialists in each Regional Small Business Center can help you identify these organizations and an appropriate contact person.

How GSA Is Organized

GSA's Washington, DC, headquarters houses policy and program offices. These include the Office of Enterprise Development, which works to maximize contracting opportunities for small, small disadvantaged, small women-owned, and HUBZone businesses. Also at headquarters are the main offices of the Services through which GSA carries out the principal business of the agency: the Federal Supply Service (FSS), the Federal Technology Service (FTS), and the Public Buildings Service (PBS).

Most GSA contracts are advertised, awarded, and managed through the regional contracting offices of FSS, FTS, and PBS. Some are nationwide contracts. For example, the FSS regional office in Kansas City, MO, manages all contracts for tools. Most contracts handled through regional offices, however, have regional or local application.

Each GSA region is served by a Small Business Center. (The Pacific Rim Region has two, one in San Francisco and one in Los Angeles.) See the list of Regional Small Business Centers in this chapter for the address and telephone number of the center serving your area.

GSA procures products and services for its U.S. Government "customers." These customers include most agencies of the executive branch, the judicial and legislative branches, and Government facilities worldwide.

To serve our customers efficiently and economically, GSA "shops" both national and local markets from its headquarters in Washington, DC, 11 regional offices in major U.S. cities, and field offices in many locations.

Federal Supply Service

The Federal Supply Service (FSS) procures billions of dollars worth of products and services every year for U.S. Government agencies throughout the world. Purchases

range from pencils and paper to trucks, maintenance, and travel services. FSS provides products and services through the Federal Supply Schedules Program, the Stock and Special Orders Programs, consolidated purchases, and other contracting programs.

For more information on FSS activities, visit the FSS web site at www.fss.gsa.gov/ or contact a Regional Small Business Center. Also, contact one of the FSS Acquisition Centers listed in this chapter, or the Federal Supply Service Information Center at GSA/FSS, Information Center (FMLI), Lobby Level Room 104, Washington, DC 20406 or call (703) 305-6477 or 1-888-FSS-0070.

Federal Supply Schedules Program

FSS is responsible for managing the GSA Federal Supply Schedules Program. If you provide products and services, a GSA Federal Supply Schedule contract may help you secure work with other Federal agencies. It is an excellent way to get your foot in the door of a Federal agency. Federal Supply Schedules are the preferred method of procurement for Department of Defense activities and many civilian agencies.

Schedules are indefinite quantity contracts for products and services at stated prices for given periods of time, usually 5 years. They allow GSA customers to buy directly from Schedule contractors, as needed, at favorable prices associated with volume buying.

Although GSA awards most Federal Supply Schedule contracts, authorization may be given to other agencies to award and publish Schedule contracts. FSS has over 100 Schedules. FSS distributes a Federal Supply Schedule document for each Schedule, which provides the following information:

- Ordering information for customer agencies;
- A listing of products and services covered under the Federal Supply Schedule; and
- Contract award information on the Schedule or how to obtain the contract award information.

FSS buys products and services through two types of Schedules:

Single Award Schedule (SAS). SAS's are contracts with one supplier for a specific product or service at a stated price. Delivery is limited to a specific geographic area defined in the Schedule. Products procured through SAS's include fire extinguishers, hoses, and nozzles; and some types of furniture, such as folding tables and chairs. Photocopy machines are no longer purchased from an SAS. All photocopy machines are now purchased through the Multiple Award Schedules.

Most SAS's contain all the information Government buyers need to place orders with vendors. However, some require contractors to provide brochures or lists containing additional ordering information.

Multiple Award Schedule (MAS). MAS's cover contracts made with more than one contractor for a group of related products or services to be delivered worldwide. Contracts are awarded to vendors supplying the same generic types of items at varying prices. Agencies make best value selections when ordering under MAS's.

Among the thousands of different products procured in this way are hand tools, construction and building materials, woodworking and metalworking machinery, road cleaning equipment, plumbing and heating equipment, video magnetic tape reels and cassettes, lamps, alarm systems, and information technology. Services include credit reports, videotape duplication, distribution of audiovisual materials, quality management programs, and support for lending libraries.

As a MAS contractor, you will be required to prepare and distribute a catalog and/or price list for customers to use in placing orders. Also, contractors must provide electronic files to allow agencies to order electronically through GSA Advantage!TM.

Maintenance and Repair Schedules. These are competitive SAS's for maintenance, repair, and rehabilitation of Government personal property (equipment and supplies). Many repair Schedule contracts are awarded under Government set-aside programs for small and minority businesses. For more information on set-aside programs, see chapter 2.

How To Win a GSA Federal Supply Schedule Contract

The Office of Enterprise Development gives a briefing on "How To Win a GSA Federal Supply Schedule Contract" monthly. Check the OED's homepage at www.gsa.gov/oed for registration information. Also, the Regional Small Business Centers are staffed with specialists who provide current information, counseling services, and literature concerning doing business with GSA. Schedules orientation sessions are held quarterly. Contact the center in your area.

Listed below are steps that will help you get started in applying for your GSA Federal Supply Schedule Contract:

- Review the FSS Partnership Guide on the Internet at <http://pub.fss.gsa.gov/vendorguide>;
- Identify the Federal Supply Schedule that covers your product or service;
- Obtain a copy of the Federal Supply Schedule solicitation for the product or service on the Internet at <http://www.eps.gov>;
- Obtain a Dun and Bradstreet reference check;
- Be sure you are financially sound;
- Complete all information in the solicitation; and
- Be ready to negotiate your best and final offer.

Once the GSA Schedule contract(s) is awarded, be ready to market your product or service to the Federal Government.



GSA Advantage!™

The GSA Advantage!™ On-line Shopping Service is an Internet acquisition solution for the entire Federal Government. It allows agencies to search through all GSA sources of supply and select the item that is the best value for their requirements. Through the wonders of the Internet, Federal agencies have the capability to order directly from the desktop PC. GSA Advantage!™ is a fast and convenient shopping system that is quickly becoming the hottest shopping web site in Government. This shopping

system allows Federal agencies to browse or search for products and services using key words, national stock numbers, and vendor names; compare features, prices, and delivery options; and place orders electronically. For additional information on GSA Advantage!™, the Internet address is www.fss.gsa.gov/cgi-bin/advantage!11. The Internet e-mail address is GSA.Advantage@gsa.gov.

Stock Program

Through the Stock Program, FSS provides a wide variety of common-use items, such as cleaning compounds, paper products, and office supplies. These items are listed in the GSA Supply Catalog. They are made available to Federal agencies through a network of GSA supply and distribution centers and customer supply centers and through the GSA Advantage!™ on-line shopping service.

Businesses deliver catalog items to distribution centers unless an order from an individual agency is large enough to make delivery to that agency more efficient. FSS solicits and awards contracts for Stock Program items through sealed bid and negotiated procurements. Contracts can be for periods of 1 to 5 years.

The Special Order Program (SOP) provides for the purchase and delivery of items not in the Stock or Schedules Programs. SOP contracts are established for items that have a high demand but are not economical to place in the Stock Program; for example, some furniture items. Agencies place orders with FSS, and products are shipped directly to the customer by the vendor. For other than high-demand items with established contracts, agencies may requisition any item, and FSS will initiate action to make the purchase.

FSS Acquisition Centers

FSS manages procurements, inventories, supply and distribution, and related activities through nine acquisition centers. Each center is responsible for worldwide procurement of specific products or services. A center can procure locally, nationally, or internationally, depending on factors such as price, availability, technical requirements, quality levels, and delivery terms. The centers, their addresses and telephone numbers, and brief descriptions of products or services handled are listed on page 13.

Information Technology (IT) Acquisition Center:

Mainframe and minicomputer systems, microcomputer systems, used or refurbished IT equipment, telecommunications equipment, electronic commerce translation and mapping software, automated procurement systems, enhanced e-mail, and Internet access.

IT Acquisition Center (FCI)
Crystal Mall Building 4, Room 1017
1941 Jefferson Davis Highway
Arlington, VA 22202
Telephone: 703-305-3022

Automotive Center: automobiles, buses, fire trucks, trucks, ambulances, motorcycles, engines, turbines, and tires.

Automotive Division (FFA)
Crystal Mall Building 4, Room 604
1941 Jefferson Davis Highway
Arlington, VA 22202
Telephone: 703-308-4190

National Furniture Center: office, household, and systems furniture, and related furnishings for Federal agencies, Government-furnished housing, and court facilities.

National Furniture Center (3FN-CO)
Crystal Mall Building 4, Room 403
1941 Jefferson Davis Highway
Arlington, VA 22202
Telephone: 703-305-6636
Customer Service: 703-305-7003

General Products Commodity Center: hardware and abrasives (except tools); household goods; materials/equipment for fiber optics, power distribution, heating, plumbing, safety, and security; chemicals and chemical products, cleaning and polishing compounds, laundry detergents, and toiletry products.

General Products Center (7FX)
819 Taylor Street
Ft. Worth, TX 76102
Telephone: 817-978-4545

Office and Scientific Equipment Center: standard office equipment, industrial equipment, laboratory and

scientific instruments and equipment.

Office and Scientific Equipment Center (FCG)
1941 Jefferson Davis Highway
Arlington, VA 22202
Telephone: 703-305-6626

Office Supplies and Paper Products Center: all types of office supplies and devices

Office Supplies and Paper Products Center (2FY)
26 Federal Plaza
New York, NY 10278
Telephone: 212-264-0479

Management Services Center: provides contractor services for management solutions through the use of Federal Supply Schedules for management improvement and organizational effectiveness services, environmental advisory and support services, laboratory services and mail management services.

Management Services Center (10FT)
400 15th Street, SW
Auburn, WA 98001
Telephone: 206-931-7353

Hardware and Appliance Center: household appliances, lawn and garden equipment, paints, sealants and adhesives, industrial quality hand tools (powered and non-powered) for all U.S. Government civilian agencies and military services and for cost-reimbursable contractors and foreign military services of most-favored nations.

Hardware and Appliance Center (6FE)
1500 E. Bannister Road, Building #6
Kansas City, MO 64131
Telephone: 816-926-6760

Services Acquisition Center: debt collection, Government credit cards, employee relocation, other services, and international contracts

Services Acquisition Center (FCX)
Crystal Mall Building 4,
1941 Jefferson Davis Highway
Arlington, VA 22202
Telephone: 703-305-6658

Consolidated Purchase Contracts

For certain items, FSS combines orders from a number of Government customers into consolidated purchase contracts so that it can buy in volumes large enough to obtain price discounts. FSS uses consolidated purchase contracts for all types of Government vehicles.

FSS also contracts for vehicle leasing and short-term rentals. For information on the motor vehicle procurement and leasing programs, contact a GSA Regional Small Business Center, or the GSA/FSS Automotive Center at the address given under FSS Acquisition Centers, listed in this chapter.

Contracts for Travel, Transportation, and Other Services

Using a central purchasing program, FSS contracts for a number of special services. These include worldwide hotel/motel discounts and special discount air and rail fares for Federal passengers on official business. FSS also contracts for fleet maintenance, transportation of freight and household goods, overnight mail, and a number of other services.

Federal Technology Service

The Federal Technology Service (FTS) manages procurements of Government information resources. FTS offers a variety of products and services to its customers including global voice, data, and video services supporting both local and long distance Government telecommunications users. Additionally, FTS provides advanced telecommunications products and services that include Federal calling cards, wireless equipment and services, network applications, acquisition services for information technology and telecommunications systems, risk analysis and security support, and office automation and network design.

For more information on FTS activities, visit the FTS web site at www.fts.gsa.gov/.

FIS Contracting Programs

Information Technology (IT) Solutions

- Federal Systems Integration and Management Center (FEDSIM)
- Information Security
- Federal Computer Acquisition Center (FEDCAC)
- Federal Information Systems Support Program (FISSP)
- Federal Acquisition Services for Technology (FAST)
- Seat Management
- Financial Management Systems Software (FMSS)

For additional information on IT Solutions contracting programs at the national level, call or write:

Federal Technology Service
Office of Information Technology
Skyline Building 2
5203 Leesburg Pike
Falls Church, VA 22041-3467
Telephone: (703) 756-4300

Federal Technology Service
Office of Information Security
Center for Business Development
7th & D Streets, SW
Washington, DC 20704
Telephone: (202) 708-7066

For additional information on Network Services contracting programs at the national level call or write:

Federal Technology Service
Office of Service Delivery
7980 Boeing Court—4th Floor
Vienna, VA 22182-3988
Telephone: (703) 760-7444

Federal Technology Service
Office of Service Development
c/o Mitretek Systems, Inc.
7525 Colshire Drive
McLean, VA 22102-7492
Telephone: (703) 610-2170

Network Services

- Long-distance voice and data services (FTS 2001)
- International Direct Distance Dialing (ID3)
- Wire and Cable Services (WACS)
- Technical and Management Support (TMS)
- Telecommunications Support Contract 2 (TSC2)
- Federal Wireless Telecommunications Services (FWTS)
- Paging
- Local Telecommunications Services
- Purchase of Telecommunications Services (POTS)
- Commerce, Internet, Electronic Mail Access (CINEMA)

- National Security Emergency Preparedness (NSEP)
- Government-Wide Registration Service

Public Buildings Service

The Public Buildings Service (PBS) is the Federal Government's property developer, lessor, and manager of federally owned and leased properties. PBS is responsible for planning, designing, building, restoring, renovating, decorating, and landscaping Government-owned office buildings and other facilities and for maintenance and security. PBS also leases property for Federal agencies.

PBS has a nationwide network of centers and field offices

For information on information technology and networking services contracting programs in your area, contact the appropriate regional office listed below.

New England Region

Boston, MA (617) 565-5750

Includes: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont

Northeast & Caribbean Region

New York, NY (212) 264-1257

Includes: New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Virgin Islands

Mid-Atlantic Region

Philadelphia, PA (215) 656-6310

Includes: Delaware, New Jersey, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia (excludes Washington, DC metropolitan area)

Southeast Sunbelt Region

Atlanta, GA (404) 331-5104

Includes: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee

Great Lakes Region

Chicago, IL (312) 886-3284

Includes: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin

The Heartland Region

Kansas City, MO (888)-879-3278

Includes: Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska

Greater Southwest Region

Fort Worth, TX (817) 978-7504

Includes: Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas

Rocky Mountain Region

Denver, CO (303) 236-7333

Includes: Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming

Pacific Rim Region

San Francisco, CA (415) 522-4500

Includes: Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, American Samoa, Guam, and the Mariana Islands

Northwest/Arctic Region

Auburn, WA (253) 931-7500

Includes: Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington

National Capital Region

Washington, DC (202) 708-6100

Includes: District of Columbia; Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, MD; Fairfax, Loudon, Prince William and Arlington Counties, VA; and the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, and Falls Church, VA

that manage, operate, maintain, alter, preserve, and repair all facilities under their custody and control. These centers purchase building materials and services—from acoustical work to waterproofing—needed to operate and maintain the more than 8,000 Federal buildings managed by GSA. For a list of centers or field offices in your area of activity, contact a Regional GSA Small Business Center or PBS.

Visit the PBS web site at www.gsa.gov/pbs/pbs.htm for more information on PBS activities.

Types of PBS Contracts

Architectural and Engineering Services

PBS, through its regional offices, awards contracts to architectural and engineering firms for the design of Federal buildings. It also contracts for design and engineering of mechanical and electrical systems, elevators, and other building components and for renovation and restoration of existing buildings, including historical structures.

Architect-engineering services are acquired based on evaluation in accordance with published criteria, demonstrated competence, and qualifications for the type of professional services required. Award is made to the most technically qualified firm, after negotiation of a fair and reasonable price. Requirements for design services are published in the *Commerce Business Daily*, GSA Electronic Posting System (see this chapter), newspapers, trade journals, and technical publications.

The architect-engineering firms who have been awarded prime PBS contracts generally subcontract other design-related services. These services include soil testing, topographical surveys, design programming, and the management and inspection of construction. Prime architectural contractors who are responsible for comprehensive design projects also occasionally subcontract with consulting engineers.

If you are interested in architect-engineer contracting, contact a Regional Small Business Center serving your area or the PBS Small Business Technical Advisor. See chapter 8 for more information on architect/engineer contracts.

Construction

PBS delivers its construction programs through 11 regional offices that manage projects within their geographic boundaries.

Contracts for construction or repairs and alterations are usually awarded to the lowest responsible and responsive bidder on the basis of sealed bids. Competitive negotiations, however, are used when warranted.

PBS advertises contracting opportunities in the *Commerce Business Daily*, GSA Electronic Posting System, and in local newspapers, trade journals, and technical publications serving the construction industry. Each PBS regional office maintains lists of interested prospective bidders.

Successful bidders must provide bid, performance, and payment bonds for construction contracts exceeding \$100,000. Bonds can be obtained through a surety or bonding company.

For more information on construction contracting, contact the Regional Small Business Center serving your area or the PBS Small Business Technical Advisor. (See chapter 2 for SBTA information.)

Space Planning and Interior Design

PBS has a nationwide space planning and interior design program, which awards contracts for services ranging from conventional programming and layout to macro-scale, long-range space planning, interior design guides, and space standards.

Competitive proposals are usually solicited through the *Commerce Business Daily* and the GSA Electronic Posting System, and awards are made on the basis of a firm's experience, qualifications for the work required, understanding of and approach to the problem at hand, and price.

Art-in-Architecture Program

Under the Art-in-Architecture program, GSA sets aside a minimum of 0.5 percent of the estimated construction cost of a new building or major renovation for artwork. GSA invites five community representatives, five art professionals, and the project architect to collaborate on selecting an artist. This group reviews artists' portfolios, and recommends three to five artists to GSA for final selection. The selected artist prepares a proposal, which is reviewed by the community participants; and their final recommendations are forwarded to GSA. Following acceptance of the proposal by the PBS Commissioner, the artist executes the commission.

Office Space Leasing

PBS leases space for most Federal agencies in urban centers of the 50 States; Washington, DC; Puerto Rico; and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Although PBS normally contracts for leases through negotiation, it occasionally uses invitations for bids (IFB). PBS advertises upcoming solicitations in the *Commerce Business Daily*, the GSA Electronic Posting System, local newspapers and publications serving the real estate industry.

For more information on opportunities for leasing space to GSA, contact the PBS Small Business Technical Advisor. (See chapter 2 for SBTA information.)

Building Services

PBS is responsible for the maintenance of the buildings under GSA control. Regional PBS offices procure services such as cleaning, operation and maintenance of heating and cooling systems, commercial facility management, cafeteria operation, trash removal, safety inspections, elevator maintenance, lawn maintenance, snow removal, and guard services. Often some services are covered under larger service contracts. For instance, some custodial service contracts include lawn maintenance and snow removal. Some operations and maintenance contracts include safety and/or fire inspection services.

Building Managers/Customer Service Representatives generally have direct procurement authority of up to \$100,000 and frequently buy products and services from small businesses in their areas. If you're interested in marketing building products or services to PBS, contact a Regional Small Business Center (see chapter 4 for the address of the Small Business Center in your region).

Other Activities

GSA's administrative and support offices occasionally need to contract for products and services. GSA offices sometimes buy editorial, audiovisual, accounting, management consulting, training, repair, maintenance, and other services. Such contracts are usually handled as simplified acquisitions. To find out if that individual GSA office is likely to buy the products or services you sell, contact your nearest Regional Small Business Center.

Electronic Commerce (EC)

Electronic commerce (EC) means electronic techniques for accomplishing business transactions, including electronic mail or messaging, World Wide Web technology, electronic bulletin boards, purchase cards, electronic funds transfers, and electronic data interchange.

Electronic Data Interchange (EDI)

Driven by the need to produce better, faster, and cheaper results, GSA has jumped into the world of electronic commerce and the use of EDI. Currently in the agency, many of our Federal Supply Service vendors present their invoices through a standard electronic invoice format referred to as an "810." This method of invoicing allows the vendor and the Government the opportunity to conduct business without a paper invoice. Vendors contracting with FSS may also use EDI to streamline and speed up the flow of paperwork for purchase orders and other documents.

The basic elements of an EDI program are a personal computer; a modem, communication and translation software; an electronic mailbox; and a value added network. A potential contractor, wishing to do business using EDI, must first provide registration information to the Central Contractor Registration (CCR). Call (800) EDI-3414 for information regarding (CCR).

Electronic Funds Transfer

Most of the vendors that deal with GSA are currently offered three payment options: credit card, Treasury check, and electronic funds transfer (EFT). We have found over the years that many of our vendors prefer EFT to the other methods. Not only does this ensure direct deposit to the vendor's bank account, it allows for much better cash management for the vendor. This method is not only a winner for the vendor, it is also a big winner for the Federal Government by reducing the cost of preparing a paper check as well as its postage and handling.

Debt Collection Improvement Act of 1996

The Debt Collection Improvement Act of 1996 mandates the use of electronic funds transfer (EFT) for all Federal payments to recipients eligible to receive such payments, effective July 26, 1996. The only exception was for those

who certified in writing that they did not have an account at a financial institution. On January 1, 1999, EFT became mandatory for all Federal payments.

The Act also requires each Federal agency to collect a taxpayer identification number (TIN) from each person and/or entity doing business with the agency. In order to comply with this requirement, GSA in the near future will request the TIN and banking data to comply with the mandatory EFT requirements from all entities where they are currently missing.

Federal Acquisition Computer Network (FACNET)

FACNET is architecture used by contracting offices for acquisition of products and services between the micro-purchase and simplified acquisition thresholds (see chapter 6). It is based on EDI technology. Use of FACNET was man-

dated by the Federal Acquisition Streamlining Act and later repealed by the Department of Defense 1998 Authorization Act, Section 850. The current mandate is for agencies to consider use of existing technology, including FACNET, before implementing new electronic commerce systems.

Electronic Posting System (EPS)

EPS is a method of posting notices of solicitations and the actual solicitations to the Internet. It provides vendors a way to search and download this information, using product class or selected agencies. GSA's EPS provides access to agency business opportunities and allows businesses to register to receive e-mail notification of opportunities in their areas of interest. The website is <http://www.eps.gov>.

GSA began using EPS October 1, 1998, to post requirements valued at \$25,000 or above, with limited exceptions.

How To IDENTIFY CONTRACTING OPPORTUNITIES



Mirinda Jackson, Deputy Associate Administrator for Enterprise Development, describes marketing techniques and strategies on doing business with GSA for a business organization.

A basic understanding of what GSA does, its organization, and how to market to the agency will make it easier to identify contracting opportunities. The resources available from a Regional Small Business Center will help you develop a marketing plan. The *Commerce Business Daily*, published by the Department of Commerce, GSA's Electronic Posting System (EPS), and several GSA publications and reports will provide you valuable marketing information.

Marketing To GSA

Marketing and personal representation are the keys to your success as a supplier to GSA. Regional Small Business Centers located across the country should be your first point of contact regarding GSA's procurement opportunities. Find out which GSA offices buy the products or services you provide then call or visit the offices. Ask how to get on their handlists of sources willing to fulfill their requirements. Provide each contracting office with brochures or other information describing your company and the products or services you offer.

When you're contacting GSA offices, you'll want to know what each office buys and the procedures it follows.

Suggested questions you might ask:

- How often do you buy it?
- May I send you some literature about my company and its products?

The offices and resources discussed in this section will help you get off to a good start in selling to GSA. Much of the information and assistance you'll need initially are available from GSA's Regional Small Business Centers (SBCs). Effective use of SBC expertise and information will help prepare you to market to GSA contracting offices and take advantage of special marketing events sponsored by GSA.

Introduce Yourself through a Regional Small Business Center (SBC)

Each of GSA's 12 Regional SBC's is staffed with specialists who can quickly tell you if GSA buys what you sell. SBC technical advisors will then help you locate the GSA offices that buy your products or services. They will brief you on other steps required in competing for GSA contracts and explain Federal contracting terminology and policy.

At a Regional SBC, you can review some abstracts of the bidding history of contract awards for your product and get

forms and other documents you'll need. You can scan the *Commerce Business Daily* for announcements of upcoming contracts; view GSA's Electronic Posting System for agency business opportunities and register to receive e-mail notifica-

tion of opportunities in your area of interest; and obtain copies of useful publications and other reference materials.

Most importantly, a Regional SBC will provide counseling

How To Contact a Regional Small Business Center (SBC)

In 12 key locations nationwide, GSA has Regional SBC's that can help you tap the multibillion-dollar GSA "market" for products and services. Their addresses, telephone numbers, and websites are listed below.

New England Region (1)

Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont

General Services Administration
Small Business Center (1AB)
Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. Federal Building
10 Causeway Street, Rm. 901
Boston, MA 02222
Tel: (617) 565-8100
Fax: (617) 565-8101
www.r1site.gsa.gov/

Northeast and Caribbean Region (2)

New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands

General Services Administration
Program Support Division (2AR)
Business Services
26 Federal Plaza, Rm. 18-130
New York, NY 10278
Tel: (212) 264-1234
Fax: (212) 264-2760
<http://r2.gsa.gov/>

Mid-Atlantic Region (3)

Delaware, Maryland and Virginia (except District of Columbia Metropolitan area), Pennsylvania, West Virginia

General Services Administration
Program Services Division (3ADS)
Wanamaker Building
100 Penn Square East, Rm. 808
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Tel: (215) 656-5525
Fax: (215) 656-6404
<http://tsd.r3.gsa.gov/>

Southeast Sunbelt Region (4)

Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee

General Services Administration
Office of Enterprise Development (4E)
401 West Peachtree St., Rm. 2832
Atlanta, GA 30365-2550
Tel: (404) 331-5103
Fax: (404) 331-1813
www.gsa.gov/regions/4k/index.htm

Great Lakes Region (5)

Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin

General Services Administration
Small Business Center (5ADC)
230 South Dearborn Street, Rm. 3718
Chicago, IL 60604
Tel: (312) 353-5383
Fax: (312) 886-9893
<http://www.greatlakes.gsa.gov/>

The Heartland Region (6)

Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska

General Services Administration
Office of Enterprise Development (6ADB)
1500 East Bannister Road, Rm. 1161
Kansas City, MO 64131
Tel: (816) 926-7203
Fax: (816) 823-1167
<http://www.r6.gsa.gov/default.htm>

Greater Southwest Region (7)

Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas

General Services Administration
Office of Enterprise Development (7CPP)
819 Taylor Street, Rm. 1E13A
Fort Worth, TX 76102

Tel: (817) 978-3284
 Fax: (817) 978-0440
<http://www.gsa.gov/rg07gsw.htm>

Rocky Mountain Region (8)

Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota,
 Utah, Wyoming

General Services Administration
 Small Business Center (8PB-B)
 Denver Federal Center
 Building 41, Room 145
 P.O. Box 25006
 Denver, CO 80225
 Tel: (303) 236-7408
 Fax: (303) 236-7403
<http://www.gsa.gov/rg08rm.htm>

Pacific Rim Region (9)

Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada

General Services Administration
 Office of Enterprise Development (9ADB)
 450 Golden Gate Ave., Rm. 5th Floor
 San Francisco, CA 94102
 Tel: (415) 522-2700
 Fax: (415) 522-2705
<http://www.gsa.gov/regions/r9/>

Satellite Office of Region 9

General Services Administration

Small Business Center (9ADB-L)
 300 North Los Angeles Street, Rm. 3108
 Los Angeles, CA 90012
 Tel: (213) 894-3210
 Fax: (213) 894-7658

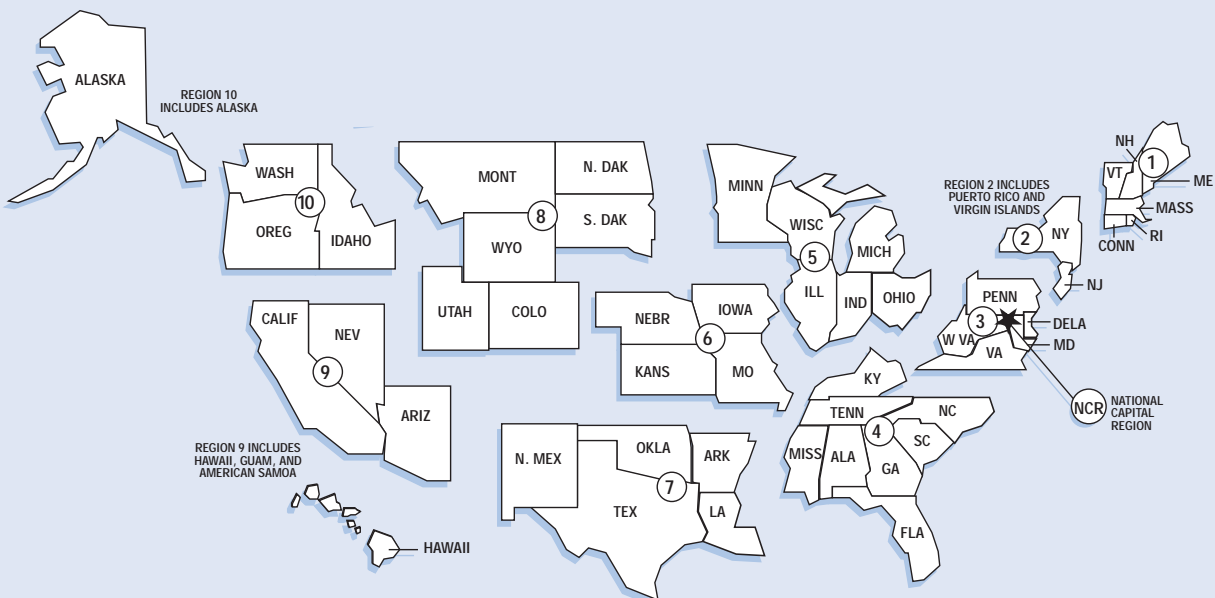
Northwest Arctic Region (10)

Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington
 Office of Enterprise Development (10AB)
 400 15th Street, SW
 Auburn, WA 98001-6599
 Tel: (253) 931-7956
 Fax: (253) 804-4887
<http://www.northwest.gsa.gov/>

National Capital Region (NCR)

District of Columbia and the Washington, D.C.,
 Metropolitan area in Maryland—Montgomery and
 Prince George’s Counties; in Virginia—Arlington,
 Fairfax, Loudon, and Prince William Counties and the
 cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, and Falls Church

General Services Administration
 Small Business Center (WCAB)
 7th and D Streets, SW, Rm. 1050
 Washington, DC 20407
 Tel: (202) 708-5804
 Fax: (202) 205-2872
<http://ncr.gsa.gov/>



and guidance on contracting procedures, including GSA's small business set-aside programs and the small, small disadvantaged, and women-owned small business, and subcontracting programs.

Attend Networking Sessions and Other Marketing Events

GSA, along with other Federal agencies and Congressional and State offices, provides opportunities where you can market your product or service to the Federal Government. These opportunities include networking breakfasts, power lunches, procurement conferences and networking sessions, seminars, and trade fairs. Typical workshop sessions at conferences are about marketing strategies, bid preparation, and identifying subcontracting opportunities.

The monthly power breakfasts and networking sessions sponsored by the Regional SBC's also offer opportunities to meet contracting personnel. For information on procurement conferences, networking sessions, and other marketing events, contact a Regional SBC or the Office of Enterprise Development. (See this chapter for the address of the SBC in your region.)

Procurement Conferences and Networking Sessions.

Most Regional Small Business Centers sponsor monthly breakfast or luncheon networking sessions. During these sessions, business owners and marketing representatives meet GSA contracting personnel and network among themselves. Additionally, Regional SBC's conduct procurement networking sessions centered around major GSA acquisitions that permit small, small disadvantaged, and women-owned small businesses to meet potential prime contractors and discuss teaming arrangements and subcontracting opportunities. For information about networking sessions in your area, contact your Regional SBC.

GSA and other agencies that are large buyers of products and services frequently sponsor procurement conferences to increase contracting opportunities for minority and women-owned small businesses. To help their constituents sell to Federal agencies, the offices of United States Senators and Representatives also publicize and sponsor procurement conferences. For information on upcoming conferences in your area, contact your Regional SBC.

Seminars and Trade Fairs. State and local agencies usual-

ly sponsor seminars and trade fairs. At these marketing events, contracting officers from GSA and other Federal agencies often make presentations and appear on panels. Seminars and trade fairs are typically publicized in the local press and business publications.

Some marketing events require a small fee. Others are free. In both cases, they are valuable resources for vendors who want to sell products and services to GSA and other Federal agencies.

Register To Receive Notices of Acquisitions

You should register your company so you can be notified of contracting opportunities as they arise. GSA's Electronic Posting System provides vendors access to agency business opportunities and allows vendors to register to receive e-mail notification of opportunities in their areas of interest. If you are registered with the GSA's Electronic Posting System, you will automatically receive notices of acquisitions. You may register to receive automatic notices of acquisitions at web site <http://www.eps.gov>.

Use Marketing Resources

Information about upcoming contracts and subcontracts makes it possible to pursue and fine-tune your marketing strategy. Following are some of the sources for such information.

Commerce Business Daily (CBD). Every Monday through Saturday, the U.S. Department of Commerce publishes the *CBD*. The *CBD* lists proposed Government procurement actions, subcontracting leads, sales of surplus property, and overseas business opportunities. Proposed procurement actions appear in the *CBD* only once, so you should check daily. Potential suppliers should check the *CBD* notices to ensure that timely response of offers/bids are met. The response times vary, depending on the dollar value, whether the request is for a commercial item, and whether the NAFTA/Trade Agreements Act is involved.

All intended procurement actions of \$25,000 or more, with some exceptions, are published in the *CBD*. The electronic edition of this publication is CBDNet. It is available from several sources, which are listed on the first page of each

issue of the *CBD*. The Internet address for the CBDNet is <http://cbdnet.gpo.gov/>.

To obtain a subscription to the *Commerce Business Daily*, write to the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. To review current copies, visit a Regional Small Business Center, Small Business Administration office, Department of Commerce field office, or your public library.

Electronic Posting System (EPS). The EPS is a World Wide Web-based application that provides an interface with the *Commerce Business Daily's* CBDNet for creating synopses, and permits uploading of solicitation files. The EPS also provides vendors access to agency business opportunities and allows them to register to receive e-mail notification of opportunities in their areas of interest.

The EPS is GSA's primary vehicle for disseminating written solicitations. GSA intends that EPS will substitute for, not supplement, paper copies of solicitations. However, web-based transactions are not practical in some industries or in some geographic areas. If the contracting officer believes that the distribution of paper copies is necessary to ensure adequate competition, then paper copies will be distributed.

The Electronic Posting System Manual provides detailed instructions for using the EPS. The manual is available at <http://eps.arnet.gov/handbook/>. You may find solicitations for GSA at <http://www.eps.gov>.

Forecast of GSA Contracting Opportunities. This annual on-line document lists GSA's expected contracts for the current or upcoming fiscal year, giving prospective contractors enough lead time to develop marketing strategies, compile the necessary information, and carefully prepare proposals. The Forecast is divided into several sections, following GSA's organizational lines. Within each section, contracting opportunities are listed by region and by type of goods or services required. This document is compiled and maintained by GSA's Office of Enterprise Development (OED). It is accessible on the Internet through OED's homepage. The address is <http://www.gsa.gov/oed>. To open the document, click on Publications and then click on *Forecast of GSA Contracting Opportunities*.

GSA Subcontracting Directory. This semiannual publication lists large companies that have contracts with GSA for goods or services worth \$500,000 or more (\$1 million

or more for construction). Such contractors are required to have subcontracting plans that suggest the dollar value and the percentage of goods and services that may be supplied through subcontracts with small, small disadvantaged, women-owned small, and HUBZone small businesses. This publication is issued by the Office of Enterprise Development (OED) and is available free of charge from GSA's Regional Small Business Centers. It is also accessible on the Internet through OED's homepage. The address is <http://www.gsa.gov/oed>. To open the document, click on Publications and then click on *Subcontracting Directory*.

Companies are listed alphabetically by name within each of the 11 GSA regions. Each listing includes the company's name, the products or services for which it subcontracts, its address, and the name and telephone number of the firm's small business liaison to whom you may market your product or service. For a free copy of the *GSA Subcontracting Directory*, write or call a Regional Small Business Center or visit GSA's homepage.

Governmentwide Information Systems Division. The Governmentwide Information Systems Division compiles data on all Federal contracts. From this information, it produces an annual report and special reports in response to specific requests. The annual Federal Procurement Report contains in "snapshot" form statistics on procurements by GSA and more than 60 other Federal agencies. To be placed on the mailing list for a free copy of this report, write to the Governmentwide Information Systems Division (MVS), U.S. General Services Administration, 7th and D Streets, SW, Room 5652, Washington, DC 20407, or telephone 202-401-1529.

The division's special reports can be helpful in tracking the Federal demand for a specific type of product or service or the value and number of procurements by an individual agency or procurement office. A fee is charged for each special report.

CONTRACTING REGULATIONS, REQUIREMENTS, AND SPECIFICATIONS

GSA contracts for products and services through three procurement methods: simplified acquisition, sealed bidding, and negotiation. In determining the procurement method to be used, a contracting officer takes into consideration Federal and GSA rules and other requirements. This chapter provides information on the Federal and GSA rules that govern all GSA contracting decisions on general contracting requirements and on specifications. Subsequent chapters discuss procedures for and applications of the different procurement methods.

Procurement Regulations

GSA purchasing procedures are governed by two sets of regulations: the *Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR)* and the *General Services Administration Acquisition Regulation (GSAR)*.

Federal Acquisition Regulation

The *Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR)* is the primary regulation GSA and all Federal executive agencies follow when they purchase products and services with appropriated funds. This regulation contains uniform policies and procedures governing acquisitions (including construction) through purchase or lease. It implements the numerous laws that have been enacted to govern Federal procurement.

The *FAR* is published as Chapter 1 of Title 48 of the *Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)* and is available for reference in GSA's Regional Small Business Centers and most central libraries. The *FAR* also is published in a loose-leaf edition, in a bound volume edition, on CD-ROM (Compact Disc Read Only Memory), and is available electronically on the "Acquisition Reform Network" (ARNET) at <http://www.arnet.gov>. The ARNET is probably the most comprehensive of the websites that provide access to Federal procurement documents and information on current procurement initiatives throughout the Government.

Loose-leaf versions with periodic updates and bound volumes of the *FAR* can be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO), Washington, DC 20402, and through GPO bookstores in 22 other locations around the country. You can access the GPO website at <http://www.gpo.gov/> to locate the bookstore nearest you.

General Services Administration Acquisition Regulation

GSA has supplemented the *FAR* with its own policies and procedures, the *General Services Administration Acquisition Regulation (GSAR)*. It appears in chapter 5 of Title 48, CFR. Copies of the *GSAR* are available for review in GSA's Regional Small Business Centers. Bound copies may be purchased from GPO. The *GSAR* is available on line. Particular sections of the *GSAR* can be retrieved, just as any other section of the CFR, in the GPO database website at http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/.

Amendments to both the *FAR* and the *GSAR* are published in the *Federal Register*. *FAR* amendments may be accessed on the Internet at <http://www.gsa.gov/far>.

General Contracting Requirements

No matter what GSA is buying or which regulations govern the purchases, certain aspects of purchases are similar. That's because all of our regulations have a common basis in law. Some of the important similarities are discussed in this section.

Publicizing Procurements

Generally, all procurements must be publicized. GSA procurements over \$25,000 are announced in the *Commerce Business Daily*. Solicitations between \$10,000 and \$25,000 are displayed in a public place in the contracting office, and

those for products and services worth over \$10,000 are displayed in the Regional Small Business Center, where the purchase is being made.

Certain procurements are not required to be publicized. These exceptions, listed in *FAR* 5.202(a), include:

- Situations that would compromise national security;
- Statutory authority (e.g., 8(a) contracts);
- Utility services;
- Orders under indefinite delivery contracts;
- Acceptance of a proposal under the Small Business Innovation Development Act;
- Certain unsolicited research proposals;
- Perishable subsistence supplies; or
- Where action is under the terms of an existing previously synopsised contract.

Another example of a condition when solicitations between \$10,000 and \$25,000 need not be displayed is when oral solicitations are used.

Competition

Federal procurement laws require that vendors compete for Government contracts so that agencies will receive the best products and services at the best possible prices.

Contracting officers meet this requirement by soliciting bids or offers from more than one supplier for most of the products and services purchased.

Full and open competition is not required for procurements that fall under any of the seven statutory exceptions, which are spelled out in *FAR* 6.302. These exceptions cover situations such as emergencies, international agreements, national security, and certain products and services for which sources of supply are limited. Also, the requirements for competition vary under "simplified acquisition procedures" (acquisitions under \$100,000 in value), which are discussed in more detail in chapter 6.

Contractor Qualifications

GSA can enter into contracts only with "responsible" contractors. To be considered "responsible," a contractor must have adequate financial resources to perform the contract, be able to comply with the delivery or performance schedule, have a satisfactory record of past performance and integrity, and have the necessary skills and facilities to per-

form the needed work.

For smaller purchases, the contracting officer may determine responsibility from information on hand or readily available. For larger contracts, GSA may request that the vendor submit information (e.g., financial data and personnel information) to use in making the determination. In some instances, it may be necessary that a "preaward survey" be conducted; this is an evaluation by an auditor of the vendor's ability to meet the responsibility factors.

The *FAR* requires that the contracting officer make a determination of nonresponsibility unless information clearly indicates that the vendor is responsible. However, if the prospective contractor is a small business, any determination of nonresponsibility must be referred to the Small Business Administration (SBA) for further investigation. If SBA finds that a firm is competent to perform the contract, it may issue a certificate of competency (COC), which is binding on the contracting officer for that particular procurement. For more information on COC's, contact the Regional Small Business Center or SBA office in your area.

Types of Contracts

Contracts are generally grouped into two broad categories: fixed-price contracts and cost-reimbursement contracts.

Variations on these two broad categories range from firm fixed-price, in which the contractor has full responsibility for the performance costs and resulting profit, to cost-plus-fixed-fee, in which the contractor has minimal responsibility for the performance costs and the negotiated fee (profit) is fixed. In between these extremes are various incentive contracts, tailored to the uncertainties involved in contract performance. Contract types are discussed in detail in the *FAR*, Part 16. GSA usually uses firm fixed-price contracts.

If the procurement is a "sealed bid," only two types of contracts can be used: (1) firm fixed-price, or (2) fixed-price with economic price adjustment.

If the procurement is "negotiated," the contracting officer is allowed considerable latitude in selecting the appropriate contract type. Two primary factors that will be considered are: (1) the amount of responsibility placed on the contractor and (2) the amount and nature of profit incentive offered to the contractor for achieving or exceeding specified standards or goals.

Metric Conversion

In October 1992, the metric system of measurements (meters, grams, liters, and degrees Celsius) became the preferred system of measurement for Federal procurement. GSA has converted the English measurements in most Federal standards, specifications, and commercial item descriptions to the metric system.

GSA's Construction Metrication Ombudsman is responsible for ensuring that GSA is implementing the metric system of measurement in an efficient manner while ensuring that the goals of the Metric Conversion Act of 1975 are observed. The Ombudsman also responds to comments from prospective bidders, subcontractors, and suppliers related to guidance on the use of the metric system of measurement in contracts for the construction of Federal buildings and for services and materials used in these contracts.

You may contact the Construction Metrication Ombudsman at GSA's Office of Acquisition Policy, Room 4012, 1800 F Street, NW, Washington, DC 20405.

Specifications, Standards and Commercial Item Descriptions

Federal specifications and commercial item descriptions are often used to describe products purchased by the Government. The products may be specified in terms of performance requirements, design characteristics, or both. These documents tell bidders the requirements they must satisfy to establish a quality level upon which Government purchasers can rely.

GSA's policy is becoming more oriented toward performance. GSA also references specifications and standards

Metric Conversion

English to Metric Conversion Factors

Length (basic unit, meter)

Inches	X	25.4	=	Millimeters (mm)
Inches	X	2.54	=	Centimeters (cm)
Feet	X	0.3048	=	Meters (m)
Yards	X	0.9144	=	Meters (m)
Miles	X	1.60934	=	Kilometers (km)

Area (basic unit, meter)

Square inches	X	6.45	=	Square centimeters (cm ²)
Square feet	X	0.09	=	Square meters (m ²)
Square yards	X	0.836127	=	Square meters (m ²)
Acres	X	0.404687	=	Hectares (ha)

Volume (basic unit, meter; a liter is 0.001 cubic meter fluid volume)

Cubic inches	X	16.39	=	Milliliters (mL)
Fluid ounces	X	30.00	=	Milliliters (mL)
Quarts	X	0.946353	=	Liters (L)
Gallons	X	3.79	=	Liters (L)
Cubic feet	X	0.03	=	Cubic meters (m ³)
Cubic yards	X	0.764555	=	Cubic meters (m ³)

Mass/weight (basic unit, kilogram)

Ounces	X	28.3495	=	Grams (g)
Pounds	X	0.453592	=	Kilograms (kg)
Short tons	X	0.91	=	Metric tons (t)

Temperature (basic unit, degree Kelvin)

Degrees Fahrenheit (°F) - 32, then x 5/9 = Degrees Celsius (°C)

Metric to English Conversion Factors

Length

Millimeters (mm)	X	0.0393701	=	Inches
Centimeters (cm)	X	0.3937	=	Inches
Meters (m)	X	3.28084	=	Feet
Meters (m)	X	1.09361	=	Yards
Kilometers (km)	X	0.621371	=	Miles

Area

Square centimeters (cm ²)	X	0.1550	=	Square inches
Square meters (m ²)	X	10.76	=	Square feet
Square meters (m ²)	X	1.19599	=	Square yards
Hectares (ha)	X	2.47104	=	Acres

developed by nationally and internationally recognized technical societies, associations, and laboratories when the requirement involves precise measurements. GSA invites these organizations, as well as individual manufacturers and users, to comment on proposed specifications.

Specifications

Federal specifications are generally used only to describe Government-unique products, or those which, for reasons of health, safety, or interface requirements, must be described in detail or subjected to extensive testing.

Standards

Federal standards establish engineering and technical requirements for processes, procedures, practices, and methods that have been adopted as standard. They may also

establish requirements for selection, application, and design criteria for material. Examples include test methods, standards for terminology, and sampling procedures.

Commercial Item Descriptions

GSA's policy is becoming more oriented toward the purchase of commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) type items when practical. Commercial item descriptions are simplified documents that specify COTS products by function, performance, or essential physical characteristics.

Volume				Common Metric Prefixes			
Milliliters (mL)	X	0.06102	=	Multiples			
Milliliters (mL)	X	0.03381	=	Basic unit		=	1
Liters (L)	X	1.05669	=	1 x 10 (10 ¹)		=	deka (da)
Liters (L)	X	1.02642	=	1 x 100 (10 ²)		=	hecto (h)
Cubic meters				1 x 1,000 (10 ³)		=	kilo (k)
(m ³)	X	35.31	=	1 x 1,000,000 (10 ⁶)		=	mega (M)
Cubic meters				1 x 1,000,000,000 (10 ⁹)		=	giga (G)
(m ³)	X	1.30795	=	1 x 1,000,000,000,000 (10 ¹²)		=	tera (T)
Mass/weight				Fractions			
Grams (g)	X	0.0352740	=	Basic unit		=	1
Kilograms (kg)	X	2.20462	=	1/10 (10 ⁻¹)		=	deci (d)
Metric tons (t)	X	1.1016	=	1/100 (10 ⁻²)		=	centi (c)
				1/1,000 (10 ⁻³)		=	milli (m)
				1/1,000,000 (10 ⁻⁶)		=	micro (μ)
				1/1,000,000,000 (10 ⁻⁹)		=	nano (n)
				1/1,000,000,000,000 (10 ⁻¹²)		=	pico (p)
Temperature							
Degrees Celsius (°C)	X	9/5 + 32	=	Degrees Fahrenheit (°F)			

GSA'S SIMPLIFIED ACQUISITION PROGRAM

What Is a Simplified Acquisition?

The term "simplified acquisition" has replaced "small purchase," and the threshold has been increased to \$100,000. The *Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR)* permits the use of simplified acquisition procedures up to \$5 million for commercial item acquisitions. Those simplified acquisitions, which range in value between \$2,500 and \$100,000 are usually reserved exclusively for small businesses.

For small businesses interested in purchases under \$100,000, many procurement opportunities exist, minus the red tape. Each year, the Federal Government buys billions of dollars worth of products and services using simplified acquisition procedures. GSA purchases account for hundreds of millions of dollars of that total.

Simplified acquisition procedures may be used for the purchase of products, services, or construction. Making and paying for purchases can be accomplished with purchase orders, cash, a Governmentwide commercial purchase card, or blanket purchase agreements.

Price and other information for simplified acquisitions are obtained through "quotations." Quotations, unlike bids or offers, are not binding on the firm submitting them, and a binding contract is formed only when the vendor accepts the Government's order.

Of course, not all purchases under \$100,000 are simplified acquisitions. GSA sometimes uses sealed bidding or negotiation procedures (discussed in chapters 7 and 8) on procurements under the simplified acquisition threshold. If you receive a solicitation for a requirement under \$100,000, read the first page to see if the solicitation is a request for quotations or for bids or offers. Unlike quotations, any bids or offers you submit are binding on your firm.

Simplified Acquisitions Reserved for Small Businesses

Most simplified acquisitions are reserved for small businesses and are awarded under a procedure called "set-asides for small businesses."

Your company may qualify as a small business if it is independently owned and operated, is not dominant in its field, and qualifies under size and other criteria. You may find the criteria in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Title 13, Part 121, as amended.

To learn more about these requirements, contact one of GSA's Regional Small Business Centers listed in chapter 4 or a Small Business Administration office.

Where GSA Makes Purchases

In most purchases using simplified procedures, GSA buys from small businesses located close to where the product or service is needed. Depending on the product or service and which GSA organization is involved, actual contracting may be performed by a local, regional, or central GSA office.

For example:

- GSA's Public Buildings Service (PBS) procures buildings services through its nationwide network of Property Management Centers, but handles simplified lease acquisitions through its regional leasing offices.
- The Federal Supply Service (FSS) buys most common-use products and services centrally through its Acquisition Centers.

Competition Requirements

No matter what the dollar amount of a purchase, the price must be reasonable in order for the purchase to be made. Price reasonableness is usually determined by comparing

quotations from several sources.

Sometimes competition is based *only* on lowest cost or price; other times it is based *primarily* on technical capabilities or concepts, *secondly* on price. Whatever approach is used (as well as the criteria against which offers will be evaluated) will be specifically spelled out in the solicitation.

Among the few exceptions to the competition requirement is the exception for purchases that do not exceed the micro-purchase threshold of \$2,500 (\$2,000 for construction). For purchases exceeding \$2,500, but not \$25,000, the FAR generally requires that the contracting officer solicit, at a minimum, three quotations.

Purchases Under \$2,500

Purchases under \$2,500 are referred to as "micro-purchases" with one exception being the purchase of construction services, where the maximum dollar amount is \$2,000. Micro-purchases may be made by using the governmentwide commercial purchase card. Micro-purchases are unique in that they may be awarded without soliciting competitive quotations, as long as (1) the contracting officer considers the price to be reasonable and (2) to the extent practicable, the micro-purchases are distributed equitably among qualified suppliers.

Accepting a governmentwide commercial purchase card makes getting paid quick and easy. Vendors are paid earlier than other payment options that come under the Prompt Payment Act. The Governmentwide commercial purchase card contractor guarantees payment and the vendor does not have to prepare a paper invoice.

Purchases Between \$2,500 and \$25,000

Purchases worth from \$2,500 to \$25,000 generally are handled in one of two ways:

- Oral quotations. The contracting office may solicit oral quotations from potential suppliers.
- Written quotations. The contracting office normally solicits written quotations through Standard Form 18: Request for Quotation. This procedure is generally used if unusual specifications or a large number of different items are involved or if oral quotes are otherwise impractical.

Purchases Between \$2,500 and \$100,000

Purchases between \$2,500 and \$100,000 are reserved for exclusive participation of small businesses if the contracting officer is able to obtain offers from two or more small businesses that are competitive with regard to price, quality, and delivery.

Purchase Orders

Purchase orders are often used for simplified acquisitions. A purchase order is actually an offer from the Government to buy something from a vendor, typically in response to an oral quotation or a written request for a quotation. It is not a binding contract unless the vendor accepts the order in writing or performs the required work.

The purchase order spells out everything the Government and the vendor must know to complete a transaction. This includes the products or services required, their prices, when and where they are to be delivered, the originating and billing offices, contract and acquisition numbers, and other relevant information.

Many agencies, including GSA, are now preparing to solicit quotations and issue purchase orders through electronic data interchange (EDI). For more information on EDI, see chapter 3.

Blanket Purchase Agreements

A blanket purchase agreement (BPA) is an agreement between the Government and a supplier allowing repetitive purchases during a specified period. If a Government office is going to make several purchases of a product or service, a contracting office may write a BPA.

This procedure cuts down on paperwork and speeds up procurement. A contracting officer usually issues BPAs to a number of different suppliers for the same types of products or services. This gives Government offices greater flexibility and choice in making their purchases.

SEALED BID PURCHASES



Office of Enterprise Development Women Business Summit on how to increase the number of women-owned businesses bidding for GSA contracts.

GSA uses sealed-bid procedures to buy standard, easily defined products or services (usually those worth more than \$100,000). This is a straightforward procurement procedure. However, it has strict rules that the bidder and the contracting officer must follow before a contract can be awarded.

Sealed Bid Purchasing

A sealed bid purchase involves competitive bids and public opening of bids. It is used when:

- The award will be made on the basis of lowest price;
- There is no need to discuss the bids submitted with the bidders;
- There is time to solicit, submit, and evaluate bids; and
- GSA can reasonably expect to receive more than one bid.

Sealed Bid Solicitation

When participating in sealed bidding, you'll be relying largely on information supplied in the solicitation, called an invitation for bids (IFB), and in documents cited in the

IFB. You'll need to review this information carefully to make sure your price is both competitive with other bids and profitable for you.

Because it covers everything a vendor must know to fulfill a contract, a sealed bid solicitation can be a sizable document. It is divided into sections and subsections and has a transmittal sheet and a table of contents.

The transmittal sheet generally gives the solicitation number, the products or services to be acquired, the contract period, items affected by set-asides (see chapter 2), and other key information about the requirement. You should remove this sheet before submitting your bid.

The solicitation itself consists of four primary sections: the Schedule; Contract Clauses; List of Documents, Exhibits, and Other Attachments; and Representations and Instructions.

The Schedule

This section usually begins with Standard Form 33: Solicitation, Offer and Award; or Standard Form 1449: Solicitation, Contract, Order for Commercial Items. These

forms display the basic information you and the contracting officer will need in order to conduct business. Included are the contract and solicitation numbers, the issuing office, address to which bids must be sent, and a table of contents for the attached materials. The form has a section for your (the bidder's) name, address, and telephone number, signature, and date signed. It also has a section for any price discounts you're willing to offer in return for early payment.

The Schedule contains the specification for the contract, with space for your bids. It has detailed descriptions of the item or items being solicited; technical information about production, marking, packaging, packing, delivery, and inspection; and other information necessary to fill the contract requirements. For each product or service being procured, you are asked to supply a bid price and other information.

Contract Clauses

This section lists all standard clauses that apply to the contract. An IFB may include the full text of clauses, but often just gives their numbers and titles. You can find clauses beginning with "52" in Part 52 of the *Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR)*; those starting with "552" are in the *General Services Administration Acquisition Regulation (GSAR)*.

List of Documents, Exhibits, and Other Attachments

This is a list of documents attached to or cited in the IFB that you will need to read before making your bid. Documents that might be on the list include Federal specifications, diagrams, standards, and architectural drawings.

As with standard clauses, the IFB may give only the document titles and/or numbers, rather than the full text. If you have a question about where to obtain a document, call the contact listed in the IFB or contact a Regional Small Business Center.

Representations and Instructions

This section contains instructions for preparing your bid and asks questions you must answer for your bid to be considered. Items in it range from definitions of contracting terms to statements about contract conditions to lists of preferences for various categories of businesses. It asks for your taxpayer

identification number, company size, and employee makeup. It also includes certifications and representations related to small, small disadvantaged, women-owned small, and HUBZone small business status; debarment and suspension; lobbying activities; and other conditions. Be sure to fill in and sign all sections requiring a signature; if you don't, you may be considered "nonresponsive," and the bid may be rejected.

Requesting an Invitation for Bid (IFB)

To learn about upcoming sealed bid solicitations, check the *Commerce Business Daily*, which publishes all Government solicitations over \$25,000, and the GSA Electronic Posting System, which provides vendors access to agency business opportunities.

Preparing Your Bid

Responding to a solicitation can require considerable time and effort. If the bid is not filled out and signed correctly, it may be rejected. However, there are some things you don't have to do. For example, you don't have to prepare a transmittal letter—it's actually better if you don't. And you can fill out the IFB by hand (in ink), rather than typing it.

Following are some pointers that can help you prepare your bid thoroughly, efficiently, and on time.

Give Yourself Enough Time

Start working on your bid as soon as you receive an IFB, and allow extra time for unanticipated but essential consultation, checking, and rechecking. This is particularly important if the contract is large or if you must obtain and read several documents before making a bid.

Even if everything goes smoothly, and you finish sooner than expected, you'll need time to thoughtfully review and, if necessary, revise your bid.

Be Sure You Understand the IFB

Read the solicitation document carefully. To make a realistic bid and fulfill the contract to the mutual benefit of you and GSA, you must understand all instructions, clauses, specifications, and other documents.

If you are in doubt about the meaning of any part of a solicitation, make no assumptions. Ask the contracting officer or other person named in the solicitation.

Obtain the Necessary Related Documents

The solicitation package should indicate where to obtain all essential specifications, standards, and other documents cited in the solicitation. If it doesn't, ask the contracting officer, or a Regional Small Business Center, how to get the documents. Bidders must meet the requirements of all documents cited.

Develop a Work Plan and Delivery Schedule

By making a work plan and schedule at this stage, you can better calculate the time and material costs of fulfilling the contract; you'll need this information to determine your bid price. Also, some solicitations require a schedule of work as part of the offer. Note the distances to the locations where you'll be shipping products, and be sure you are able to meet the delivery schedule your bid promises.

Determine Costs

After using your work plan and schedule to arrive at a preliminary cost estimate, review the estimate to be sure it reflects other important cost factors. What are the market forecasts for the period when you'll be supplying goods or services? Are the costs of raw materials and/or labor rising? Do you expect transportation costs to remain stable?

Most solicitations give you an opportunity to offer a discount for prompt payment. Decide whether you can afford to make such a discount as part of your offer.

Compile Other Information Requested in the IFB

Some solicitations will require information about your firm's financial stability and relevant experience. Make sure that any information you supply meets the requirements and is complete and accurate.

Review Your Bid

After you've prepared your bid, review it for clarity, consistency, and accuracy. Compare your work plan, budget, and schedule to be sure they're in agreement. For example, if

your plan indicates that it will take 20 days to complete a task, your budget and schedule should reflect this level of effort. Double check cost figures and computations, and make sure nothing has been left out.

Submitting Your Bid

When you're ready to submit your bid, review the submission instructions, including envelope labeling.

Double-check the address where the bid is to be sent, and allow enough time to meet the deadline. Late responses are disqualified unless they were:

- Mishandled by the Government;
- Submitted by registered or certified mail postmarked no later than the fifth calendar day before the deadline; or
- Sent via U.S. Postal Service Express Mail Next Day Service, not later than 5:00 p.m. two working days before the deadline. Exceptions to deadlines are not made when express services do not live up to their promises to deliver bids by a certain time.

If you're having the bid hand delivered, make sure you have the right room number and meet any other special requirements for hand delivery.

Also remember to place the sealed bid label (Optional Form 17) on the outer envelope. The label, which is provided with the solicitation, helps to ensure expeditious handling of your bid.

You may withdraw your bid any time up until the bid opening. However, once the bids have been opened, the contracting officer may allow withdrawal or correction of bids in accordance with the conditions specified in *FAR* 14.407.

Bid Opening and Contract Award

All bids in response to an IFB are kept unopened in a locked bid box by the Regional Small Business Center where the contract award is to be made. Even information about the number of bids and about bidders' identities is available only to Government employees with a "need to know."

At the time set for opening, a contracting official at the

award site announces that the time has arrived. He or she opens the bids, reads the bids aloud, and records them. Interested persons may examine the bids at this time, but will not be given access to financial or other proprietary information of the bidders.

After the bids have been opened, award is made on a fixed-price basis to the responsible bidder who submitted the lowest responsive bid.

Responsive and Responsible Bidders

The low bidder in a sealed bid solicitation has two final hurdles to clear before receiving a contract award. These are the "responsive" and "responsible" bidder requirements. Essentially, these mean that the bidder must have followed the submission rules correctly and must be able to fulfill all contract requirements.

If the contract is small and uncomplicated, these determinations may be made shortly after the time the bids are opened. Large contracts involving a number of products or services may require further evaluation before they can be awarded.

"Responsive" means that the bid was submitted on time and

Sealed Bid Checklist

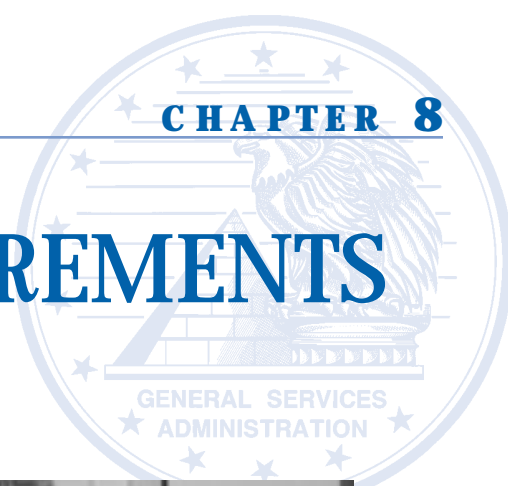
- Do you understand all requirements of the basic specification and all other specifications, documents, and attachments to the solicitation?
- Have you read all materials referred to but not included with the solicitation?
- Have you rechecked your answers, your math, and your price quotes to make sure they are accurate and complete?
- Have you verified unit prices and inserted them in the proper places?
- Are you confident that you can meet all contract requirements (such as materials used, manufacturing procedures, quality levels, testing, and packaging)? And is your bid price high enough so you can meet these requirements and make a reasonable profit?
- Have you answered every question fully and accurately and supplied all information requested?
- Have you refrained from qualifying your bid either by insertions on the bid or in an accompanying letter? Additions of unwanted part numbers, exceptions to items and conditions of the solicitation, or inclusion of any type of contingency statement could result in your bid being declared nonresponsive.
- Have you signed and dated the solicitation in all sections where required, including all certifications that apply to your business? Remember that a letter of transmittal isn't necessary: proper and accurate completion of the forms provided is all that is necessary.
- Have you properly acknowledged, signed, and returned to the purchasing office all amendments to the solicitation?
- Have you included a bid guarantee, if required by the solicitation? Is the bid guarantee properly executed and in the proper amount?
- Have you correctly addressed the envelope containing your bid to the receiving office listed in the solicitation?
- Have you allowed enough time for the bid to reach the receiving office before the posted deadline? (See the rules for delivery of bids.)
- Have you placed sufficient postage and the sealed bid label (Optional Form 17) on the envelope used for returning your bid?
- If you plan to have the bid hand delivered, do you have the room number and other information necessary to get the bid to the right place before the time set for the bid opening.
- Do you have at least one file copy of the final version of your bid?
- Have you retained your original worksheet used in preparing your bid?

prepared according to the instructions and requirements of the IFB. Problems that would cause a bid to be judged non-responsive are listed in the *Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR)* 14.404-2; they include (but are not limited to):

- Failure to conform to the requirements of the IFB, such as specifications, delivery schedule, or permissible substitutions.
- Conditions imposed by a bidder that would modify requirements of the IFB or give the bidder an advantage over other bidders. For example, a bid accompanied by a notice that a product is subject to prior sale or that prices are subject to change without notice will usually be rejected as nonresponsive. Bids that don't specify a definite price will also be rejected.
- Changing the minimum bid acceptance period to a shorter period of time than that required by the Government to evaluate and award the procurement.

The review of a bidder's responsibility could include assessments of a firm's plant and testing facilities, production capabilities, quality control, financial status, credit rating, performance on previous Government contracts, and integrity. Small businesses found "not responsible" are referred to the Small Business Administration (SBA) for further assessment. The offeror must apply for a certificate of competency (COC); this process is not automatic. If the offeror does not apply, no COC will be issued.

NEGOTIATED PROCUREMENTS



FTS Commissioner Dennis Fischer, addresses an audience of small business owners at the Technical Management Support Services Acquisition Post-Award Procurement Networking Session.

The most flexible, but sometimes complicated, procedure for procuring products and services is negotiation. This method is used when contracting offices do not define all requirements of the procurement or when factors other than price are important enough to require evaluation.

Negotiated procurements take many forms. They may call for competitive proposals, may involve restricted competition, or may even be sole source. Some permit discussions with offerors, while others allow award of a contract without discussions.

What Is Negotiation?

The negotiation procedure permits bargaining between the contracting officer and the offerors, who are allowed to revise their offers before award of a contract. Depending on the size and complexity of the requirement, negotiation may include discussion; persuasion; changes in positions; and give-and-take on price, schedule, technical requirements, type of contract, or other contract terms.

Contracting officers use negotiated procurements whenever sealed bidding is not appropriate. Generally, negotiation is appropriate if time does not permit sealed bidding, if award will be based on factors other than just price, if discussions are necessary, or if the Government is aware of only one source.

What Is a Request for Proposal (RFP)?

An RFP is the solicitation package issued under a negotiated procurement; it contains the information necessary for prospective contractors to prepare proposals. Most RFP's follow the same uniform contract format as IFB's (discussed in chapter 7), but some, such as solicitations for architect/engineer services, do not. The special rules for architect/engineer services are discussed later in this chapter.

In response to an RFP, prospective contractors submit a price, plus a technical proposal spelling out how they will approach the need described in the solicitation. RFP's

include the criteria by which proposals will be evaluated.

The recommendations in chapter 7 for preparing a bid (under "Sealed Bid Checklist") also apply to preparing an offer. When you respond to an RFP, pay particular attention to the evaluation criteria and the relative importance of each factor. If more emphasis is placed on "workplan," for example, that part of your proposal should be developed with special care.

How Contractors Are Selected and Evaluated

In selecting among offers submitted in response to an RFP, the contracting officer considers not only price, but also the offeror's ability to carry out terms of a contract. Selection includes the evaluation of technical and cost/price proposals, negotiations between contracting officers and offerors, and selection of the offer that represents the "best value" to the Government.

Evaluation of Proposals

Contracting officers evaluate proposals on the factors specified in the solicitation. These may include workplan, proposed contract personnel, the offeror's experience, price quotations, quality, and other criteria. Selection may involve evaluation of proposals by a review panel and ranking of offerors according to set criteria.

The contracting officer will determine which proposals are competitive enough to remain under consideration during negotiation and will establish a "competitive range." Offerors whose proposals are judged not to be in this competitive range are notified in writing that their proposals are no longer being considered.

Negotiation

Negotiation includes the discussion of the offeror's technical proposal or other terms and conditions of the proposed contract. This is the phase of the acquisition where the contracting officer and the offeror discuss the specific aspects of the offeror's proposals and those areas where it doesn't meet the Government's needs, and where the cost/price may be discussed. It should be noted, however, that the contracting officer may award a contract without holding negotiations. This could occur when an offer, as initially submitted, clearly represented the "best value" and there is no need to hold

discussions.

Revised Offer

After conclusion of the negotiations, offerors remaining in the competitive range are invited to submit revised offers. At this time, offerors can make their prices as competitive as possible and address specific questions and concerns raised during negotiation/discussions. (Note: The revisions are not automatically allowed. The contract may contain a clause that award may be made without any discussions [and thus without any revision]).

Qualifying for Consideration

Just as in sealed bidding, an offeror must be considered responsible in order to receive a contract. GSA also may have to audit the winning offeror before the contract can be awarded.

Responsible Offerors

In determining responsibility, the contracting officer will consider a firm's plant and testing facilities, production capabilities, quality control, financial status, credit rating, performance on previous Government contracts, and integrity.

When finding a small business "nonresponsible," the contracting officer must refer the determination to the Small Business Administration (SBA) for further investigation. If it finds that the bidder or offeror is competent to perform the contract, SBA will issue a certificate of competency (COC), which is binding on the contracting officer for that particular offer. For more information on COC's, contact the Regional Small Business Center or Small Business Administration office in your area.

Audits

Prior to the award of certain contracts, GSA's Office of Inspector General conducts audits to verify and evaluate information presented in offers, particularly cost proposals. Audits help determine if a proposed price is fair and reasonable when contracts are awarded on the basis of factors other than price. GSA audits most proposals for negotiated contracts worth over \$500,000 and in special situations may audit proposals for contracts between \$100,000 and \$500,000.

Debriefing of Offerors

There are two classes of debriefing: "pre-award" and "post-award." An unsuccessful offeror can request either of the two. To request a pre-award debriefing, the offeror may submit a written request to the contracting officer within 3 days after receipt of a notice excluding its offer from the competitive range. To request a post-award debriefing, a written request must be submitted within 3 days after receiving a notice of contract award. If the offeror does not submit a timely request, the offeror need not be given either a pre-award or a post-award debriefing. Offerors are entitled to no more than one debriefing on each acquisition. Debriefing may be done orally, in writing, or by any other method acceptable to the contracting officer. The contracting officer shall include an official summary of the debriefing in the contract file.

Pre-award Debriefing

A pre-award debriefing may include:

- GSA's evaluation of the significant elements in the offeror's proposal;
- A summary of the rationale for excluding the offerors from the competitive range; and
- Reasonable responses to questions about whether the source selection procedures that were stated in the solicitation, regulations, and other authorities were followed in eliminating the offeror's proposal.

The pre-award debriefings may not disclose the number of offers received, nor can it disclose identity of other offerors, the content of other offerors' proposals, or their proposals' ranking or evaluation. Also, any information prohibited from disclosure or exempt from release under the Freedom of Information Act cannot be provided.

Post-award Debriefing

A post-award debriefing may include:

- GSA's evaluation of the significant weaknesses or deficiencies in the offeror's proposal;
- The overall evaluated cost or price and technical rating of the successful offeror and the debriefed offeror and past performance information on the debriefed offeror;
- The overall ranking of all offerors when ranking was

developed by the agency;

- A summary of the rationale for award; and
- Reasonable responses to questions about whether the source selection procedures that were stated in the solicitation, regulations, and other authorities were followed in eliminating the offeror's proposal.

The post-award debriefing may not include point-by-point comparisons of the debriefed offeror's proposal with those of other offerors. In addition, as in the pre-award debriefing, any information prohibited from disclosure or exempt from release under the Freedom of Information Act cannot be provided.

Architect/Engineer Selection Process

GSA awards contracts for design services to the most highly qualified architect/engineer (A/E) firms. They are selected according to criteria published in the *Commerce Business Daily* on the basis of demonstrated competence and qualifications for the type of professional service required.

Locating GSA Design Projects

GSA announces specific projects in its GSA Electronic Posting System and the *Commerce Business Daily*. Project notices give the location and scope of a project and also contain such information as:

- Estimated construction contract award range;
- Project schedule and the date and time limit for receiving replies;
- Categories of evaluation criteria and their relative importance; and
- Any requirements for submitting supplemental information.

Design Service Contracts

Design contracts are awarded for, but not limited to, such projects as:

- Federal office buildings, courthouses, and research centers;
- Mechanical and electrical systems and elevators;
- Engineering specialties;
- Repairs and alterations to existing buildings; and
- Renovation of historical structures.

Where and How To Apply

Architect/engineer firms interested in being considered for design service contracts should read the notices published in the *Commerce Business Daily* and then submit the required forms to the specified Public Building Service (PBS) regional office.

The first form required is a Standard Form (SF) 254: *Architect-Engineer and Related Services Questionnaire*. The form must be filed with a GSA regional PBS office each year and can be updated and resubmitted at any time. A completed form furnishes GSA with general information on the size, capabilities, personnel, and past experience of an interested firm. Firms are encouraged to submit annually an updated statement of qualifications and performance data on an SF 254. To be considered for a specific project, an A/E firm must submit an SF 255: *Architect-Engineer and Related Services Questionnaire for Specific Project*. Copies of both of these forms are available from GSA Regional Small Business Centers and from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402; telephone (202) 512-1800. They also appear on the GSA website at www.gsa.gov/forms.

How GSA Selects a Professional Services Firm

To ensure objectivity in selecting an A/E contractor, GSA has separate review boards and approving authorities for each region. Qualified professionals make evaluations, and deliberations are held in strict confidence.

Design Excellence Program

GSA wants top-quality design for all its Federal buildings projects—construction, renovation, alterations, and repairs, large and small. To satisfy this demand for talent and to open up greater opportunities for emerging talent and small, small disadvantaged, and women-owned small businesses, GSA has initiated its Design Excellence Program.

The program stresses creativity. It also streamlines the way GSA hires architects and engineers, substantially cutting the cost of competing for GSA design contracts.

The Design Excellence Program operates through GSA's Public Buildings Service (PBS). PBS directs the Federal Government's multibillion-dollar building program, which includes construction, renovation, alteration, and repair of Federal office buildings, courthouses, and other facilities. Most of PBS's work is in partnership with A/E groups from the private sector.

For a brochure describing the program's procedures, write to the U.S. General Services Administration, Public Buildings Service, Washington, DC 20405, telephone (202) 501-1888, or visit the PBS web site at <http://www.gsa.gov/pbs/>.

CONTRACT PERFORMANCE AND COMPLETION



A panel discussion with women business owners during the Access to Success in the 21st Century women's small business program. The panelists shared their success stories as major GSA contractors.

For satisfactory contract performance, you must understand the requirements of your contract and follow all the procedures and instructions carefully. A contractor's records of performance become an important part of the contract file. Other contracting officers will note rejections, late deliveries, and other failures of performance as they review performance records to determine the responsibility and eligibility of firms for future contracts. If your performance is satisfactory and you deliver quality products and services, you will have more opportunities for future GSA contracts.

Operating Requirements

A contract not only obligates a vendor to provide a product or service; it also requires that the firm operate its business in compliance with certain laws and regulations. All requirements that apply to your contract will be spelled out in the contract document.

Following are some examples of the requirements you might expect to see and where you may obtain additional information on the subject.

- Equal Employment Opportunity
Title 41 of the *Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)*,
Chapter 60
Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), Part 22.
- Labor Laws

Federal Acquisition Regulation, Part 22.

- Environment, Conservation, Occupational Safety, and Drug-Free Workplace

Federal Acquisition Regulation, Part 23.

Any requirements that apply to your contract will be spelled out in the contract document.

Performance Review

Contracting officers continually review the performance of vendors by monitoring contract performance and inspecting the supplies or services furnished. The contracting officer will call any deficiencies in performance to the attention of the contractor and will work with the contractor to resolve the deficiencies.

If corrections are not possible, the Government may assess deductions in accordance with the deduction clause of the contract, may terminate the contract for unacceptable performance, and may obtain the supplies or services from another supplier. A vendor whose contract is terminated for default may be required to pay any additional costs incurred by the Government as a result of the default termination.

Contractors who default may also be prohibited from doing business with the Federal Government and be included in GSA's *List of Parties Excluded from Federal Procurement or Nonprocurement Programs*. This monthly publication lists business firms and individuals excluded from receiving

Federal contracts, certain subcontracts, and certain Federal financial and nonfinancial assistance. It is sold through the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402, telephone (202) 512-1800. Review copies are available in GSA's Regional Small Business Centers and public libraries.

Given the possibility of losing a contract or being debarred, you should be certain that you can satisfy the requirements of a contract before submitting a bid or offer.

Submitting Your Invoice

Every contract or purchase order has instructions for preparing and submitting invoices. If the instructions are not complete or clear, call the contracting officer immediately. It's a good idea to confirm invoicing procedures the first time you submit an invoice under a contract. Careful attention to these procedures will help ensure that you get paid on time.

All Federal agencies are required by the Prompt Payment Act to pay properly submitted invoices within 30 days. The law also requires late payments to be accompanied by interest.

Vendor Inquiry on GSA's CFO Website

The GSA Office of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) website allows vendors to inquire about payments issued to them. The site is located at <http://www.finance.gsa.gov>. This page is password protected and contains instructions on how to obtain a password to gain access.

Contract Appeals

The Government tries to resolve all contractual disagreements by mutual agreement. However, sometimes a satisfactory resolution can't be reached, and the contracting officer must impose a final decision. In those cases, the contractor may appeal the contracting officer's final decision.

The GSA Board of Contract Appeals hears and resolves claims by and against the U.S. General Services Administration; the Departments of Commerce, Treasury, and Education; and other Government agencies, commissions, and boards. The General Accounting Office (GAO) is empowered to hear information technology bid protests.

Contract Award Tips

Read and understand all parts of the contract.

The contract sets forth your obligations and rights, and protects you and the agency. Each sentence is significant because it covers a specific requirement.

Comply with specifications. The specifications or scope of work precisely describe the properties of materials, the dimensions, quality, and reliability levels, as well as other characteristics required.

Consult the contracting officer. Any questions about the contract terms and delivery should be raised with the contracting officer.

Get it in writing. If the contracting officer orders changes, make sure they are well documented.

Know the payment procedure. Check the contract's instructions for submitting invoices. If they are unclear or incomplete, call the contracting officer immediately. Follow billing instructions carefully.

Bill the Government accurately. Government regulations that protect you as a taxpayer, require you as a contractor to submit a bill that is accurate in all respects. Put the accounting control transaction (ACT) number and the order or contract number on the invoice. Errors in billing can delay your contract payments.

Make sure your accounting system meets

Government requirements. This is especially important when the contract permits price revisions based on costs.

Maintain careful records. Keep all pertinent documents and case histories, whether required by the contract or not.

Deliver on schedule. Observe all time requirements.

Additional information on this subject, may be obtained in *FAR*, Part 33, or write to the Board of Contract Appeals (G), U.S. General Services Administration, Washington, DC 20405.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

Alternative dispute resolution procedures may be used any time that the contracting officer has authority to resolve an issue in controversy. The objective of using ADR procedures is to increase the opportunity for relatively inexpensive and expeditious resolution of issues in dispute. A neutral person may be used to facilitate resolution of the issue in controversy, when appropriate.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Acquisition Reform Network (ARNET): Internet web site for governmentwide acquisition information. The Internet address is <http://www.arnet.gov/>.

Blanket Purchase Agreement (BPA): An agreement between the Government and a supplier allowing repetitive purchases during a specified period.

Commercial Item: Any supply or service, other than real property, that is customarily used for non-Government purposes and that has been sold, leased, or licensed to the general public. For a complete definition, see *FAR* 2.101.

Construction Metrication Ombudsman: A senior GSA official responsible for ensuring that GSA is implementing the metric system of measurement in an efficient manner, while ensuring that the goals of the Metric Conversion Act of 1975 are observed.

Cost-Reimbursement Contract: This type of contract provides for payment of allowable incurred costs to the extent prescribed in the contract.

Contract: A mutually binding legal relationship obligating the seller to furnish the supplies or services (including construction) and the buyer to pay for them. It includes all types of commitments that obligate the Government to an expenditure of appropriated funds and that, except as otherwise authorized, are in writing. In addition, contracts include awards and notices of awards; job orders or task letters; orders, such as purchase orders, under which the contract becomes effective by written acceptance or performance; and bilateral contract modifications.

Contracting Activity: An element of an agency designated by the agency head and delegated broad authority regarding acquisition functions.

Contracting Officer: A person with the authority to enter into, administer, and/or terminate contracts and to make related determinations and findings.

Electronic Commerce (EC): A paperless process which includes electronic mail, electronic bulletin boards, electronic fund transfers, electronic data interchange, and similar techniques for accomplishing business transactions.

Electronic Data Interchange (EDI): A technique for electronically transferring and storing formatted information between computers.

Electronic Posting System (EPS): A method of posting notices of solicitations and the actual solicitations to the Internet. It allows businesses to register to receive e-mail notification of opportunities in their area of interest. The website is <http://www.eps.gov>.

Federal Specification: Description used to describe products purchased by the Government.

Fixed-Price Contract: Contracts that provide for a firm price or, in appropriate cases, an adjustable price. Fixed-price contracts providing for an adjustable price may include a ceiling price, a target price (including target cost), or both. Unless otherwise specified in the contract, the ceiling price or the target price is subject to adjustment only by operation of contract clauses providing for equitable adjustment or other revision of the contract price under stated circumstances. The contracting officer shall use *firm-fixed-price* or *fixed-price with economic price adjustment* contracts when acquiring commercial items.

Governmentwide Commercial Purchase Card: A purchase card, similar in nature to a commercial credit card,

issued to authorized agency personnel to use in paying for supplies and services.

Industry: All concerns primarily engaged in similar lines of activity, as listed and described in the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) Manual.

Information Technology: Any equipment, or interconnected systems(s) or subsystem(s) of equipment, used in the automatic acquisition, storage, manipulation, management, movement, control, display, switching, interchange, transmission, or reception of data or information. Includes computers, ancillary equipment, software, firmware, and similar procedures, services, and related resources.

Micro-Purchase: An acquisition of supplies or services (except construction), the aggregate amount of which does not exceed \$2,500, except in the case of construction, the limit is \$2,000.

Negotiation: A procedure that includes the receipt of proposals from offerors, permits bargaining, and usually affords offerors an opportunity to revise their offers before award of a contract. Any contract awarded without using sealed bidding procedures is a negotiated contract.

Offer: A response to a solicitation that, if accepted, would bind the offeror to perform the resultant contract. Responses to invitations for bid (sealed bidding) are offers called "bids" or "sealed bids"; responses to requests for proposals (negotiation) are offers called "proposals"; responses to requests for quotation (negotiation) are not offers and are called "quotes."

Purchase Order: An offer by the Government to buy supplies or services, including construction and research development, upon specified terms and conditions, using simplified acquisition procedures.

Simplified Acquisition Procedures: The methods prescribed in *FAR*, Part 13, for making purchase of products or services.

Standards: Technical requirements for processes, procedures, practices, and methods that have been adopted as standard.

SBREFA (Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act): A law enacted March 29, 1996, that provides small businesses with new and meaningful ways to participate in the Federal regulatory process. SBREFA makes certain that small businesses have a voice that will be heard by Federal agencies as they go through the rule-making process. It also gives small businesses expanded opportunities to challenge an agency's final regulatory decisions. (**NOTE:** SBREFA is not intended to replace existing dispute mechanisms such as the Contract Disputes Act).

The General Services Administration's mission does not typically involve regulatory compliance and enforcement activities in regards to the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Act. However, agencies with regulatory authority, such as the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), Small Business Administration (SBA), Federal Communication Commission (FTC), and Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA), may be contacted by small businesses to express concerns about enforcement actions. The General Services Administration issues the following notice:

NOTICE: The Small Business and Agriculture Regulatory Enforcement Ombudsman and 10 Regional Fairness Boards were established to receive comments from small businesses about Federal agency enforcement actions. The Ombudsman will annually evaluate the enforcement activities and rate of each agency's responsiveness to small business. If you wish to comment on an agency's enforcement actions, call 1-888-REG-FAIR (1-888-734-3247) or visit the SBA's web site at <http://www.sba.gov/regfair>.

Task order: An order for services placed against an established contract or with Government sources.

ANSWERS TO MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why should a small business look at GSA as a good prospective customer?

GSA is a major purchaser of products and services sold by small businesses. GSA is always seeking new businesses to compete for its products and service contracts and is committed to increasing opportunities for small, small disadvantaged, women-owned small, and HUBZone businesses. GSA's Regional Small Business Centers work with businesses to help them understand the agency's procurement processes and take advantage of special programs for all small businesses (see chapter 2).

If my business has developed a new product, is GSA a potential customer?

Yes. In its New Products Program, GSA will evaluate your product to determine if it is new or better than existing items. If the Government needs your product, GSA may negotiate a contract to purchase the product from you.

How do I find out about opportunities to sell specialized services, products, or equipment to other agencies?

Call the Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization Office (OSDBU) in the Federal agency that buys your product or service. For example, to sell forest-fire-fighting equipment, you would contact the OSDBU in the Forest Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Does Government contracting involve a lot of paperwork?

The large, complex contracts may require substantial paperwork. Some contracts do not, particularly simplified acquisitions of \$100,000 or less. Procurement regulations require not only that GSA be fair to suppliers and make taxpayer dollars go as far as possible, but also that the agency be able to document that it is meeting these obligations. In other words, Government paperwork is a necessary part of con-

tracting, and vendors must be able and willing to handle it.

Does a firm have to be certified as a small business by the Small Business Administration (SBA) in order to benefit from GSA's Small Business Program?

Yes, certification as a small business is necessary in participating in the GSA Small Business Program. Small business status is a self-certification process. Just complete the "Small Business Concern Representation" section contained in all GSA solicitations.

However, the process for certification as a small disadvantaged business, or a business within a HUBZone, is different. The process for these programs is not self-certifying. To attain status as either a small disadvantaged business or a business in a HUBZone, SBA must certify your claim.

How do I become eligible to participate in 8(a) set-asides?

The Small Business Administration (SBA) is responsible for certifying that you or your company is eligible to participate in the 8(a) Program. To apply for certification, contact the Office of Eligibility and Certification in the SBA office that serves your area.

Who determines which GSA contracts are set-aside for small businesses and the 8(a) Program?

It's up to the contracting officers to decide which contracts are set aside. However, specialists in GSA's Regional Small Business Centers monitor contracts and recommend those suitable for the 8(a) Program.

As a small business, how do I go about being a subcontractor for a prime contractor?

Register your business with the *PRO-Net* at your local Small Business Administration office. Also, market your firm's capabilities directly with prime contractors. The *GSA Subcontracting Directory* and the *Forecast of GSA Contracting Opportunities* will help you find companies that have large GSA contracts and subcontracting plans.

Is there any system for monitoring how well large prime contractors meet their subcontracting goals?

Yes. Large prime contractors are required to submit annual reports documenting good faith efforts to meet their subcontracting goals. If a report, as well as a thorough follow-up investigation, indicates that a contractor is not making a good faith effort, the contracting officer may take one of a number of actions. These possible actions include withholding payment until the contractor comes into compliance with the subcontracting plan, terminating a contract on the grounds of default, and charging the contractor monetary damages.

Does the location of my business affect my ability to compete for GSA contracts?

It depends on the solicitation. Solicitations for repair and maintenance and small construction jobs are usually limited to the geographic area needing the service. Others, such as solicitations for *GSA Supply Catalog* items and for large building projects, are open to vendors throughout the United States. In addition, FSS Acquisition Centers handle procurement of the products and services for which they are responsible.

What is GSA Advantage!™?

GSA Advantage!™ is a World Wide Web on-line ordering system that allows agencies to search through all GSA sources of supply and select the item that is the best value for their requirements, without having to know any complex paperwork or logistics systems. The GSA Advantage!™ Internet address is www.fss.gsa.gov/cgi-bin/advantage?11. The Internet e-mail address is GSA.Advantage@gsa.gov.

What benefit is GSA Advantage!™ to my company?

Through GSA Advantage!™, customers will be able to

search for and order products quickly and conveniently, increasing the potential for strong sales. Purchase orders can be submitted to you via electronic data interchange (EDI), resulting in faster order payment.

Will being on a Federal Supply Schedule benefit my company?

Yes, if your company has adequate cash flow, an effective delivery system, and a vigorous marketing program. Being on a Schedule does not guarantee an order. However, Schedules can generate substantial orders for firms that actively market their products or services. Many businesses on Schedule find that marketing requires catalogs, which can involve significant production and printing costs. With GSA Advantage!™ on-line shopping, GSA is moving toward cutting these costs. (See previous two questions.)

Is it possible to be listed on more than one Schedule?

Yes, if you have more than one product or service to sell. Be sure to register with the GSA's Electronic Posting System for each item you sell to receive e-mail notification of opportunities in your areas of interest.

How can electronic data interchange (EDI) help me, and where can I get more information about it?

The Federal Supply Service's EDI system is a computer-to-computer exchange of business documents that lets you do in minutes what otherwise might take days to accomplish. It reduces time spent in preparation, editing, and mailing of forms, invoices, and other paperwork while cutting costs for paper, postage, and clerical help. EDI also gives you greater flexibility in information use, storage, and retrieval.

Are there categories of products or services GSA never buys?

Yes. For example, GSA never buys cattle, insurance, weapons, or weapon systems. However, it does buy many support items for the military, such as paint, hand tools, office supplies, and sandbags.

Does GSA buy specialized equipment and services?

For the most part, no; however, agencies that use specialized items are buyers. For example, the Department of Veterans Affairs buys hospital equipment; the Department of Agriculture buys seeds and fertilizer; and the Department of Defense buys military equipment.

How can I learn more about architect/engineer contracting with GSA and other Federal agencies?

GSA's *Design Excellence Program* booklet gives information on architect/engineer contracting procedures. For a copy or further information on contracting opportunities, contact the U.S. General Services Administration, Public Buildings Service, Design Programs Center (PND), 1800 F Street, NW, Washington, DC 20405, or the Office of Enterprise Development at (202) 501-1021.

When I'm marketing my product or service to GSA, should I start at a Regional Small Business Center or go straight to a contracting office?

Start at a Regional Small Business Center (SBC). Regional SBC business specialists can tell you which GSA contracting offices are most likely to be interested. A specialist can also give you hints on what contracting offices will want to know or have submitted to them.

How can I obtain information about GSA procurements?

You may obtain information about GSA's procurement in the following ways:

- Talk to a Regional Small Business Center specialist;
- Access GSA's Office of Enterprise Development home-page—click on Publications and read *Forecast of GSA Contracting Opportunities* and the *GSA Subcontracting Directory*;
- Access the GSA's Electronic Posting System; and
- Consult both the annual *Federal Procurement Report* and obtain special reports from the Office of Acquisition Policy (see next question).

How can a special report from the Office of Acquisition Policy help me develop a marketing strategy?

The Office of Acquisition Policy can prepare a special report, based on your requirements, to help you identify Government procurement trends, identify competitors, and locate Federal markets for classes of products or services. To send you a special report, the Office must have a written request. You may submit your request to GSA, Government Information Systems Division (MVS), Federal Procurement Data Systems, 7th & D Streets, SW, Room 565, Washington, DC 20407, telephone (202) 401-1529.

Does GSA use specifications and standards adopted by the private sector?

GSA's policy is to adopt the appropriate specifications and standards of nationally recognized technical organizations, whenever appropriate, and to obtain input from these groups and individual firms on proposed specifications and standards.

Where can I get copies of specifications and standards?

Most solicitations will say where to obtain copies. You may also get copies from the purchasing office that issued the solicitation. Copies of Federal specifications and standards that are not related to a particular solicitation may be purchased from:

Federal Supply Service Bureau
Specification Section
470 East L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 8100
Washington, DC 20407
Telephone: (202) 619-8925
FAX: (202) 619-8978

What's the difference between a Federal specification and a standard?

Federal specifications are technical data used to describe Government-unique products or those, which, for reasons of health, safety, or interface requirements must be described in detail or undergo extensive testing. A standard, on the other hand, is a set of criteria used to compare like products or services and ensure that certain quality and performance levels are met.

My contract calls for my company to make an item in accordance with the specification, but I have a way to do the job better for less money. What should I do?

You may contact the contracting officer and present your ideas.

Some of the clauses in my contract seem to be important, but the text of the clauses is missing. What do I do?

When a contract refers to standard clauses listed elsewhere, you still must comply with the clause requirements. The full text of the clauses can be found in the *Federal Acquisition Regulation* or the *General Services Administration Acquisition Regulation*, or you may request a copy of the clauses from the procurement official listed in the solicitation.

How can I find simplified acquisition contracting opportunities at GSA?

Procurements under \$25,000 will require you to do research and engage in direct marketing to GSA offices that buy what you sell. Your first point of contact should be a GSA Regional Small Business Center (SBC). A specialist can advise you on which GSA offices to contact, special GSA programs for small businesses, and the procedures that you must follow.

What procurements under the simplified acquisition procedures are reserved?

Each acquisition of products or services having a value over \$2,500 but not over \$100,000, is automatically reserved exclusively for small business concerns and is set aside, unless the contracting officer determines there is not a reasonable expectation of obtaining offers from two or more responsible small businesses.

Are small private companies the only sources for purchases under the simplified acquisition threshold?

No. All Government contracting officers must use mandatory/required sources of supply for some types of items

before soliciting outside quotations. Those mandatory sources include Federal Prison Industries (UNICOR), National Industries for the Blind (NIB), and National Industries for the Severely Handicapped (NISH). Many requirements are filled as delivery orders against Federal Supply Schedules or other established contracts. Also, purchases may be made with any firm if there is no reasonable expectation of obtaining quotations from two or more responsible small businesses.

Can dealers compete successfully against manufacturers for supply contracts under simplified acquisition procedures?

Yes, they can, provided the products or services that small business dealers offer are their own or those of another small business.

Is there a limit on the dollar amount of sealed bid purchases?

No, but generally the sealed bid procedure is not used for purchases under \$100,000.

What should I do when an IEB is unclear?

Call the contracting officer named in the solicitation. If you have trouble getting answers to your questions, contact a Regional Small Business Center.

What should I do if I feel I can't meet the requirements stated or cited in a solicitation?

Do not bid.

What should I do if after I carefully check and submit my bid, I discover that it contains an error?

Contact the contracting officer. If you discover the error before the bid opening, you can modify your bid by written or telegraphic notice; the notice must be received in the bid opening office designated in the "Invitation for Bids" no later than the exact time set for opening of bids. If you discover the error after the opening of bids but prior to award, and the error is an obvious mistake in typing or computation, there are procedures that may allow correction of the

bid. If the error is more serious, and you're unable to substantiate the mistake, the manner in which it occurred, and the bid you intended to make, then you may not be allowed to change the bid price.

What if I feel I can meet most, but not all, of the requirements of a solicitation?

You can submit an offer and hope to resolve the problem during negotiation. However, you'll probably not want to risk your time and effort unless the offer is strong enough to compensate for your inability to meet all aspects of the requirement.

Can I get a copy of other firms' offers during negotiations?

No. Offers submitted in response to a solicitation are kept confidential. However, after the contract is awarded, you may be told the number of offers solicited, the number of offers received, the name and address of each firm receiving an award, the quantities and prices of each award, and, in general terms, the reason your proposal was not accepted. You may request a meeting with the contracting officer to discuss your proposal. These meetings are called "debriefings." Debriefing information includes GSA's evaluation of the weak or deficient factors in your proposal but will not compare your proposal with other offerors' proposals.

Can I submit my advertising material as an unsolicited proposal?

No. Rules governing unsolicited proposals specifically exclude advertising material and commercial product offers. An unsolicited proposal is one that has not been sought by the Government. The Government may accept an unsolicited proposal that demonstrates a unique or innovative concept not otherwise available. However, GSA is not responsible for costs incurred in proposal preparation. Therefore, before starting, you would be wise to consult with appropriate agency officials. A GSA Regional Small Business Centers (listed in chapter 4) can direct you to the GSA office that purchases the type of product or service you wish to offer.

Are RFP's always in writing?

No. In emergency situations, GSA may use oral solici-

tions. Sometimes, when competition is restricted (such as when a purchase must be made from a particular source), a letter RFP is used. Facsimile RFP's are used by some agencies. Eventually, most RFP's and offers will be made via electronic commerce.

I don't have a computer. Will I still be able to participate in GSA contracts?

Yes, but your competitors will have several advantages over you, such as knowing about opportunities sooner, receiving RFP's faster, submitting offers more easily, and having access to more information about contracting.

Whom should I contact if GSA doesn't live up to its obligations under the Prompt Payment Act?

You should contact the contracting officer, a Regional Small Business Center representative, or the Office of Enterprise Development.

What can I do to increase my chances of being paid on time?

Read the contract instructions on submitting invoices and double check your invoice and other required documents to see that they are filled in correctly and addressed to the right office. They should also contain the accounting control transaction (ACT) number and the order number or contract number. The ACT number is particularly important because the finance office uses it to track payments.

If my company is awarded a Schedule contract, to whom do I deliver?

A Schedule contract does not directly call for delivery of products or services. It is a way for agencies, including GSA, to easily order the items on the Schedule. If your company has been awarded a Schedule contract, you must continue to market your products and services to Government offices and encourage them to place orders with your company. When you receive an order, you will deliver directly to the agency that placed the order.



OFFICE OF ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT