



USDA FSSI Office Supply BPA Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. Who are the BPA's with? How do we contact them? What supplies does each of them carry?

Please view the documentation provided on the USDA Acquisition Toolkit website:

<http://www.dm.usda.gov/procurement/toolkit/orderingtools.htm> or visit the following link to see a list of vendors: <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/141857>

2. Is it really cheaper? Historically, BPA options have NOT been the cheapest ones available on GSA Advantage.

The FSSI Office Supply BPAs are designed to leverage the total Government spend. As more agencies use them, volume discounts are hit, driving the prices even lower. While prices of individual products constantly vary, overall the prices average 19% off of the GSA Schedule prices. Also, the GSA schedule prices average 40% off of retail pricing. Agencies will obtain spend data to help keep prices down in the future. Unlike buying office supplies retail, you can be assured you are not paying sales tax. By using your GSA SmartPay card, you'll automatically get these prices and your agency will even credit card refunds in the process.

3. Were the BPA awardees thoroughly vetted?

The FSSI Office supply BPAs were competed.

4. What constitutes an "office supply"? There is a grey area about what is covered by this Advisory. Are cleaning supplies considered office supplies?

Outside of BPA:

Janitorial Supplies

Break room Supply

Furniture

IT

5. Do the BPA's and AbilityOne meet my needs? Some items that I need to order are unavailable through either channel. Can I procure those items?

The FSSI Office Supply BPA and PaperClips, Etc. store should meet your needs, however if they do not you may procure elsewhere.

6. Has the USDA-wide BPA with OfficeMax expired?

Yes.



7. What if I do not meet the minimum order requirement on USDA/GSA Advantage?

If you do not meet the minimum order requirement to purchase through the USDA or GSA Advantage website you may order directly from the vendor and still get the FSSI Office Supply BPA savings.

8. How do I contact the vendors directly?

Please see the following link for a list of vendor's and their contact information:

<http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/141857>

9. I keep seeing language mentioning convenience fees if I do not meet the minimum \$50/\$100 requirements. How will this save the government money?

Most vendors have waived the convenience fee for ordering under the minimum requirement due to the kickback from agencies, however not all vendors have.

10. Do the FSSI BPAs have to be used for orders below the minimum ordering threshold? Field offices routinely have needs for small quantities and do not want to waste funding on convenience charges.

Yes, the FSSI Office supply BPA has to be used below the mandatory minimums. The goal of all agencies should be to try to consolidate their buys instead of buying just a few items at a time – which in turn will provide overall savings. OMB's goal, which USDA supports, is to work on the overall savings across government.

11. I have had a government account with Office Depot for several years through a catalog. Can I still use that government account number to order supplies? In the past, they have always given me the discounted government prices and not the ones in the catalogue.

If you use your purchase card, you should receive the discounted price no matter how you order. However, if you have a point of contact or you are buying over the phone, tell them that you would like to buy under "The FSSI Office Supply BPA". You should use the vendor's website for government ordering.

12. Should we buy AbilityOne products over the BPAs items?

All vendors on the FSSI Office Supply BPA have been certified AbilityOne sellers.

13. What if the BPA's prices are higher than commercial vendors? Can we purchase from commercial vendors or do we still need to buy from the BPA?

Ordering from the FSSI Office supply BPA or USDA's PaperClips, Etc. store is mandatory. The issue that some commercial vendors listed on GSA's Advantage site have lower prices than the



FSSI Office Supply BPA prices has been brought to GSA's attention. They are looking into this issue and have stated that this should not be the case; the FSSI Office Supply BPA should most always be lower. If notified, GSA will address the pricing with the vendors. GSA Customer Service can be contacted at (800) 488-3111.

14. I have just read AGAR Advisory No. 97 and I am trying to understand where FSSI BPAs fit in the list for FAR 8.002 Priorities for use of Government Supply Sources?

All vendors on the FSSI Office Supply BPA have been AbilityOne certified/have agreed to sell AbilityOne products which allows the FSSI Office Supply BPA to coincide with FAR 8.002, specifically section (1)(iv).

15. Mandatory use of the FSSI BPAs contradicts the answer to FAQ #15 at <http://www.dm.usda.gov/procurement/toolkit/FSSIOfficeSupplyBPAsFAQs.pdf>. Can AGAR Advisory 97 be revised to change mandatory use to suggested use based on situational circumstances?

There is no contradiction here. GSA cannot make things mandatory for our agency. USDA made it mandatory and released policy to that effect.

16. I have vendors here in my area that could be placed on the FSSI BPA list of office suppliers. Some are already GSA advantage suppliers. Some are not. I would like to try and get them onto the FSSI BPA list for office supplies.

At this time GSA cannot add vendors to the FSSI Office Supply BPA pool of vendors.

17. Most of the vendors are in the Midwest or east coast. We are trying to be cost effective here in the Alaska region, but paying extra shipping costs, will not save the government money.

"Pool 2 vendors are required to ship OCONUS and international, they are EZ Print, Staples and Office Depot. Please be advised that all the vendors ship nationwide for the same price, no matter where they are located. However there can be additional fees for OCONUS/International shipping.

Another solution is that Office Depot has a retail store location in Alaska can follow the following procedures:

Office Depot retail stores that operate in the remote areas do offer delivery services. The delivery service will encompass delivery location in a 50 mile radius from these retail locations. Typically these areas are included in the next-business day model. The pricing is the same as in OCONUS.

I would suggest to an end user that operates in these remote locations that they send an email to fssi@officedepot.com with the following information. This will ensure that when shopping on-line they are only seeing what is available at that remote location for delivery.



Agency Name, customer number (if previously established), along with complete contact information.”

** Response Provided by Judy B. Poskanzer, GSA

18. Can we purchase in the store from Staples and Office Depot, or do we have to go through the BPA?

If you look at the Fact Sheet located on the Acquisition Toolkit website (<http://www.dm.usda.gov/procurement/toolkit/orderingtools.htm>), the last paragraph states that starting in January you can obtain BPA prices at retail locations. It may be beneficial to give the vendor a call to make certain this is the case.

19. State Offices are using FEDSTRIP and GSA Global Supply—is that no longer acceptable?

Per the policy, the 15 FSSI Office Supply BPA vendors and the PaperClips, Etc. store are the mandatory sources for office supplies. The state offices can continue to patronize those other vendors for items that are not considered to be Office Supplies.

20. Non FSSI-BPA GSA vendors are calling RD procurement offices offering lower prices. Can we use them?

No.

21. The GSA Advantage site is very slow or has timed out.

Please contact the GSA Customer Service at (800) 488-3111 for this or any other GSA Advantage website technical questions.

22. Our previous way to procure items was utilizing GSA Advantage in the past; we ordered the supplies via Fedstrip, because it simplified the process and excluded AMD and IAS procedures, to preclude time delays, we were using NSN's and Global Supply items. Does that meet the AGAR-FSSI standards?

If you use the FSSI option under GSA/USDA Advantage (which means you procure the items from one of the 15 vendors under the FSSI Office Supply BPA), you are compliant with the policy.

23. I have a level one warrant Contracting Officer. Can I procure up to \$25,000 of office products from one of the three vendors on the FSSI BPA list, and that will suffice? Can I just input it via GSA Advantage; even though it exceeds the micro-purchase limit, as long as I have budget/funding approval, and stay within my warranted limit, \$25K for payment purposes?

You can buy as many items as you'd like if it is within the purchaser's contracting authority/warrant limits. Please note that there are three pools of vendors but there are actually 15 total vendors.



- 24. Within each group of companies on the list, are we still supposed to use the FAR buying precedence; i.e. SDVOSB or 8A's first, over the larger companies or has that policy changed? It seems a little ambiguous; please clarify.**

We have not stipulated that you must favor one set of vendors over the others in the policy. Because all of the vendors are AbilityOne certified, we are comfortable that we are meeting the FAR requirements as the office supplies are all on the procurement list which has to be obtained from AbilityOne certified vendors. To provide for some level of flexibility, we only ask that you procure the items from the vendors under the FSSI Office Supply BPA.

- 25. Other than the E-buy is that all that is required for competition over the micro-purchase limit; because we are using the Multiple Award Schedule (MAS) in GSA, and therefore we have already met the qualifications; i.e. for competition purposes?**

If you procure from one of the vendors under the FSSI Office Supply BPA, the competition requirement has been satisfied.

- 26. Is there a maximum threshold per Agency; per each BPA/vendor? For example all of our 2,400 county and state offices were purchase from just your three sources; USDA alone could easily generate or exceed \$1 million in buys for each BPA, or are the limits on the BPA's, only a single purchase/maximum limit? What if FSA chooses to buy in bulk? Since we purchase IT supplies for the entire KCMO complex; can we procure from a single source one, then would the \$150K limit apply for the BPA?**

Please note that IT does not fall under the FSSI Office Supply BPA AGAR Advisory. Information technology, Office Furniture and Janitorial supplies are all outside of the scope of the BPA. USDA is not aware of any maximum threshold per vendor. GSA stated that for orders exceeding \$100,000, the agency should try to achieve additional discounts if they are with one vendor.

- 27. When using the Smart Card for payment purposes, what is the percentage of credit our Agency will actually see, 1-2%?**

It is impossible to break out that percentage as the rebates are not broken out by agency contribution.

- 28. Are other USDA Contracting Officers and personnel moving in the same direction as the AGAR states, "Mandatory", since it is already in effect?**

They should be. It has been mandatory for a while now.

- 29. Delivery time for the toner has been up to 3 weeks - can we go to our local/favorite vendor in a short turnaround situation?**

There is no local purchasing policy. USDA has opted into the FSSI Office Supply BPA to support the government's strategic sourcing initiative. Vendors on the FSSI Office Supply BPA that have stores in the area can be patronized but the BPA is mandatory.



30. Do cardholders need to rotate sources?

Cardholders do not need to rotate sources. GSA suggested that if personnel are consistently going with one vendor and are making large orders over \$100,000 they should try to negotiate a better deal with that vendor. Other than that no rotation or further competition is needed.

31. Can toner be purchased from a pool 1 or 2 vendor?

Yes toner can be purchased from any vendor on the FSSI Office Supply BPA.

32. Are there any restrictions to using pool 2 large vendors?

There are no restrictions. Since all 15 vendors agreed to be AbilityOne certified, USDA feels this meets the FAR requirements about buying precedence.

33. Could these minimum order requirements be removed from the BPAs? If not, could the USDA Advantage.gov system be upgraded to add the appropriate charge when you are not able to meet the minimum order requirements?

Unfortunately the \$100 minimum requirement for USDA/GSA Advantage is not something that the USDA Procurement Policy Division (PPD) can change. This must be determined by GSA and was brought to their attention and they were looking into seeing what the level of effort would be to make that change.

34. I've been called from a couple of GSA vendors that are not on the FSSI BPAs. I told them that we must follow AGAR Advisory No. 97 and purchase from the FSSI BPAs. Both of these vendors told me that I could still purchase from them if my order was under \$3,000 and they had lower pricing on the same item.

This is not so. USDA personnel may only purchase office supplies through the 15 vendors on the FSSI Office Supply BPA or the PaperClips, Etc. store.

35. I have been getting emails and calls from companies claiming they are a part of Independent Stationers Inc. Is this legitimate?

Independent Stationers Inc. is a cooperative made up of at least 100 independent vendors. You can find the list of those vendors on the Independent Stationers Inc. website at <http://www.isgroup.org/public/gsearch/search.asp>.