



**General Services Administration**  
**Vendor Communication Plan**  
**for GSA's Acquisition Community**

October 31, 2011

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# Introduction

Communicating with potential vendors early and often during the acquisition process can help the Government gain better product and service information and improve the quality of market research efforts. The Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) 15.201<sup>1</sup> encourages exchanges between the Government and interested parties, from the earliest identification of a requirement through receipt of proposals, and they should be conducted in a fair and transparent manner. Such exchanges may include industry or small business conferences, public hearings, and one-on-one meetings with potential offerors. Agency officials are urged to engage with vendors, particularly during the pre-solicitation phase and for high dollar, more complex procurements, so long as sensitive or proprietary information is protected on behalf of the Government and vendors alike. Exchanges with the interested parties can be very beneficial and result in:

- Greater clarity of agency requirements;
- Increased awareness of current industry products and services;
- Better business decisions made by vendors about their private sector investments in products or services offered to the agency;
- Increased competition, including greater use of small businesses in subcontracting opportunities;
- Greater use of small business set asides;
- More favorable pricing;
- Increased cost savings;
- More realistic expectations about marketplace capabilities;
- Higher quality contract deliverables; and
- Fewer performance problems.

In February 2011, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) issued a memorandum, "Myth-Busting": Addressing Misconceptions to Improve Communication with Industry during the Acquisition Process<sup>2</sup>, which includes objectives for reducing barriers and encouraging vendor engagement throughout the acquisition process. The OFPP guidance requires the General Services Administration (GSA) and other Federal agencies to develop a high-level vendor communication plan outlining efforts to reduce unnecessary barriers, publicize communication opportunities, and prioritize engagement opportunities for high-risk, complex programs or those that fail to attract new vendors during re-competitions. This document contains GSA's vendor communication plan.

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Acquisition Regulation 15.201 "Exchanges with Industry Before Receipt of Proposals"; <https://www.acquisition.gov/far/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> "Myth-Busting": Addressing Misconceptions to Improve Communication with Industry during the Acquisition Process" Office of Federal Procurement Policy, Memorandum for Chief Acquisition Officers, Senior Procurement Executives, and Chief Information Officers, February 2, 2011

## 1. Statement of Agency Commitment

GSA's mission is to help its customers deliver exceptional results in support of their missions. To operate effectively, GSA partners with industry to provide sound solutions in support of the GSA mission and the missions of the customers served by GSA. Effective communication and collaboration with industry is a key component to GSA's success. As in the past, now, and moving forward, GSA remains committed to constructive communication with the vendor community. By doing so, GSA has positioned itself to obtain and deliver high value services and solutions across the Federal Government. The following items highlight the forms of engagement industry can expect from GSA:

- Communicating with the vendor community early and frequently in the acquisition process;
- Including small businesses and subgroups of small businesses in these communications;
- Including vendors that acquisition professionals have not worked with in the past to promote a continually growing base of vendors;
- Identifying those procurements which are likely to involve opportunity for additional communication with industry as part of the published procurement forecast; and
- Protecting non-public information including vendor's confidential information and the agency's source selection information, and to ensure compliance with all applicable ethics standards.

GSA's commitment to reducing barriers and encouraging vendor engagement throughout the acquisition process aligns with the Administrator's Strategic Goals for GSA<sup>3</sup>:

- **Innovation** - GSA will be an innovation engine for the government. GSA will use its governmentwide perspective and expertise, centralized procurement and property management role, and unique statutory authorities to take chances that others are not positioned to take. GSA will test innovative ideas within its own operations and offer those solutions to other agencies through its governmentwide contracting and policy-making authorities.
- **Customer Intimacy** - GSA will seek an intimate understanding of and resonance with its customers in order to serve with integrity, creativity, and responsibility. GSA will develop strategic partnerships with industry and with other federal agencies to develop new and innovative tools for a more effective government.
- **Operational Excellence** - GSA strives for performance excellence, continuous improvement, and the elimination of waste in all of its operations. GSA is committed to developing the acquisition workforce and deploying electronic tools to support the reform of federal contracting, and originating and fine-tuning the governmentwide policies necessary for a truly modern federal government.

## 2. Senior Agency Official Responsible for Promoting Engagement

GSA is taking a comprehensive approach and establishing a positive "tone at the top" for reducing barriers and engaging industry during the acquisition process. The GSA Chief Acquisition Officer (CAO), Dr. Mindy Connolly will champion GSA's industry engagement efforts and work closely with the Senior Procurement Executive (SPE), Mr. Joseph Neurauter.

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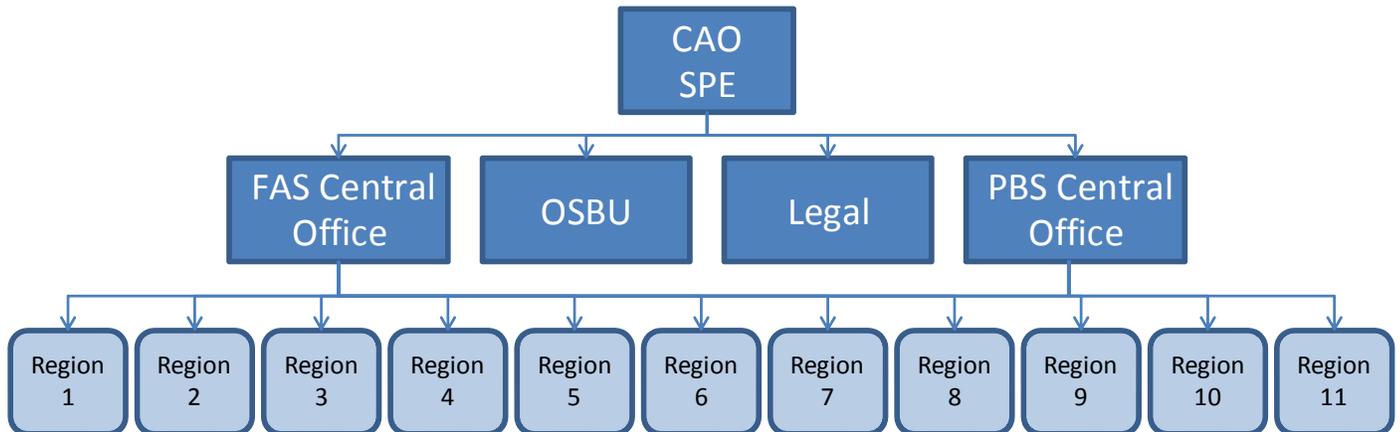
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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/209773>

## GSA's Vendor Communication Plan

The Federal Acquisition Service (FAS) and Public Buildings Service (PBS) Commissioners will drive the initiative to the Regions through the Regional Directors, Regional Commissioners and their staffs, to include acquisition leaders. **Figure 1** below depicts this leadership structure.



**Figure 1: GSA Leadership Involvement for Promoting Vendor Engagement**

### 3. Brief Description of Efforts Undertaken or Planned to Reduce Barriers and Promote Engagement

GSA will continue to build on its success engaging with industry and reducing barriers to industry involvement. Potential barriers to effective vendor engagement along with GSA initiatives used to reduce those barriers are discussed below.

#### Identifying Potential Barriers

GSA recognizes that partnering with industry is a critical component to successfully meeting the challenges associated with supporting Federal agencies. To effectively partner with industry, GSA must overcome internal and external barriers that exist in the Federal contracting marketplace. Examples of these barriers may include:

- Overly restrictive statements of work (SOW) and/or evaluation criteria;
- Vendor restrictions to accessing opportunities advertised in solicitation announcement systems such as FedBizOpps;
- Difficulty with maintaining lines of communications with small businesses and subgroups of small businesses;
- Difficulty involving vendors in solicitations that the agency has not worked with in the past;
- Short proposal response times; and
- Insufficient market research.

#### Reducing Barriers through GSA Initiatives

GSA works to reduce these barriers and promote vendor engagement at various levels of the organization and through partnerships with other Federal agencies, such as the Small Business Administration (SBA), and regional and local organizations and industry associations. Within GSA, FAS, PBS, the Office of Small Business Utilization (OSBU), and the Regions sponsor a variety of vendor outreach activities. Many initiatives are already in place and have been working effectively for a period of time. Examples of these on-going initiatives include the following:

- The annual GSA Expo provides a large vendor outreach opportunity for GSA (e.g., the FY 2011 GSA Expo included 3,063 vendor attendees, 660 exhibitor booths, and 6,718 total attendees).
- GSA developed the "Pathway to Success", a web-based program to assist vendors with getting on GSA Schedules.
- GSA offers one-on-one "counseling" sessions with vendors to discuss the process for getting on GSA Schedules, conducting business with the Federal government, and the proposal response process.
- GSA offers New Contractor Orientation seminars to assist vendors in understanding processes, contract requirements, and resources available to be successful after award.

- GSA provides industry with quarterly updates related to GSA contracts through the "GSA Steps" newsletter.
- GSA participates in the development of the OFPP sponsored Community of Practice to share information and strategies on engaging industry during the acquisition process.
- PBS Industry Relations Division (IRD) offers webinars, in-person training, and one-on-one counseling with vendors who seek to do business with PBS to explain how PBS buys the products and services it needs.
- PBS IRD through its LinkedIn group provides a forum for interaction between PBS and industry, where vendors and Industry Relations Managers (IRMs) discuss industry and federal initiatives, lessons learned, and how to improve the process.
- PBS IRD hosts roundtables and, when the budget permits, attends large vendor conventions. IRD also hosts listening sessions at the National level.
- OSBU annually publishes the *Doing Business with GSA* guide<sup>4</sup> which provides guidance and information on resources available to small businesses, information on forecasts of contracting opportunities, mentor-protégé program, training, and information on subcontracting opportunities with GSA prime contractors.
- OSBU provides training on GSA's mentor-protégé program.
- OSBU sponsored its inaugural Small Business Symposium, which provided 400 small businesses an opportunity to engage directly with GSA and other Government agency buyers, to ask questions, and to connect with specific procurements.
- Regions participate in a variety of local and regional small business outreach events that are sponsored by various local associations.

### Reducing Barriers through Competition Advocates

GSA further promotes a culture of openness by partnering with industry during the acquisition process and by encouraging competition across GSA through a network of Competition Advocates. Competition Advocates are in offices across GSA: in the GSA Central Office, at the GSA National level, and in each Region, and they work with managers, contracting officers (COs), acquisition teams, and GSA's Small Business Utilization specialists to promote competition throughout the agency. This network assists Regional offices with utilizing competitive procedures to the greatest extent possible, adhering to Competition in Contracting Act (CICA) requirements, and adequately discharging the duties of competition advocates as described in the FAR.

### Reducing Barriers through E-Government (E-Gov) Initiatives

GSA supports OMB's E-Gov initiatives for using Internet-based (online) technologies to simplify the interactions between citizens and businesses and the Federal Government which save taxpayer dollars and streamline citizen participation. GSA currently leverages several on-line tools throughout the acquisition process to reduce barriers and promote vendor engagement, including APPS.gov NOW, which is available at <http://citizen.apps.gov>. This website allows for blogs and wikis. Over 400 Federal Government employees and over 70 Federal agencies have registered at this website.

Another example is the **BetterBuy Project** (a joint initiative of the National Academy of Public Administration, the American Council for Technology-Industry Advisory Council, and GSA) which offers an online public dialog that solicits input on ways to improve government acquisitions. Relying heavily on social media tools to reach a wider audience, the **BetterBuy Project** receives innovative ideas and approaches from citizens outside of the traditional acquisition community as well as from vendors and GSA customers. GSA contributes to the **BetterBuy Blog** and maintains a GSA **BetterBuy Wiki** page. With these tools, GSA solicits and collects information during the pre-contract-award stages to improve planned acquisitions. The information obtained provides GSA with better market research which leads to improved requirements and more innovative solutions. Engaging with industry early in the acquisition process also increases the number of interested bidders and proposed solutions which provides GSA with better value.

GSA will participate in other online collaboration sites such as [BetterGovernmentIT.org](http://BetterGovernmentIT.org) to discuss strategies for effectively partnering with industry during the acquisition process.

GSA manages the E-Gov initiative, **Integrated Acquisition Environment (IAE)** which facilitates every phase of the acquisition lifecycle, from market research to contract administration. IAE facilitates and supports cost-effective acquisition of goods and services by agencies. The IAE initiative provides common acquisition functions and shared services that benefit all agencies, such as the maintenance of information about business-partner organizations (e.g.,

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.gsa.gov/graphics/staffoffices/DoingBusiness\\_GSA\\_5-08-2011.pdf](http://www.gsa.gov/graphics/staffoffices/DoingBusiness_GSA_5-08-2011.pdf)

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banking, certifications, business types, capabilities, and performance). IAE provides benefits to the government and business-partner organizations by facilitating cross-agency coordination that helps to improve the government's buying power, while providing business partners maximum visibility and transparency into the process. IAE provides various services, tools and capabilities that can be leveraged by the acquisition communities' buyers and sellers to conduct business across the Federal Government space. The IAE systems include:

IAE System	Description
FedBizOpps (FBO)	FBO is the single government point-of-entry for posting solicitations over \$25,000, allowing commercial business suppliers to search, monitor and retrieve opportunities in federal government markets.
Wage Determinations On-Line (WDOL)	WDOL is a governmentwide web site that makes Service Contract Act (SCA) and Davis-Bacon (DBA) wage determinations easily accessible by the contracting community.
Central Contractor Registration (CCR)	Vendors wanting to do business with the government are required to register in CCR and revalidate annually. This provides payment information, validates Small Business Administration certifications as small, disadvantaged, 8(a), or HUBZone businesses, calculates business size, and validates taxpayer IDs with the Internal Revenue Service.
Online Representations and Certifications Application (ORCA)	ORCA is a web-based application allows vendors to enter representations and certifications once for use on all federal contracts. Vendors update these representations and certifications annually.
Past Performance Information Retrieval System (PPIRS)	PPIRS is a web-enabled governmentwide application where the Federal acquisition community can access timely and pertinent contractor past performance information.
Excluded Parties List System (EPLS)	EPLS is a web-based system that identifies parties excluded from receiving Federal contracts and certain subcontracts. Also identified are individuals excluded from certain types of Federal financial and non-financial assistance, including benefits.
Federal Procurement Data System - Next Generation (FPDS-NG)	FPDS-NG is an online repository that provides data on all federal contract actions over \$3,000.
Electronic Subcontracting Reporting System (eSRS)	eSRS is designed for prime contractors to report accomplishments toward subcontracting goals required by their contract.

Use of the IAE common functions and services allows agencies to focus on agency-specific needs such as strategy, operations, and management while leveraging shared services for common functions. Furthermore, use of a governmentwide business focused service environment reduces funding and resources for technical services and support for acquisition systems originally housed by individual agencies.

## 4. Increasing Vendor Input during the Pre-Award Phase of Acquisitions

Communicating early in the acquisition process with potential offerors enhances GSA's ability to procure quality supplies and services for customers more efficiently and promote more competition. While GSA does not define a minimum dollar threshold for including comprehensive vendor engagement during the acquisition process, GSA acquisition professionals are encouraged to (and often do) engage industry for a wide range of procurement types and sizes, especially:

- Procurements with new requirements;
- Procurements that received limited responses to previous solicitations;
- High risk procurements;
- Complex and large scale procurements; and
- Re-competitions.

As stated in the sections above, GSA holds industry days, pre-solicitation conferences, or pre-proposal conferences as necessary and allows for reasonable engagement with vendors. GSA COs will assess vendor communication needs during acquisition planning and will identify and plan for the following, as applicable:

- Issuing a Sources Sought notice

- Issuing a Request for Information (RFI)
- Online collaboration with interested offerors using Web 2.0 tools
- Industry days, pre-solicitation, or pre-proposal conferences;
- Issuing a draft Request for Proposal (RFP) or draft Statement of Objectives (SOO)
- Allowances for a reasonable amount of one-on-one engagement with vendors; and
- An appropriate amount of time for discussions with vendors during the proposal evaluation process (in accordance with FAR Part 15).

For procurements over the Simplified Acquisition Threshold (SAT), GSA COs will include written justification in the solicitation file if the CO concludes that vendor communication is not required for a particular transaction. The justification will be signed by the Contracting Officer and the Head of Contracting Activity (HCA), and a copy will be forwarded to the Senior Procurement Executive (SPE). Vendor communication is encouraged below the SAT, even if no justification is required. (Reference Attachment A – Justification for Not Communicating with Vendors.) Advance planning will provide GSA with flexibility to raise and resolve important issues and avoid allowing timing constraints from dissuading COs from engaging in vendor discussions when those discussions would benefit GSA or our customers. A template will be developed for this, which is similar to the Attachment A in this document, which will be issued as an Acquisition Letter (AL). Additionally, the AL will define what is considered to be communicating with vendors.

GSA will conduct communication with vendors in a courteous and cohesive manner that honors procurement integrity rules, while capitalizing on the value of frequent and useful dialogue with industry. Internally, GSA will collaborate with the Office of the General Counsel (OGC) to provide guidance, as necessary, regarding the appropriateness of agency engagement opportunities with vendors to provide proper, clear, and consistent communication.

## 5. Publications of Engagement Events

GSA publishes engagement events including, but not limited to: industry days, small business outreach sessions, pre-solicitation conferences, and Request for Proposal (RFP) question and answer sessions. Many of GSA's initiatives are posted on FedBizOpps and are updated regularly.

GSA publishes procurement forecasting in the **GSA Forecast of Contracting Opportunities** which informs vendors of anticipated contracts offered by GSA for the current fiscal year. Forecasted procurements include all acquisitions at or above the \$25,000 threshold anticipated to be awarded to both other than small and small businesses. The **GSA Forecast of Contracting Opportunities** is available through the GSA public website (<http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/101163>) and includes points of contact and contact information for the procurements. Vendors can contact the points of contact directly with questions about upcoming procurements.

GSA uses the following on-line sources to advertise and communicate information about procurements.

- **GSA Advantage!®** - Acts as the online shopping and ordering system for the federal government.
- **eBuy** (Part of GSA Advantage!®) - Allows contractors to submit responses to Request for Quotations (RFQs).
- **eOffer / eMod** - Enables online modification requests for changes to vendor Schedule contracts.
- **FedBizOpps** - Lists government procurement opportunities valued at over \$25,000.
- **Schedule Sales Query** - Provides published sales data regarding Schedule contract sales, Special Item Number sales, and contractors already on Schedules, and assists vendors with assessing the size and potential of their target market.

GSA also provides information on engagement events through other means, including:

- The vendor "Landing Page" (<http://gsa.gov/forbusiness>) accessible through GSA's public website.

- Social networking sites such as Twitter, Linked In, Facebook, and various GSA Blogs, in an effort to reach a broader range of vendors outside the traditional federal procurement advertisement sources.
- A call center (1-866-PBS-VEND) that receives calls, answers questions and refers callers to Subject Matter Experts in FAS, PBS, or the OSBU, for one-on-one support.

## 6. Brief Description of Roles and Responsibilities

As previously stated, the FAR allows for many opportunities for vendor communication. In addition to FAR 15.201, which encourages exchanges between the Government and interested parties, FAR 10.002(b)(2) lists techniques for conducting market research, such as contacting knowledgeable individuals in Government and industry regarding market capabilities to meet requirements, reviewing the results of recent market research undertaken to meet similar or identical requirements, publishing formal requests for information in appropriate technical or scientific journals or business publications, querying the Governmentwide database of contracts and other procurement instruments intended for use by multiple agencies available at [www.contractdirectory.gov/contractdirectory/](http://www.contractdirectory.gov/contractdirectory/) and other Government and commercial databases that provide information relevant to agency acquisitions, participating in interactive, on-line communication among industry, acquisition personnel, and customers, obtaining source lists of similar items from other contracting activities or agencies, trade associations or other sources, reviewing catalogs and other generally available product literature published by manufacturers, distributors, and dealers or available on-line, and conducting interchange meetings or holding presolicitation conferences to involve potential offerors early in the acquisition process.

Continued effective execution of GSA's on-going initiatives to encourage vendor engagement throughout the acquisition process requires a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders involved in the process. The day-to-day roles and responsibilities of acquisition personnel are often documented at the National and Regional level and are tailored to the organization's specific activities and requirements. The documented roles and responsibilities address various acquisition activities that involve vendor engagement. An AL will be issued, which will spell out the vendor communication roles and responsibilities. The AL will include templates.

The roles and responsibilities for the stakeholders involved in GSA's vendor engagement efforts are described below.

Stakeholder	Vendor Communication Roles and Responsibilities
<b>High Level</b>	
CAO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Act as GSA Champion and Senior Agency official responsible for promoting vendor engagement;</li> <li>• Set GSA's vision for reducing barriers and promoting vendor engagement; and</li> <li>• Provide feedback to OFPP on the effectiveness of efforts to encourage industry engagement throughout GSA.</li> </ul>
FAS and PBS Commissioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work in concert with the CAO to implement the plan;</li> <li>• Drive GSA's vendor engagement initiatives to the Regions;</li> <li>• Coordinate Regional vendor engagement initiatives;</li> <li>• Communicate the benefits of engaging industry to GSA acquisition personnel;</li> <li>• Identify objectives for the Regions to use for reporting on the effectiveness of efforts to encourage industry engagement at the Regional level; and</li> <li>• Consolidate feedback from the Regions and provide feedback to the CAO on the effectiveness of efforts to encourage industry engagement.</li> </ul>
PBS IRD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer webinars, in person training, and one on one counseling with vendors who seek to do business with PBS to explain how PBS buys the products and services it needs.</li> <li>• Host "chat sessions" on LinkedIn where vendors and IRMs discuss industry and federal initiatives, lessons learned and how to improve the process.</li> </ul>

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Stakeholder	Vendor Communication Roles and Responsibilities
High Level	
Regional Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take direction from the FAS and PBS Regional Commissioners;</li> <li>• Promote internal training and professional development opportunities for acquisition personnel;</li> <li>• Promote participation in collaboration and outreach initiatives;</li> <li>• Communicate the benefits of engaging industry to GSA acquisition personnel;</li> <li>• Execute vendor engagement initiatives within their specific Regions; and</li> <li>• Provide feedback and report on progress towards achieving objectives to the FAS and PBS Commissioners on the effectiveness of efforts to encourage industry engagement at the Regional level.</li> </ul>
National and Regional OSBU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct outreach with small businesses on doing business with GSA including providing one-on-one counseling and training opportunities for industry;</li> <li>• Assist COs with understanding small business capabilities relative to planned and active procurements;</li> <li>• Publicize small business opportunities through available media outlets such as GSA and governmentwide websites and social media;</li> <li>• Share lessons learned and participate in collaboration and outreach initiatives sponsored by other organizations; and</li> <li>• Partner with other organizations, such as the SBA, for outreach events.</li> <li>• <b>National OSBU Only</b> - Identify and report on progress towards achieving objectives and provide feedback to the CAO on the effectiveness of efforts to encourage industry engagement at the National level.</li> <li>• <b>Regional OSBU Only</b> - Provide feedback to the Regional Directors on the effectiveness of efforts to encourage industry engagement at the Regional level.</li> </ul>

Stakeholder	Vendor Communication Roles and Responsibilities
Operational Level	
COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document the methods to engage with industry in Acquisition Plans;</li> <li>• Participate in vendor engagement and outreach initiatives;</li> <li>• Establish the timing, frequency, and degree of vendor engagement (e.g., industry days and pre-solicitation conferences) consistent with the size and complexity of the acquisition;</li> <li>• Recommend communication methods to the acquisition team;</li> <li>• Post procurement opportunities on acquisition advertisement sites such as FedBizOpps and eBuy; and</li> <li>• Set expectations for Project Managers (PMs), Contracting Officer Technical Representatives (COTRs), Administrative Contracting Officers (ACOs), and Industrial Operations Analysts (IOAs) vendor engagement efforts.</li> </ul>
PMs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confer with the CO early in the acquisition process and inform the CO about the level of vendor engagement needed to help the PM and others conduct effective market research;</li> <li>• Evaluate expected level of competition, assess the need for introducing new entrants to the market, and make recommendations to the CO;</li> <li>• Keep the CO informed of vendor engagement activities; and</li> <li>• Share lessons learned and participate in collaboration and outreach initiatives.</li> </ul>
COTRs, ACOs and IOAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify ways to improve vendor communications, understanding, and compliance with contract requirements after award;</li> <li>• Keep the CO informed of vendor engagement activities;</li> <li>• Remain cautious not to allow communications with the vendor to evolve into unwarranted changes to the contract, which could cost money and time; and</li> <li>• Share lessons learned and participate in collaboration and outreach initiatives.</li> </ul>
General Counsel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage vendor communications to the maximum extent practicable; and</li> <li>• Advise the CO and acquisition team on appropriate vendor communications.</li> </ul>
Ethics Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address vendor communications in annual ethics training; and</li> <li>• Provide clear guidance on permissible and prohibited vendor engagement activities.</li> </ul>

Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participate in GSA sponsored outreach activities;</li><li>• Provide current market information and contribute to collaboration sites to assist GSA with defining solicitation requirements and developing acquisition strategies; and</li><li>• Provide feedback on the effectiveness of GSA vendor engagement initiatives.</li></ul>
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## 7. Training and awareness efforts for employees and contractors

GSA provides a variety of training opportunities for acquisition personnel (internal training) and the vendor community (external training) associated with Federal contracting.

### Internal Training

GSA provides training on competition requirements and practices, including effective communication with the vendor community, and provides acquisition personnel with many opportunities for continuous learning and training. As part of the efforts to improve vendor communications, GSA will communicate the benefits of engaging industry throughout the acquisition process through "GSA Update" daily e-mail messages, internal "InSite" websites, and "All Hands" meetings.

Continuous training helps acquisition personnel to enhance their skill sets and improve operating efficiency. Training opportunities align with the Federal Acquisition Certification (FAC) programs for contracting, COTR, and PMs, which includes guidance on working with and engaging industry during the acquisition process. As part of the Contracting Officer Warrant Program (COWP), GSA acquisition entities monitor compliance with continuous learning requirements for acquisition personnel.

### Information Provided Externally

GSA provides educational information to the vendor community on a variety of topics associated with doing business with GSA, which enhances the vendor base and improves competition. Examples of training available to the vendor community (often free of charge) include (but are not limited to) the following:

- New Contractor Orientation Seminars;
- Small Business Symposium - information on business development and contracting opportunities (conference);
- 8(a) Certification Overview Workshop (conference);
- Understanding the GSA Mentor-Protégé Program (on-line webinar);
- Initiating Partnering Agreements (on-line webinar);
- Sustainability Awareness for Small Business (on-line webinar);
- Six Steps to Marketing for the New Small Business (on-line webinar);
- 2011 Veteran Entrepreneur Training Symposium (conference); and
- Doing Business with GSA (on-line webinar).

## 8. Existing Policy

GSA acquisition personnel follow guidance provided in the FAR regarding permissible communication and interactions with industry during the acquisition process. The GSA Acquisition Manual (GSAM) provides additional guidance for industry communication. The policies listed below are available to GSA personnel and the public on GSA's public website at the following links:

### Policy Links and Other Related Links

- GSAM - <https://www.acquisition.gov/gsam/gsam.html>
- FAR - <https://www.acquisition.gov/far/index.html>
- Public Building Service - [www.gsa.gov/pbs](http://www.gsa.gov/pbs)
- Federal Acquisition Service - [www.gsa.gov/fas](http://www.gsa.gov/fas)
- GSA Forecast of Contracting Opportunities - <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/101163>

- BetterBuy Project - [www.betterbuyproject.com](http://www.betterbuyproject.com)
- BetterBuy Blog - [www.blog.betterbuyproject.com](http://www.blog.betterbuyproject.com)
- GSA BetterBuy Wiki - [https://betterbuy.fas.gsa.gov/index.php/Main\\_Page](https://betterbuy.fas.gsa.gov/index.php/Main_Page)
- GSA Vendor Support Center - <https://vsc.gsa.gov>
- How GSA Helps Small Business - <http://gsa.gov/smallbizhelp>
- Integrated Acquisition Environment (IAE) - <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/105036>

## 9. Assessing Communication Plan Effectiveness through Employee and Vendor Feedback

### Short Term Actions

Within six months of finalizing the Vendor Communication Plan, GSA will collect, consolidate, and analyze internal and external stakeholder feedback through the existing feedback mechanisms described below to assess the effectiveness of the Vendor Communication Plan and identify potential enhancements to the on-going communication, outreach, and training initiatives identified in this plan.

Internal Stakeholder Feedback Mechanisms	External Stakeholder Feedback Mechanisms
The CAO receives feedback from the SPE on the effectiveness of efforts to encourage industry engagement at the National level.	COs and COTRs solicit feedback from vendors during active contract periods of performance on the effectiveness of interactions and communications between GSA and the vendor.
The FAS and PBS Commissioners receive feedback from the Regional Directors on the effectiveness of efforts to encourage industry engagement at the Regional level and provide feedback to the SPE.	COs solicit feedback from vendors during procurement debriefing sessions on the solicitation requirements and source selection process.
COs solicit feedback from PMs on the effectiveness of industry engagement during the acquisition process.	Regions and Central Office solicit feedback from industry during Industry Days and Pre-Solicitation Conferences.
OSBUs solicit feedback from COs on the effectiveness of small business capabilities as they relate to specific procurements.	Regions, Central Office, and OSBUs solicit feedback from industry on GSA procurement and communication initiatives through the use of collaboration tools, social media, outreach activities, and during one-on-one counseling sessions.

In addition to collecting and analyzing stakeholder feedback, GSA will proactively monitor and assess the effectiveness of the communication efforts for reducing barriers and encouraging vendor engagement through the following activities.

Responsible Group	Activities
SPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the internal GSA timeline for reporting on the effectiveness of the outreach initiatives.</li> <li>• Consolidates results, analyzes the results, and reports on the effectiveness of outreach initiatives to the CAO.</li> </ul>

## GSA's Vendor Communication Plan

Responsible Group	Activities
FAS and PBS Commissioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify FY 2012 objectives for outreach initiatives. Examples of the types of objectives may include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Number of industry days and pre-solicitation conferences planned;</li> <li>○ Number of outreach events sponsored by the Region/Central Office;</li> <li>○ Number of outreach events sponsored by other organizations in which the Region participates;</li> <li>○ Diversity of vendor participation in Regional-sponsored outreach events; and</li> <li>○ Number and types of communication channels used by the Regions to advertise upcoming and active procurements and outreach initiatives.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Consolidate results, analyze the results, and report on the effectiveness of outreach initiatives to the CAO.</li> </ul>
Regional Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect information for the objectives.</li> <li>• Analyze results and report on the effectiveness of outreach initiatives to the FAS and PBS Commissioners.</li> </ul>
National OSBU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify FY 2012 OSBU objectives for OSBU outreach initiatives.</li> <li>• Collect information for the OSBU objectives.</li> <li>• Analyze results and report on the effectiveness of OSBU outreach initiatives to the CAO.</li> </ul>

### Long Term Plans for Improvement

Although GSA has many on-going initiatives already in place to reduce barriers and encourage vendor engagement, GSA provides the following potential opportunities for improvement which we will consider implementing in the future.

Potential Opportunity for Improvement	Description
Increase coordination among GSA National and Regional OSBU initiatives.	Existing National and Regional OSBU's initiatives are not coordinated, resulting in potential duplicated efforts and inefficiencies. Regional OSBUs report to their respective Regional Directors and not to the National OSBU, making coordination difficult. Increasing coordination should reduce duplicative efforts, increase effectiveness and consistency of OSBU outreach efforts, and potentially reduce overall costs of OSBU related initiatives.
Increase partnering with industry associations.	The level of partnering with Regional and local industry and small and disadvantaged business associations varies among the Regions and the Central Office. Increased partnering provides the Regions and Central Office more opportunities to engage industry, potentially resulting in a broader vendor reach and increased outreach efficiencies.
Issue Acquisition Letters reiterating the acceptable ways GSA acquisition personnel can engage with industry.	The FAR and GSAM provide guidance on permissible communication and interactions with industry during the acquisition process. These documents are voluminous and may be difficult to navigate when searching for guidance regarding specific questions on interacting with industry. Issuing GSA Acquisition Letters specifically related to industry engagement may provide GSA acquisition personnel with a single source for specific and consolidated guidance. The Acquisition Letters may even include "quick reference guidance" with "dos and don'ts" for engaging with industry. Issuing new Acquisition Letters also provides GSA Leadership with an opportunity to reiterate vendor communication guidance and encourage vendor engagement.
Incorporate information in ethics training, regarding the appropriate methods for engaging industry.	Required ethics training typically focuses on impermissible engagement activities with industry (such as Procurement Integrity Act violations) and does little to address permissible activities. Including information on permissible methods for engaging industry in ethics training may provide another outlet for GSA to encourage vendor engagement within the acquisition workforce.

## Appendix A - Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
ACO	Administrative Contracting Officer
BPA	Blanket Purchase Agreement
CAO	Chief Acquisition Officer
CCR	Central Contractor Registration
CICA	Competition in Contracting Act
CO	Contracting Officer
COTR	Contracting Officer's Technical Representative
COWP	Contracting Officer Warrant Program
DBA	Davis-Bacon Act
EPLS	Excluded Parties List System
eSRS	Electronic Subcontracting Reporting System
FAC	Federal Acquisition Certification
FAR	Federal Acquisition Regulation
FAS	Federal Acquisition Service
FBO	FedBizOpps
FPDS-NG	Federal Procurement Data System - Next Generation
FSSI	Federal Strategic Sourcing Initiative
GSA	General Services Administration
GSAM	General Services Administration Acquisition Manual
HUB	Historically Underutilized Business
IAE	Integrated Acquisition Environment
ID/IQ	Indefinite Delivery / Indefinite Quantity
IOA	Industrial Operations Analysts
IRD	Industry Relations Division
IRM	Industry Relations Manager
MAS	Multiple Award Schedules
OFPP	Office of Federal Procurement Policy
OGC	Office of the General Counsel
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
ORCA	Online Representations and Certifications Application
OSBU	Office of Small Business Utilization
PBS	Public Buildings Service
PM	Program Manager
PPIRS	Past Performance Information Retrieval System
RFP	Request for Proposal
RFQ	Request for Quotation
SBA	Small Business Administration
SCA	Service Contract Act
SIN	Special Item Number
SOW	Statement of Work
SPE	Senior Procurement Executive
WDOL	Wage Determinations On-Line

