

Our Guiding Principles for FAS Information Systems

To be successful as an organization, we first require a shared definition of success. This document serves as the starting point for defining success, to ground the fundamental ways we operate within the Office of Systems Management, and to guide how we act as an organization and how we'll hold ourselves accountable.

The Federal Acquisition Service (FAS) delivers diverse services to different parts of the federal government across multiple portfolios. FAS leadership is developing and communicating a shared enterprise vision for the delivery of those services. As the Office of Systems Management, we are responsible for delivering information systems in ways that best support the FAS journey. And across these different types of services, we seek a unified way of describing how we prioritize our efforts and how we align our work.

We interviewed our internal customers, members of our own teams, and external stakeholders—from that research we developed a strong hypothesis on their needs.

That work helped us articulate the following [principles](#) for FAS systems:

- [Reliability is foundational.](#)
- [We invest economically.](#)
- [Our work is aimed at burden-reduction.](#)

This document is just the start. These principles will only have their intended impact when we all understand them, support them, and live them. We will know that has happened when we observe ourselves calling on them and reflecting on them as we do our work. We will refer to them in discussions, and they will be evident in decisions we make.

Reliability is foundational.

Suppliers need to know that they are providing the government—and receiving from the government—accurate, up-to-date information. Contracting officers have legal obligations under the Federal Acquisition Regulations to deliver “on a timely basis the best value product or service to the customer, while maintaining the public’s trust and fulfilling public policy objectives.” Colleagues depend on another to do their work. And customers expect GSA to deliver a compliant product on-time and on-budget. To meet these needs, FAS systems are built to be **reliable**.

Who needs reliability?

- Our customers
- Our industry partners
- Our colleagues within GSA and government
- Our oversight bodies

What does successful reliability look like?

- Consistent functionality
- Features that promote compliance with applicable laws and regulations
- Defined level of availability of services
- Traceability of actions/decisions
- Predictable behavior/outcomes

Why is reliability important?

- Our customers rely on GSA to provide certain services, consistent with law and policy, and our users rely on our systems to deliver these services
- To do their jobs effectively, our acquisition workforce depends on our systems to “just work” as expected.
- To work together successfully, we depend upon the reliability of each other, and hold ourselves accountable to the needs of our users and colleagues

How can we measure reliability?

- Task completion
- System Uptime
- Defect Level
- Mean time to repair
- Mean time between failure
- Users’ perception of data quality

We invest economically.

We often say that we FAS should run like a business; more accurately, though, we want to be businesslike in the way we operate. We are not here to make a profit. Taxpayers have entrusted us with their precious tax dollars, and it is our highest responsibility to use those funds in the best way possible, and that means that we have to invest in efforts that are not only good for government but are sustainable over the long term. In the past, cost-recovery -- and, to a lesser extent, gross margin -- has been a proxy for success; however, focusing exclusively on cost-recovery ignores the cost-side of the equation and jeopardizes investments that have business value. We strive to be **economical** with our resources and continually evaluate our investments to make sure we are using them in the best way possible.

Who needs us to be economical?

- Our customers
- The public

What does economical success look like?

- When we make investments, we should have a clear understanding of how much something is likely to cost, the return on the investment, and the expected value over time.
- Our products must have a viable, sustainable business model commensurate with demand, and continually reexamined to ensure that they are grounded in the current market realities.
- Our systems' costs should be aligned with the value to the business, and we should avoid duplication so that we maintain as few systems as necessary to operate.
- It is not enough to cover our costs, we need to be conscious of opportunity cost as well as looking for ways to reduce costs to free up resources for other investments or higher value within the product.
- Every feature has cost; we need to measure and manage tradeoffs.

Why is it important to be economical?

- Every dollar in the Acquisition Services Fund came from a FAS customer, with limited resources. We need to be good stewards of our customers' funds so that we can deliver greater value to them.
- Every cost ultimately needs to be recovered, so being economical is a method of ensuring greater likelihood of program success.

How can we measure if something is economical?

- Overall cost of the service, including user effort and system cost
- Dollars spent per transaction and per user
- Feature cost-benefit
- Cost savings and cost avoidance

Our work is aimed at *burden-reduction*.

Working in or with government is not easy—we have important missions to accomplish with competing demands on our resources—and yet, it shouldn't be *painful*. We exist to **reduce the burden** associated with government work. We help FAS create contract vehicles that reduce contract duplication and use strategic sourcing to improve acquisition outcomes, provide shared services to let agencies focus on their core mission work (and by being economical, they have more resources to do that work), and work with suppliers, customers, and policymakers to achieve better acquisition outcomes.

Who needs the system to reduce burden?

- The acquisition workforce
- Our customers
- Industry partners

What does success for burden-reduction look like?

- Burden reduction requires a keen understanding of what it takes to both complete an individual task as *well* as an understanding of the overall burden associated with service delivery, and a continued effort to minimize time and effort associated with successful completion.
- Burden reduction involves managing systems, policies, and interface design to ensure that the end-to-end experience is as simple as possible, but not more.
- Burden reduction cannot exist without a user, so we must deliver value to users and help them meet their objectives, and test our products to ensure that they meet real users' needs.

Why is burden-reduction important?

- At the heart of what FAS does is making it easier for agencies to accomplish their mission and for industry to effectively partner with government. We know there's a minimum amount of burden that's necessary to achieve excellent outcomes, and our goal is to find ways (understanding that there are budgetary tradeoffs) to reduce the burden as much as possible.

How can we measure burden-reduction?

- Completion rate (at task-level and service-level)
- System uptake
- Time to completion
- Overhead cost per transaction
- Customer satisfaction