



# **U. S. General Services Administration Industry Communications Plan**

**December 2016**

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## Introduction

The General Services Administration (GSA) is focused on building better relationships between government and industry, thus resulting in greater acquisition outcomes. Front and center to this focus is the Office of the Procurement Ombudsman (OPO).

Successful acquisitions depend on a clear understanding of the market's capabilities and dynamics, requiring an early and meaningful engagement with industry and the application of strong management practices within federal government agencies.<sup>1</sup> Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) 15.201<sup>2</sup> encourages exchanges between the government and interested parties, from the earliest identification of a requirement through receipt of proposals, in a fair and transparent manner. Open communication and collaboration between industry and the federal government can drive innovation in products and services, and improve the acquisition environment, resulting in

- greater clarity of agency requirements;
- increased awareness of current industry products and services;
- increased competition, including greater use of small businesses in subcontracting opportunities;
- greater use of small business set-asides;
- more favorable pricing;
- more realistic expectations about marketplace capabilities;
- higher-quality contract deliverables; and
- fewer performance problems.

In February 2011, the Office of Management and Budget's Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) issued a memorandum, "Myth-Busting: Addressing Misconceptions to Improve Communication with Industry during the Acquisition Process,"<sup>3</sup> which includes objectives for reducing barriers and encouraging vendor engagement throughout the acquisition process. This memorandum directed federal agencies to develop vendor communication plans, consistent with existing law and regulation that promote responsible and constructive exchanges with industry. The

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<sup>1</sup> "Acquisition 360—Improving the Acquisition Process through Timely Feedback from External and Internal Stakeholders," Office of Federal Procurement Policy, Memorandum for Chief Acquisition Officer, Senior Procurement Executives, March 18, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Federal Acquisition Regulation 15.201, "Exchanges with Industry Before Receipt of Proposals," [Federal Acquisition Regulations \(FAR\)](#).

<sup>3</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. [OMB Procurement Index](#)

U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) has prepared this Industry Communications Plan in response to this direction.

Furthermore, GSA's senior procurement executive (SPE) outlined three key priorities to support the agency's mission and provide value to its customers. These priorities are:

- strengthen the acquisition workforce,
- promote smart and effective buying, and
- build healthy and productive industry relationships.

In order to vigorously advance these priorities, the SPE created the role of the GSA procurement ombudsman to spearhead engagement initiatives and partner with other internal GSA offices to "be a voice for industry, make sure we are hearing their concerns and helping industry partners navigate our bureaucracy."

GSA has developed this Industry Communication Plan to assist with reducing unnecessary barriers to industry engagement and to publicize and prioritize outreach and learning opportunities for both existing industry partners and new vendors. This Plan provides a framework to leverage internal GSA stakeholders, offices, and tools with existing external communication vehicles to overcome barriers, making it easier to use GSA purchasing programs and services, and to synthesize market trends for innovation and acquisition best practices.

## 1. Statement of Agency Commitment

The GSA vision for vendor engagement promises to foster productive relationships with industry partners to ensure customers receive the gold standard in products and services to fulfill their mission as effectively and efficiently as possible. GSA pledges to:

- communicate early, frequently, and constructively with industry;
- include small businesses and socioeconomic groups of small businesses in communications with industry;
- include vendors that the agency has not worked with in the past;
- identify, in the agency's published procurement forecast, which procurements are likely to involve opportunities for additional communication with industry; and
- protect non-public information including vendors' confidential information and the agency's source selection information.

## 2. Senior Agency Officials and Offices Responsible for Promoting Industry Engagement

GSA senior leadership has pioneered a comprehensive approach to reducing barriers and engaging industry during the acquisition process. Senior leadership include the following:

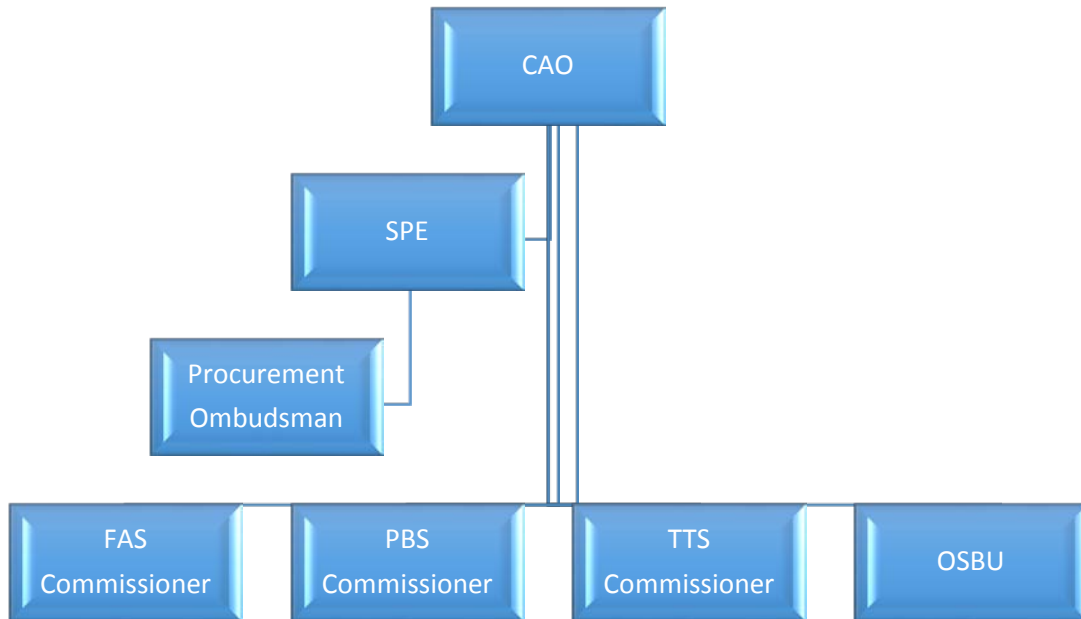
Associate Administrator, Office of Government-wide Policy Chief Acquisition <b>(Vacant)</b>	Senior Procurement Executive, Deputy Chief Acquisition Officer <b>Jeffrey Koses</b> (703) 605-5535 <a href="mailto:Jeffrey.Koses@gsa.gov">Jeffrey.Koses@gsa.gov</a>	Procurement Ombudsman <b>Millisa L. Gary</b> (202) 501-0699 <a href="mailto:Millisa.Gary@gsa.gov">Millisa.Gary@gsa.gov</a>
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The CAO and SPE will be actively engaged in promoting the ombudsman as the pioneer of the industry engagement initiative, advocating outreach and collaboration. Additionally, the Commissioners of the Federal Acquisition Service (FAS), Technology Transformation Service (TTS) and Public Buildings Service (PBS) will assist in driving the industry engagement initiative throughout the GSA Regions.

The Procurement Ombudsman will also work with the Office of Small Business Utilization (OSBU), the Office of General Counsel and the Federal Acquisition

Institute to promote vendor engagement. A more detailed description of critical stakeholders and their roles in industry communication and collaboration are outlined in **Section 6** of this document.

Figure 1: Senior Agency Officials/Offices Responsible for Promoting Engagement



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

Potential barriers to effective vendor engagement along with GSA existing and developing initiatives to reduce these barriers are outlined below.

#### Potential Barriers

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 and and/or vendor evaluation criteria;
- vendor restrictions in accessing opportunities advertised in federal government contracting solicitation systems/sites, such as FedBizOpps;
- difficulty in maintaining open lines of communication with small businesses and small business socioeconomic groups;

- difficulty in sourcing and maintaining relationships with new vendors;
- limited competition among non-schedule holders;
- short proposal response times; and
- limited market intelligence.

### **Reducing Barriers through Ongoing Outreach Initiatives**

GSA works to reduce barriers and promote vendor engagement and collaboration at various levels of the organization. While many of these initiatives are discussed in other areas of this document, the following are a few highlights:

- The GSA Vendor Support Center is a one-stop resource to help GSA's commercial partners succeed in the federal government marketplace. The center helps numerous guides on how to do business with GSA, and it provides links to engagement and training opportunities. The New Contractor Orientation seminar and the "Doing Business with GSA Guide" assist vendors in understanding processes, contract requirements, and resources available to be successful before and after award. See <https://vsc.gsa.gov/>.
- GSA "Interact" is an open, collaborative community for connecting, communicating, learning, and engaging across GSA topics. The goal of the community is to increase better communication and collaboration with industry, and it serves as a platform for industry to voice feedback and concerns.
- The Acquisition Gateway, built by GSA, helps federal government buyers from all agencies act as one acquisition community. The Acquisition Gateway is a workspace that provides accurate, useful, and unbiased advice. It helps federal acquisition professionals learn what they need to know, connect with others to collaborate and communicate, and act to accomplish their tasks effectively. In the future, anyone will be able to access the site.
- FAS's Vendor Education Center offers "Pathway to Success," a web-based program to assist vendors with getting on GSA schedules, as well as a plethora of other training opportunities. See <https://vec.gsa.gov/MASTrainingHome>. FAS's Office of Customer Accounts and Research provides enterprise-wide representation of the value of FAS to agency customers as well as the needs of agency customers to FAS.
- GSA maintains active and updated public websites as well as active social media accounts on Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and LinkedIn to announce learning events, Industry Days, pre-proposal and pre-solicitation conferences, relevant news, and business opportunities.
- PBS's Industry Relations Division engages collaboratively with industry and hosts a mentor-protégé program to help protégé firms compete for government contracts.
- Biannually, OSBU publishes the "Doing Business with GSA Guide," which provides guidance and information on resources available to small businesses, information on forecasts of contracting opportunities, the mentor-

protégé program, training, and information on subcontracting opportunities with GSA prime contractors. Furthermore, OSDDBU and component small business specialists provide active small business support through Outreach, participation in more than 100 functions per year, and ongoing dialogue with small businesses. A calendar of events with OSBU participation is available at [GSA Small Business Events](#).

- GSA's Call Center (1-866-PBS-VEND) receives calls, answers questions, and refers callers to subject matter experts in FAS, PBS, or OSBU for one-on-one support.

### **Reducing Barriers through the Procurement Ombudsman**

GSA has an active, full-time procurement ombudsman program responsible for and dedicated to fostering a fair and open dialogue between GSA and industry to encourage competition and innovation. The ombudsman supports the above ongoing initiatives but also provides an entirely independent, impartial, and confidential source for industry to voice concerns and seek conflict resolution. The ombudsman also works closely with the Office of Small Business Utilization to support small business interests, and helps GSA improve training, policies, and business strategies for GSA acquisitions.

The ombudsman is undertaking several initiatives to improve outreach to industry. Major initiatives include:

- With the endorsement of the CAO and SPE, the ombudsman has begun building a National team of industry liaisons to expand the ombudsman program across the GSA regions. The industry liaisons will work closely with the ombudsman to intake inquiries from industry and recommendations for program and process improvements. The team will include representatives from regional offices across GSA.
- The ombudsman is maturing relationships with major professional associations and councils in order to collaborate and communicate with a broad spectrum of industry leaders and other stakeholders. These councils are vital channels in which to communicate and receive feedback from vendors. Below are 12 major industry associations that the ombudsman works closely with to promote industry outreach. The GSA ombudsman encourages both existing and new vendors to engage with these associations and councils as well establishing direct lines of communication with GSA.

#### **List of Key Industry Associations/Councils**

1. American Council for Technology—Industry Advisory Council (ACT-IAC)
2. Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association



(AFCEA)

3. American Bar Association Section on Public Contract Law
4. Coalition of Federal Ombudsman (COFO)
5. Coalition for Government Procurement (CGP)
6. Information Technology Industry Council (ITIC)
7. International Ombudsman Association (IOA)
8. National Contract Management Association (NCMA)
9. National Defense Industry Association (NDIA)
10. National Manufacturers Association (NMA)
11. Procurement Round Table (PRT)
12. Professional Services Council (PSC)

### **Reducing Barriers through Industry Coordinators and Liaisons**

FAS, PBS, and TTS each have industry liaisons (ILs). The role of the IL on the ombudsman National Team is to be the “eyes and ears” of the ombudsman at the operational and regional levels.

Additionally, FAS, PBS and TTS will be responsible for identifying an Industry Coordinator (IC) who will be tasked with industry related issues within their respective Service. The IC will coordinate the activities of the ILs with those of the ombudsman. The IC will work closely with the ombudsman to identify industry groups and vendors for outreach, within their respective services. ILs will meet biweekly with the respective IC to provide updates on outreach activities and share information on lessons learned. The IC will then funnel the information to the ombudsman for submission into the centralized repository.

GSA promotes the removal of barriers to full and open competition through competition advocates. There are competition advocates located in the GSA Central Office as well as in each region. These individuals work with managers, contracting officers, acquisition teams, and GSA OSBU specialists to promote competition throughout the agency. This network assists regional offices with using competitive procedures to the greatest extent possible, adhering to Competition in Contract Act requirements, and adequately discharging the duties of competition advocates as described in the FAR.

## Reducing Barriers through Electronic Tools

In addition to the GSA public website, GSA offers electronic tools to help manage an agency's GSA procurement transactions, place orders, or learn about business opportunities. For links to these tools, please visit <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/category/25574>.

- **Acquisition Gateway.** An innovative workspace where acquisition professionals can act as one government-wide community to find unbiased advice, share expertise, and contribute to its iterative development.
- **Interact.** AN online community and blog where users engage and discuss views on a variety of trending topics and learn about upcoming events and training opportunities.
- **GSA Advantage!** Offers an online shopping and ordering system that provides access to thousands of contractors and millions of services and products.
- **GSA Global Supply.** Used to order GSA products at any time from a vast selection of supplies for government customers anywhere in the world.
- **GSA Carbon Footprint Tool.** Developed by GSA to assist agencies in managing their greenhouse gas emissions as required by Executive Order 13514 and recent energy laws.
- **Green Products Compilation.** A tool that facilitates the procurement of green products and services.
- **FedBizOpps.** Single government point of entry for federal government procurement opportunities of more than \$25,000.
- **eBuy.** Online request for quote tool for a wide range of commercial services and products that GSA offers.
- **eOffer/eMod.** A tool to submit and modify proposals electronically.
- **e-Resolve.** Offers an opportunity to report a problem with a GSA Global Supply order or submit an inquiry about any of the products and services offered.
- **Centralized Mailing List Service.** Used to order publications and GSA Global Supply catalogs.
- **Schedule Sales Query.** Provides the sales reported by contractors for specific report quarters during the current and past five fiscal years.
- **Small Business Resources.** Connects small businesses to in-person and online training, counseling, procurement opportunities, and more.
- **GSA eLibrary.** Online source for schedule contract award information searchable by the contractor's name, contract number, special item number, schedule number, or keyword.

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

GSA's Integrated Award Environment organization is managing a U.S. government effort to consolidate 11 acquisition systems into a single consolidated system called the System for Award Management (SAM). The 11 systems listed below include 10 federal systems and the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance.

SAM Systems	Description
Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance	The single, authoritative, government-wide comprehensive source document of all financial and nonfinancial assistance programs, including grants, loans, and other types of domestic assistance administered by the federal government.
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.*
Contractor Performance Assessment Reports System	Web-enabled application that collects and manages automated Contractor Performance Assessment Reports. It assesses a contractor's performance and provides a record of performance.
Electronic Subcontracting Reporting System	Designed for prime contractors to report accomplishments toward subcontracting goals required by their contract.
Excluded Parties List System (EPLS)	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 nonfinancial assistance, including benefits.*
Federal Awardee Performance and Integrity Information System	Database that collects stores and tracks government awardees' misconduct and performance.
FedBizOpps	Single government point-of-entry for posting solicitations over \$25,000, allowing commercial businesses to search, monitor, and retrieve opportunities in federal government markets.
Federal Procurement Data System-Next Generation	Online repository that provides data on all federal contract actions over \$3,000.
Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA) Sub-award Reporting System	Reporting tool that federal prime awardees (i.e., prime contractors and prime grants recipients) use to capture and report sub-award and executive compensation data regarding their first-tier sub-awards to meet the FFATA reporting requirements.
Online Representations and Certifications Application (ORCA)	Web-based application that allows vendors to enter representations and certifications once for use on all federal contracts. Vendors update these representations and certifications annually.*

Wage Determinations On-Line	Government-wide website that makes Service Contract Act and Davis-Bacon wage determinations easily accessible by the contracting community.
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\*Indicates systems currently consolidated in SAM.

Currently, SAM is composed of only CCR, EPLS, and ORCA. However, the complete SAM platform will facilitate every phase of the acquisition life cycle, from market research to contract administration, supporting the cost-effective acquisition of goods and services by agencies. The integrated SAM platform will provide common acquisition functions and shared services that benefit all agencies, such as the maintenance of information about business-partner organizations (e.g., banking, certifications, business types, capabilities, and performance), and will allow for better buying decisions.

SAM will provide 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. SAM will also provide various services, tools, and capabilities that can be leveraged by the acquisition community to conduct business across the federal government space.

The overarching benefits of SAM include streamlined and integrated processes, elimination of data redundancies, and reduced costs while providing improved capability.

#### **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.

GSA holds industry days, pre-solicitation conferences, or pre-proposal conferences as necessary and allows for a reasonable amount of one-on-one engagement with

vendors. GSA contracting officers assess vendor communication needs during acquisition planning and will employ a comprehensive vendor engagement strategy that allows 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); or it requires a written justification as to why these steps are unnecessary.

GSA conducts 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 collaborates with the Office of the General Counsel to provide guidance, as necessary, regarding the appropriateness of agency engagement opportunities with vendors to provide proper, clear, and consistent communication. Additionally, coming soon, the Acquisition Gateway online community will allow access to those who are not federal government employees.

Additionally, the Forecast of Contracting Opportunities provides a wealth of information about GSA's projected acquisitions at or above a \$25,000 threshold. Whether or not a small business is ready to compete for business, the forecast's data elements, acronyms, regional breakdown, and explanation of terms gives the small business owner a window into GSA and what it buys, from contract type to socioeconomic category to region. The *GSA Forecast of Contracting Opportunities* is available through the GSA public website. <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/232923>

## **5. Publications of Engagement Events**

GSA publishes engagement events including, but not limited to, industry days, roundtables, small business outreach sessions, pre-solicitation conferences, and request for proposal question-and-answer sessions. GSA's initiatives are posted on FedBizOpps and are updated regularly.

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

- “For Business: Working with GSA” on GSA’s public website. Social networking sites such as Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and various GSA blogs also have links provided on this page ([For Business: Working with GSA](#)).
- Dates and locations for upcoming GSA-sponsored seminars, workshops, meetings, and other events can be found at the Vendor Support Center (<http://www.gsa.gov/portal/event/getEvents/future/category/22104/hostUri/portal>).

- The GSA Office of Communications and Marketing works with the ombudsman to publicize engagement events through internal GSA websites as well as other channels to reach the general public.
- The ombudsman will also publicize engagement events to the greater acquisition community through the ombudsman website and the Interact blog.

## 6. Brief Description of Roles and Responsibilities: Stakeholders

GSA strongly endorses vendor engagement and communication, expanding beyond current FAR guidance. For example, FAR 15.201 encourages exchanges between the government and interested parties, and FAR 10.002(b)(2) lists techniques for conducting market research to enhance vendor engagement practices and increase engagement opportunities. By collaborating internally with GSA’s existing network of industry coordinators/liaisons and senior acquisition officials, and externally with industry associations and the vendor community, the GSA ombudsman will help transform the GSA culture into one that values and promotes vendor engagement in all acquisition activities.

The GSA ombudsman will focus on establishing initiatives and fostering relationships that encourage vendor engagement. This requires a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders involved in GSA’s acquisition process. The day-to-day roles and responsibilities of acquisition personnel are documented at the national and regional levels and are tailored to the organization’s specific activities and requirements. The documented roles and responsibilities address various acquisition activities that involve vendor engagement.

GSA has several mechanisms to address and respond to issues that may be raised by vendors and industry associations. The ombudsman does not replace those mechanisms but supports them, as well as GSA’s commitment to continuous evaluation of its programs and processes, and building productive relationships with industry to better serve its customers and stakeholders.

### Summary of Roles and Responsibilities

#### Internal GSA Acquisition Workforce—Senior Leadership

Stakeholder group	Stakeholder	Senior leadership high-level roles and responsibilities
Senior leadership	Chief acquisition officer (CAO), Senior procurement executive	<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.</li> <li>• Provide feedback to OFPP on the</li> </ul>

Stakeholder group	Stakeholder	Senior leadership high-level roles and responsibilities
		effectiveness of efforts to encourage industry engagement throughout GSA.
Senior leadership	Procurement ombudsman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with the CAO and SPE to develop and implement GSA’s Industry Communication Plan.</li> <li>• Work closely with the GSA acquisition career manager to identify training for the acquisition workforce that will foster agility and improve industry relationships.</li> <li>• Meet with industry to discern market trends and advances in technology that will enhance GSA’s ability to make smarter buying decisions; and address concerns/issues and recommendations for improvement relative to GSA’s contracting programs and processes.</li> <li>• Collaborate with GSA Industry Coordinators to share resources, industry trends, and lessons learned.</li> <li>• Work closely with GSA’s Office of Public Engagement and Outreach to coordinate industry-related events and activities involving senior leadership.</li> <li>• Engage industry and ombudsman communities across agencies to conduct joint training activities for acquisition workforce.</li> <li>• Promote and advance supplier intimacy.</li> <li>• Promote and advance benefits of healthy industry/government relationships to both entities. For example, government can benefit from innovation and advances in technology; industry can benefit from getting close to government decision makers and government customers.</li> </ul>
Senior leadership	Office of Acquisition Policy (Directors)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote and advance GSA ombudsman engagement activities.</li> <li>• Collaborate with the GSA ombudsman and other directors when considering and taking actions related to vendor acquisition integrity issues, including suspension and debarments.</li> <li>• Promote recommendations to enhance training efforts to improve acquisition workforce capabilities based on feedback from vendor partners and engagement activities.</li> </ul>
Senior leadership	FAS and PBS commissioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work in concert with the CAO, SPE, and ombudsman to implement the vendor engagement strategies outlined in the ombudsman’s Concept of Operations.</li> <li>• Drive GSA’s vendor engagement initiatives to the regions.</li> </ul>

Stakeholder group	Stakeholder	Senior leadership high-level roles and responsibilities
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate regional vendor engagement initiatives.</li> <li>• Communicate the benefits of engaging industry to FAS and PBS 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.</li> <li>• Consolidate feedback from the regions and provide feedback to the CAO, SPE, and GSA procurement ombudsman on the effectiveness of efforts to encourage industry engagement.</li> </ul>
Senior leadership	FAS Office of Customer Accounts and Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work in concert and partnership with the GSA ombudsman.</li> <li>• Survey industry on view of relationship with GSA.</li> <li>• Report findings of surveys to GSA senior leadership and GSA ombudsman with recommendations for improvement.</li> </ul>
Senior leadership	PBS Industry Outreach Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work in concert and partnership with the GSA ombudsman.</li> <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 industry relations managers discuss industry and federal initiatives, lessons learned, and how to improve the process.</li> <li>• Engage collaboratively with industry and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).</li> <li>• Engage with industry through the National Call Center, which offers assistance to those seeking to do business with GSA/PBS, participation in conferences and events, and the development of partnerships with NGOs nationwide.</li> </ul>
Senior leadership	Regional directors/commissioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work in concert and partnership with the GSA ombudsman based on 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 vendor outreach and engagement initiatives.</li> <li>• Communicate the benefits of engaging industry to their acquisition personnel.</li> <li>• Execute vendor engagement initiatives</li> </ul>



Stakeholder group	Stakeholder	Senior leadership high-level roles and responsibilities
		<p>within specific regions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide feedback and report on progress toward achieving objectives to the FAS and PBS commissioners on the effectiveness of efforts to encourage industry engagement at the regional level.</li> </ul>
Senior leadership	Office of Administrative Services associate administrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work in concert and partnership with the GSA ombudsman.</li> </ul>
Senior leadership	Office of Public Engagement and Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work closely with the GSA ombudsman to coordinate industry-related events and activities involving senior leadership and vendor outreach and engagement.</li> </ul>
Senior leadership	National and regional OSBU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work in concert and partnership with the GSA ombudsman.</li> <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 government-wide websites and social media.</li> <li>• Share lessons learned and participate in collaboration and outreach initiatives sponsored by other organizations.</li> <li>• Partner with other organizations, such as the Small Business Administration, for outreach events.</li> <li>• National OSBU only—identify and report on progress toward achieving objectives and provide feedback to the CAO and GSA ombudsman on the effectiveness of efforts to encourage industry engagement at the national level.</li> <li>• Regional OSBU only—provide feedback to the regional directors and GSA ombudsman on the effectiveness of efforts to encourage industry engagement at the regional level.</li> </ul>
Senior leadership	Competition advocate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work in concert and partnership with the GSA ombudsman. Encourage industry to contact the PO for conflict resolution.</li> </ul>
Senior leadership	General counsel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work in concert and partnership with the GSA ombudsman.</li> <li>• Encourage vendor communications to the maximum extent practicable.</li> <li>• Advise GSA COs and acquisition team members on appropriate vendor communications.</li> </ul>

Stakeholder group	Stakeholder	Senior leadership high-level roles and responsibilities
Senior leadership	Ethics officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work in concert and partnership with the GSA ombudsman.</li> <li>• Address vendor communications in annual ethics training by providing clear guidance on permissible and prohibited vendor engagement activities.</li> <li>• Monitor ethics compliance activities.</li> </ul>
Senior leadership	Information technology (IT) VMO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work in concert and partnership with the GSA ombudsman.</li> <li>• Integrate IT VMO activities with the GSA ombudsman as the single point of contact for GSA IT vendor relationship management and IT procurement assistance.</li> <li>• Collaborate with the GSA ombudsman on life-cycle vendor relationship management activities.</li> <li>• Collaborate on efforts to engage vendors on strategic sourcing initiatives.</li> <li>• Report GSA IT vendor monitoring and performance activities with the GSA ombudsman to mitigate risks and drive service excellence and innovation.</li> </ul>

### Internal GSA Acquisition Workforce – Operational Offices

Stakeholder group	Stakeholder	GSA acquisition workforce operational-level roles and responsibilities
GSA acquisition workforce	COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work in concert and partnership with the GSA procurement ombudsman.</li> <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 vendor communication methods to the acquisition team.</li> <li>• Post procurement opportunities on acquisition advertisement sites such as FedBizOpps and eBuy, as well as with appropriate Industry Associations.</li> <li>• Set expectations for project managers (PMs), contracting officer representatives (CORs), administrative contracting officers (ACOs), and industrial operations analysts (IOAs) regarding participation in vendor engagement efforts.</li> </ul>

<b>Stakeholder group</b>	<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>GSA acquisition workforce operational-level roles and responsibilities</b>
GSA acquisition workforce	PMs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work in concert and partnership with the GSA ombudsman.</li> <li>• Confer with the CO early in the acquisition process and inform the CO about the level of vendor engagement needed throughout the contract life cycle.</li> <li>• Monitor vendor engagement throughout the contract life cycle and track vendor performance.</li> <li>• Keep the CO informed of vendor engagement activities.</li> <li>• Share lessons learned and participate in collaboration and outreach initiatives.</li> </ul>
GSA acquisition workforce	CORs, ACOs, and IOAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work in concert and partnership with the GSA ombudsman.</li> <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.</li> <li>• Share lessons learned and participate in collaboration and outreach initiatives.</li> </ul>
GSA acquisition workforce	Industry coordinators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work in concert and partnership with the GSA ombudsman. Report directly to ombudsman on the three bullet points below:</li> <li>• Identify ways to improve vendor communications, and manage industry outreach efforts and relationships.</li> <li>• Keep the ombudsman informed of vendor engagement activities.</li> <li>• Share lessons learned and participate in collaboration and outreach initiatives.</li> </ul>
GSA acquisition workforce	Industry liaisons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify ways to improve vendor communications, and manage industry outreach efforts and relationships. Report up to ICs.</li> <li>• Keep the ombudsman informed of vendor engagement activities.</li> <li>• Share lessons learned and participate in collaboration and outreach initiatives.</li> </ul>

### **External Industry Partners – Vendors and Vendor Associations**

<b>Stakeholder group</b>	<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Industry operational-level roles and responsibilities</b>
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Industry	Vendors	<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 comprehensive solicitation requirements and developing acquisition strategies.</li> <li>• Provide feedback on the effectiveness of GSA vendor engagement initiatives.</li> </ul>
Industry	Vendor associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See a list of critical Industry Associations in Section 3.</li> </ul>

## Summary of Engagement Activities

At the highest level, engagement activities between the GSA procurement ombudsman and stakeholders can be summarized into three categories—information/collaboration, reporting, and vendor assistance. These engagement categories are mapped by stakeholder in the table below, which summarizes how the GSA ombudsman will engage each stakeholder.

Stakeholder group	Stakeholder	Information/collaboration	Reporting	Vendor assistance
Senior leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chief acquisition officer,</li> <li>• Senior procurement executive</li> </ul>		✓	
Senior leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Procurement ombudsman</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓
Senior leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Office of Acquisition Policy (Directors)</li> </ul>	✓	✓	
Senior leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FAS and PBS commissioners</li> </ul>	✓	✓	
Senior leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FAS professional services industry liaison</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓
Senior leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PBS Industry Outreach Offices</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓
Senior leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional directors/commissioners</li> </ul>	✓	✓	
Senior leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Office of Administrative Services assoc. admin.</li> </ul>	✓	✓	
Senior leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Office of Public Engagement and Outreach</li> </ul>	✓	✓	
Senior leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National and regional OSBU</li> </ul>	✓	✓	
Senior leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competition advocate</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓
Senior leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General counsel</li> </ul>	✓	✓	
Senior leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethics officers</li> </ul>	✓	✓	
Senior leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IT VMO</li> </ul>	✓	✓	
Senior leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal vendor relationship manager</li> </ul>	✓	✓	
GSA acquisition workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COs</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓
GSA acquisition workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PMs</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓
GSA acquisition workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CORs, ACOs, and IOAs</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓
GSA acquisition workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industry coordinators</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓
GSA acquisition workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industry liaisons</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓
Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vendors and vendor associations</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓

## **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 in an effort to help strengthen the acquisition workforce.

### **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. As part of the effort to improve vendor communications, GSA will communicate the benefits of engaging industry internally throughout the acquisition process through “GSA Update” daily e-mail messages, internal “InSite” websites, especially the Acquisition Portal, and “All Hands” meetings.

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

The Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI) has been charged with fostering and promoting the development of a federal acquisition workforce. FAI facilitates and promotes career development and strategic human capital management for the acquisition workforce and provides extensive training on a number of topics (see <https://www.fai.gov>).

### **Information Provided to the Public**

GSA offers essential training for vendors interested in selling to the government and those already on contract with the government.

Featured training includes the following:

- On-site schedules contract training, webinars, and instructional videos targeted specifically to small businesses. These are for those new to contracting as well as those that are current contractors (<http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/232487>) .
- Scheduled webinars and web-based, self-learning modules found at the Vendor Support Center (<https://vsc.gsa.gov>) .

The GSA public website extensively lists training programs for a variety of GSA stakeholders. See <https://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/104738> .

The ombudsman offers numerous training opportunities, seminars, and roundtables focused on building better relationships between government and industry. The ombudsman seminar series, “Can We Talk?” is available in the FAI media library located at [https://www.fai.gov/media\\_library/](https://www.fai.gov/media_library/) .

In addition to the GSA public website, the GSA blog, “Interact,” also provides an extensive list of GSA training opportunities. See <https://interact.gsa.gov/gsa-training-home> .

## **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, as well as the GSA Vendor Communication Plan. The policies listed below are available to GSA personnel and the public on GSA’s public website at the following links:

### **Policy and Other Related Links**

- GSA Acquisition Manual—<https://www.acquisition.gov/gsam/gsam.html>
- Federal Acquisition Regulation—<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)
- Technology Transformation Service—[www.gsa.gov/tts](http://www.gsa.gov/tts)
- GSA Forecast of Contracting Opportunities—<http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/101163>
- GSA Vendor Communication Plan—[www.gsa.gov/ombudsman](http://www.gsa.gov/ombudsman)
- GSA Vendor Support Center—<https://vsc.gsa.gov>
- GSA Interact—<http://interact.gsa.gov>
- How GSA Helps Small Business —<http://gsa.gov/smallbizhelp>
- System for Award Management—<https://www.SAM.gov>.

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

### **Short-Term Actions**

GSA is committed to promoting and sustaining meaningful and productive communication and engagement practices by continually collecting feedback from stakeholders including internal GSA stakeholders and external industry partners. GSA has a stakeholder feedback system that continuously measures the success of the industry communication program and maximizes communication effectiveness, performance, responsiveness, and transparency.

GSA uses proven stakeholder satisfaction communication techniques and continuous improvement practices to solicit input from stakeholders and let them know that it is always listening and to rate its performance and mature communication practices. All of the practices below help GSA identify how well it is performing, identify opportunities for improvement, and implement changes to enhance communication practices:

- Design and monitor e-mail, automated contact forms, and web-based comment boxes
- Administer web-based questionnaires and satisfaction surveys using industry best practices to maximize participation
- Establish and update chatter accounts, blogs, and newsletters
- Use social media tools like twitter and innovative outreach practices from the Technology Transformation Service
- Submit targeted outreach feedback forms
- Host one-on-one and facilitated group feedback sessions, interviews, and forums
- Conduct internal lessons-learned sessions
- Monitor website usage and event attendance statistics.

GSA integrates stakeholder feedback efforts with other offices such as the Industry Relations Division, the Office of Public Engagement and Outreach, and OCSIT to minimize redundant efforts measuring stakeholder satisfaction. GSA also leverages the results from stakeholder communication assessments, develops plans for implementing approved enhancements, and measures improvements against measures for success. Communication practices are continuously monitored as GSA looks for opportunities to improve. Its goal is to provide the best communication and engagement experience possible and to meet stakeholder expectations.

GSA's short-term actions and long-term plans for improving communication are presented below:

Internal stakeholder feedback mechanisms	External stakeholder feedback mechanisms
The CAO receives feedback from the SPE and ombudsman on the effectiveness of efforts to encourage industry engagement at the national level.	The 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 industry coordinators receive feedback from industry liaisons on the effectiveness of efforts to encourage industry engagement at the regional level and provide feedback to the ombudsman.	The COs solicit feedback from vendors during procurement debriefing sessions on the solicitation requirements and source selection process.
The COs solicit feedback from the PMs on the effectiveness of industry engagement during the acquisition process.	The regions and the Central Office solicit feedback from industry during industry days and pre-solicitation conferences.
OSBU solicits feedback from the COs on the effectiveness of small business capabilities as they relate to specific procurements.	The 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.
ICs solicit feedback from ILs on ways to improve vendor communications, major vendor concerns and complaints, lessons learned, and ongoing outreach initiatives. ICs then report this directly to the ombudsman.	ILs maintain an open dialogue with industry and report to their IC on ways to improve communication, major vendor concerns and complaints, lessons learned, and ongoing outreach initiatives.
	Ombudsman solicits feedback from industry and acquisition workforce via a survey to gauge efficacy of ombudsman programs and activities, and recommendations for improvement.

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>• Consolidate results, analyze the results, and report on the effectiveness of outreach initiatives to the CAO.</li> </ul>



Responsible group	Activities
FAS, PBS and TTS Commissioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify annual objectives for outreach initiatives. Following are examples of the types of objectives:               <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</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> <li>• Select FAS and PBS ICs, and verify that ICs and ILs are communicating openly and frequently with the ombudsman.</li> </ul>
Regional directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <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 annual OSBU objectives for the 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>
Procurement Ombudsman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify key objectives for program initiatives (issue resolution, outreach, and training).</li> <li>• Analyze results of surveys and report to SPE the effectiveness of program initiatives.</li> </ul>

## Long-Term Plans for Improvement

Although GSA has many ongoing initiatives already in place to reduce barriers and encourage vendor engagement, it provides the following potential opportunities for improvement that it 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 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 the Central Office more opportunities to engage industry, potentially resulting in a broader vendor reach and increased outreach efficiencies. The ombudsman should ultimately drive this initiative to increase involvement and membership with various industry associations and councils.
Expand the role and reach of the procurement ombudsman	The ombudsman is establishing a permanent program to collaborate with all internal GSA stakeholders relating to industry engagement as well as industry itself. Creating and finalizing an internal GSA Industry Council will be crucial in improved industry outreach. Furthermore, the ombudsman has developed a database to track vendor complaints, concerns and common issues to be used to make data-driven decisions in the future. Creating and finalizing an internal GSA Industry Network as described in <b>Section 3</b> will be crucial in improved industry outreach.
Issue acquisition letters reiterating the acceptable methods 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.

## 10. Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
CAO	Chief Acquisition Officer
CO	Contracting Officer
COR	Contracting Officer's Representative
FAR	Federal Acquisition Regulation
FAS	Federal Acquisition Service
GSA	General Services Administration
HUB	Historically Underutilized Business
IC	Industry Coordinator
IL	Industry Liaison
IOA	Industrial Operations Analysts
IRD	Industry Relations Division
IRM	Industry Relations Manager
OFPP	Office of Federal Procurement Policy
OGC	Office of the General Counsel
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
OPO	Office of the Procurement Ombudsman
OSBU	Office of Small Business Utilization
PBS	Public Building Service
PM	Program Manager
PO	Procurement Ombudsman
SBA	Small Business Administration
SPE	Senior Procurement Executive
TTS	Technology Transformation Service