

What is category management?

Category management organizes products and services into logical groupings so the government can buy more like a single enterprise. It is a strategic and systematic approach to purchasing that is widely used in the private sector. Ten government-wide categories of commonly purchased goods and services have been created for the federal government.

What are key benefits of category management?

Industry and government will both benefit from the elimination of redundant acquisitions and contracts, and a streamlining of the procurement workflow. Category management will also reduce the burden industry incurs in doing business with the government today. Fewer duplicative contracts will decrease bid, proposal, and contract administration costs.

Isn't this the same as strategic sourcing?

Category management is a broader concept that encompasses strategic sourcing as one of its execution options. Category management is about optimizing ALL of the acquisition vehicles, processes and knowledge available to best address agencies needs and generate savings. The Federal Strategic Sourcing Initiatives (FSSI) is just one strategy that can be utilized. Other strategies include demand management, supplier engagement, and development of shared services.

Will category management hurt small business?

Category management will not change the federal government's commitment to meeting small business goals. Maintaining or improving small business participation will continue to be a high priority, and is one of the key metrics that OMB and GSA use in measuring the success of the program. In fact, category management will have an equalizing effect for small and large vendors because they will be included in the "hallways" where customers can find the products and services that they need, regardless of business size.

Won't small businesses be harder to find in category "hallways"?

Federal acquisition professionals will access category "hallways" through the Acquisition Gateway, a web portal that serves as the category management customer interface. Like aisles in a grocery store, category hallways will feature products and services from small and large businesses alike. The hallways allow government agencies to more easily compare products and services across vendors.

Will category management make it difficult for small business to compete on price?

Category management emphasizes the sharing of best practices that will aid the acquisition professional in their critical decision making. These best practices will clearly describe the appropriate acquisition strategy to use in order to achieve the goals. While price will likely continue to be an important factor in how contracts are awarded, category management is solution neutral. Buyers will continue to focus on myriad factors, including quality, value, and a solution that best fits their agency's needs.

Will my company's pricing be visible to other companies?

Industry cannot access secure portions of the Gateway, such as prices paid. Companies are not able to see competitive pricing information.

Can large businesses position themselves more favorably in the hallways?

Pricing and features cannot be compared vendor-to-vendor so companies are not able to put themselves "front and center" in a hallway. In addition, procurements cannot be performed on the Gateway so companies do not need to "position" or "highlight" themselves to be found.

Can I access the Acquisition Gateway?

Industry will have access to the Gateway in early FY16. In the interim, please visit the site (<https://hallways.cap.gsa.gov/>) and register to receive a login. Once logged in, the site will provide more detailed information, such as FAQs and system updates. Stakeholder input is an essential element in developing the Gateway. We welcome all comments at hallways_contribute@gsa.gov

Are federal agencies required to use FSSI?

Government-wide use of FSSI is not mandatory, although some agencies are more inclined to use FSSI and some have instituted mandatory use policies to support FSSI (such as Veterans Affairs).

Does FSSI direct government spend to large businesses, taking away opportunities from smaller ones?

FSSI, in fact, has a mandate to increase the number of small business contracts and, in some instances, small businesses make up the majority of spend in certain categories (e.g., office supplies). OS3, for example, has 23 small business and one large business provider. It is also important to note that the General Services Administration (GSA) requires each large FSSI vendor to have a small business subcontracting plan in place. In addition, FSSI is just one piece of the federal acquisition landscape. GSA awards many contracts to small businesses and provides opportunity for participation across an array of procurement vehicles.

Does FSSI address provisions from the Small Business Jobs Act of 2010?

Per the Small Business Act of 2010, GSA performs extensive market research and takes active steps to include small businesses, with the overwhelming majority of awards being reserved for small businesses when appropriate. On recent FSSI awards, our acquisition strategy was tailored to optimize small business participation through category alignment, small business set-asides, and use of waiver to the non-manufacturing rule to ensure maximum small business opportunity. On all new FSSI solicitations, GSA's acquisition team works directly with the small business community through online discussions, in-person listening sessions, and partnering sessions. In almost all instances, based on comments, suggested changes, and information shared by small businesses GSA does make adjustments to the program. (For example: increasing the number of awardees, adding additional spots for small business awards, reducing some of the data-reporting requirements, removing requirements that would increase costs leading to increased prices.)

Are small office supply businesses hurt by FSSI?

Of the 24 suppliers awarded a spot on OS3, 23 are small businesses, and overall dollars going to small business has increased from 67% to over 88% via FSSI. As with all FSSI solutions, GSA continues to monitor the impact of federal acquisitions on the small business community. As the office supply solution has matured and evolved, GSA addressed the needs of small businesses by adding an "on ramp" during open season, increasing the number of awards from 15 to 24 vendors.

How is FSSI different from category management? Are they the same?

Category management is a broader concept that encompasses strategic sourcing as one of its execution options. Category management optimizes ALL acquisition vehicles, processes and knowledge available to best address agencies needs and generate savings. FSSI is just one strategy that can be utilized.