

From the Editor

Fall is approaching and GSA is wrapping up another successful year in serving customer agencies. Much of our success is due to hard working contractors like you! We are looking forward to starting off the new fiscal year by providing our vendors with useful information and sharing the latest hot topics in FAS contracting. In this issue of *GSA Steps*, you'll read about the Reverse Auction Platform that is the latest electronic commerce tool offered by GSA, used by government buyers to meet competition requirements and to obtain the best possible pricing. You will also find information regarding the following: Updates on the Universal Product Code; a link locator available on the Vendor Support Center (VSC) to provide you access to your ACO or IOA; ways to remit your IFF payments more easily and more quickly; the review process of professional labor qualifications; and, updates on other processes.

If you would like to provide feedback and/or have suggestions for subjects to cover in future newsletters, please feel free to contact contract.relations@gsa.gov. Enjoy the Fall weather and this issue of *GSA Steps*! ■



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Fall Reminder: Subcontracting Reporting for Large Businesses

As we enter the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2014, which ends on September 30th, this is a reminder to large companies with federal government contracts that you will have up to 30 days to submit your end-of-year reports (due October 30, 2014). In preparation for the upcoming FY 2014 reporting period, please review the Electronic Subcontract Reporting System (eSRS) to ensure that you are up to date on reporting requirements for all prior fiscal years, as well.

In accordance with FAR clause 52.219-9, having a contract covered by an **individual** subcontracting plan requires semi-annual cumulative reporting throughout the contract term via Individual Subcontracting Report (ISR) into www.eSRS.gov. You are also required to submit the Summary Subcontract Report (SSR) covering achievements on all your government contracts for the current fiscal year.

For those companies with approved commercial subcontracting plans, you are only responsible for the annual SSR for the current fiscal year, also due by October 30, 2014. All requirements and instructions to contractors may be found in the above reference FAR clause at 52.219-9. ■



GSA's Reverse Auction Platform: How to optimize your results using GSA's latest eTool

On July 1, 2013, the National Information Technology Commodity Program (NITCP) launched the GSA's Reverse Auction (RA) Platform with the mission of providing a pricing tool managed by government for government. The RA Platform is an efficient, cost effective eTool for buying non-complex commodities and simple services that is designed to drive down the total cost of acquisitions and increase savings to customers and taxpayers. The RA Platform can be used to facilitate the request for and submission of quotes, offers or proposals for products, services, and solutions through GSA and VA Multiple Award Schedules (MAS) and Blanket Purchase Agreements (BPAs). The RA Platform is the latest electronic commerce tool offered by GSA, used by government buyers to meet competition requirements and to obtain the best possible pricing.

Here are the top 10 things that you need to know about the RA Platform:

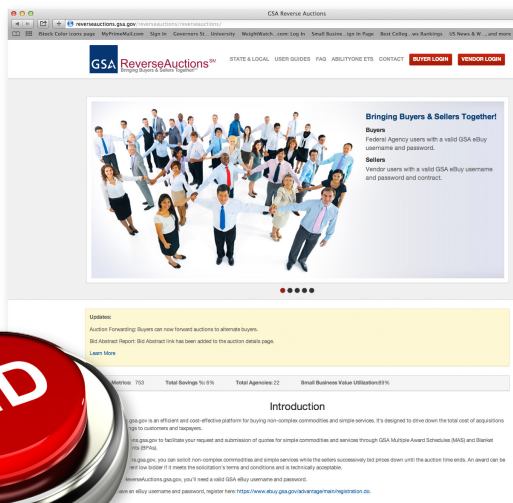
1 How to access: Any vendor that has access to eBuy, has access to the RA Platform through <http://reverseauctions.gsa.gov/>. Simply, use the same login credentials that you use for eBuy. The RA Platform is available to all GSA and VA Multiple Award Schedules (MAS) and BPA holders.

- 2 Learn to use the RA Platform through online training, the Vendor User Guide, and demo site:** There are many ways to familiarize yourself with the features of the RA Platform:
- Participate in virtual training that is offered regularly by GSA. Please look at the training schedule located at <http://reverseauctions.gsa.gov/>,
 - You can also familiarize yourself with RA Platform by reading through the vendor user guide available via the link at the top of the RA homepage,
 - Try out the demo site, which gives hands on experience using the RA Platform (Buyer and Vendor login information is posted on the demo homepage at <http://reverseauctionsdemo.gsa.gov/>).

If you have any questions, consult the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and support is available by e-mail at reverseauctionshelp@gsa.gov or by phone at (855) 372-1094.

- 3 No additional fees:** Although there are no additional fees to use the RA Platform, vendors are still responsible for reporting sales and remitting the Industrial Funding Fee (IFF) in accordance with the terms and conditions of their contract.
- 4 Bidding:** There are three types of bids that can be placed on the RA Platform: flat bid, proxy bid, and no bid. All bids must reflect the whole dollar total price by line item, not a unit price. Keep in mind that the RA Platform does not accept commas “,” , periods “.” or the dollar symbol “\$”.
- a. Flat bid** – A flat bid can be placed at or below the maximum bid, which would allow for the vendor to also submit a proxy bid. Flat bids can also be placed at a higher price than the apparent low bid, which would preclude the vendor from submitting a proxy bid. Flat bids in the range higher than the maximum, but lower than or equal to the apparent low are not permitted. Flat bids placed above the apparent low bid can still be considered by the buyer for award.

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GSA's Reverse Auction Platform: How to optimize your results using GSA's latest eTool *continued*

b. Proxy bid – A proxy bid is the lowest amount that a vendor is willing to bid. If a proxy bid is used, the reverse auction system will bid automatically on behalf of the vendor until this price is reached. Proxy bids are optional and can only be placed in conjunction with a flat bid.

c. No bid – The vendor may elect to not place a bid for a particular auction by selecting the No Bid/Opt Out button. Vendors can also provide a statement to the buyer explaining why they elected to 'no bid.' Note: if a vendor has an active bid on an auction they will not be able to place a 'no bid.' If a vendor places a 'no bid' on an auction they can place a bid at a later time if they choose to.

5 Over 670 auctions and \$60 million in Reverse Auction Opportunities have been posted in fiscal year 2014 and counting: Since its inception, the RA Platform has seen a steady increase in the number of vendor and buyer users. More and

more procurements are being successfully awarded through the RA Platform (Figure 1 below).

- 6 Be sure to identify open market items:** Keep in mind that you are still bound by the terms and conditions of your GSA contract when using the RA Platform. Any and all open market items should be clearly identified to your customer when participating in a reverse auction. We strongly recommend having open market items added to your contract.
- 7 Bid anonymously:** Bidders' identities are not visible to other sellers/bidders in a reverse auction.
- 8 Real time pricing:** During a live reverse auction the bid price is shown in real time, allowing vendors to be aware of where they stand in auction process.

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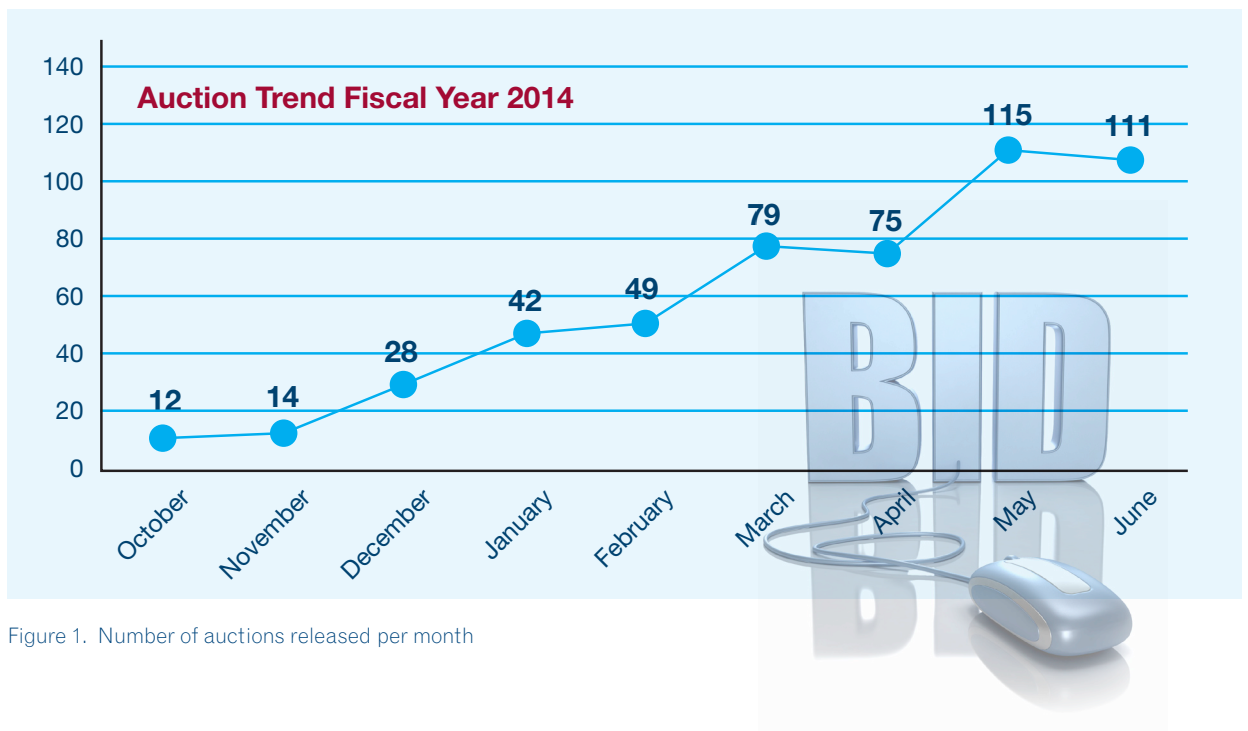


Figure 1. Number of auctions released per month

9 Small Business Set-asides: The RA Platform offers opportunities set aside for small businesses. Since its inception, the RA Platform has seen small business utilization of 88%. Small business participation in the RA Platform is integral to agencies meeting their small business goals in a cost effective way (Figure 2 below).

b. Disaster Purchasing Program – Purchase directly from all GSA Federal Supply Schedule vendors to support disaster preparation and response or recovery from declared disasters or acts of terrorism. To learn more about disaster purchasing, visit <http://www.gsa.gov/disasterpurchasing>.

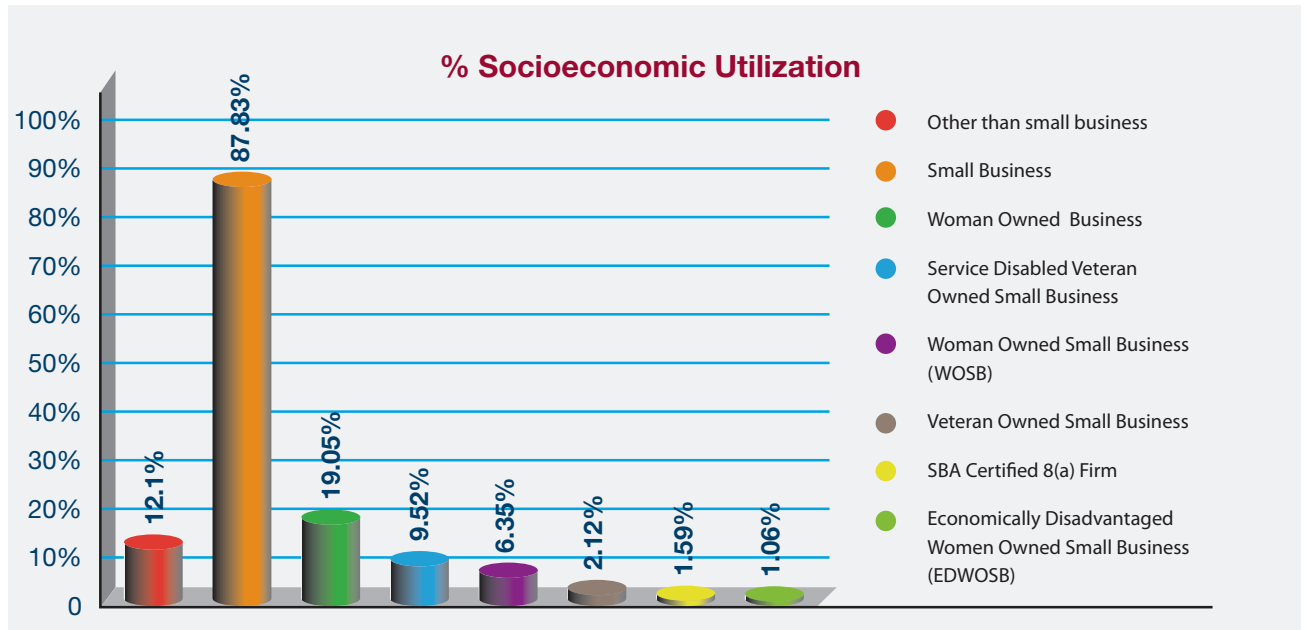


Figure 2. Socioeconomic utilization metrics

10 State and local government purchasing: As of August 3, 2014, state and local governments are able to begin using the RA Platform to access applicable GSA Federal Supply Schedule contracts under the authorities of the Cooperative Purchasing and Disaster Purchasing Programs.

a. Cooperative Purchasing Program – Purchase Security and Law Enforcement equipment from GSA Schedule 84 and Information Technology Products from GSA IT Schedule 70 and the IT Special Item Numbers (SINs) on the consolidated Schedule. To learn more about cooperative purchasing, visit <http://www.gsa.gov/cooperativepurchasing>.

What state and local government entities are eligible to use GSA's Reverse Auction Platform?

40 U.S.C § 502 (c) offers the following definition of state or local government:

“The term, “State or local government” includes any state, local, regional, or tribal government, or any instrumentality thereof (including any local educational agency or institution of higher education).”

The term does not include contractors or grantees of state or local governments.

For additional information on eligibility, please consult GSA Order ADM 4800.2H.

We invite you to see what the RA Platform has to offer! Please visit the RA Platform website at <http://reverseauctions.gsa.gov/>. ■

Have you provided your UPCs & MPNs?

Do you provide a comprehensive list of your awarded base products on *GSAAdvantage!*[®] including any associated Universal Product Codes (UPC) and Manufacturer Part Numbers (MPN)?



Customers doing research rely on UPCs and MPNs to determine if they are getting the exact item they need, to make price comparisons, and for general market research. Therefore, ensuring that you have a complete and accurate list of all your base products on *GSAAdvantage!*[®] will assist agencies with finding what you offer. It will also help your products show up in the search results, thereby increasing your visibility with customers and potential sales.

Thus, GSA is requesting your assistance and cooperation with improving data quality, system usefulness, and user experiences on *GSAAdvantage!*[®], by voluntarily submitting UPCs and MPNs for all base products awarded under schedule contracts.

We understand that not every product has a UPC and MPNs are not always available. However, we are asking you to make a best effort to get the information and update your (Schedule Input Program) SIP files. For additional information on using UPC and MPN [click here](#).

We invite you to engage in an open dialogue with us regarding improving data quality with UPNs and MPNs. Join the conversation on MAS Interact. ■

Paper check vs Electronic payment

Are you still remitting your IFF via paper check? GSA has electronic payment options that make it quick and easy to remit IFF payments. Remitting electronically makes it easier for you to pay and easier for GSA to process the payment, making it a win/win. Paper checks require manual intervention by each party, which increases the risk of reporting errors and lost checks. If you choose to continue using paper checks, there are a few necessary steps you must take to ensure your payment is properly identified and accounted for. First, please remit one check for each Multiple Award Schedule contract. If you have multiple contracts, you will need to remit a separate check for each contract. It's also necessary to include your schedule contract number and associated reporting quarter(s) on the check face. These steps are necessary to ensure that your payment is promptly and accurately applied to your appropriate contract.

Second, if you are remitting your IFF by using Automated Clearing House (ACH) network, please list your contract number and report quarter in the Addendum Detail section. If the ACH amount covers multiple Schedule contracts, please also list each of your contract numbers in this section. These additional steps will ensure proper processing of your payments and avoid any delays. ■



New Professional Labor Qualifications Review during Contractor Assistance Visits

Multiple Award Schedule (MAS) contractors providing professional labor categories should be prepared to demonstrate the personnel they are providing under each GSA task order meet the minimum qualifications as specified in their GSA MAS contract. Professional services labor is made up of employees considered exempt from the Service Contract Act (SCA) such as those who qualify as executive, administrative, or professionals under the definitions provided in 29 C.F.R. Part 541. These employees are generally salaried employees not paid on an hourly basis, and who either supervise others, make decisions of importance and significance using independent judgment, and/or perform work primarily requiring advanced education and experience.

If providing professional services, the MAS contract will typically be awarded with labor categories, which will describe the minimum qualifications required of the person serving in that particular capacity. The minimum qualifications are established by the contractor during the pre-award phase or at the time labor categories are added to the MAS contract. Therefore, the labor categories will be unique to the contractor's particular MAS contract. For example, a contractor may have a labor category titled, Network Engineer, which requires a bachelor's degree and ten years of experience. Therefore, if the same contractor is bidding on a task order project and offers their Network Engineer, and is awarded the project, the contractor must ensure the employee serving in this capacity has a bachelor's degree and ten years of experience. Otherwise, the contractor will be found to have provided unqualified labor for that particular project and noncompliant with the terms and conditions of their MAS contract.

The review of labor provided is now part of the Industrial Operations Analyst (IOA) Contractor Assistance Visit process. Therefore, professional service providers will now be asked by their IOA to demonstrate the personnel provided on MAS task orders meet the qualifications and experience as provided in their respective MAS contract.

Your IOA may ask to look at resumés, timesheets, and other personnel documentation to ensure you are indeed providing qualified labor on MAS task orders. The IOA will refer any issues found regarding the qualified labor provided to the Procurement Contracting Officer (PCO) for appropriate follow-on action.

If you have any questions regarding the specific labor you are providing and/or are not sure if the additional review is applicable to you, please contact your PCO for further direction. If you have questions related to the IOA Contractor Assistance Visit process and the additional review of professional labor qualifications, please contact your IOA. ■



Would you like to know who your ACO/IOA is?

Tired of searching and calling to find out who's your Administrative Contracting Officer (ACO) or your Industrial Operations Analyst (IOA)? Your frustrations have been answered as GSA has now incorporated the ACO/IOA locator via the Vendor Support Center (VSC) website under the Contract Administration tab. All you have to do is follow the instructions and you'll be able to retrieve your ACO/IOA's contact information. This link will direct you to the locator site.

https://vsc.gsa.gov/vsc/aco_ioa.cfm ■

Change continues

As described in the last two issues of *GSA Steps*, the Federal Acquisition Service's (FAS) Supplier Management Division began an internal realignment in 2014.

As a first step, the Industrial Operations Analysts (IOAs) assumed all sales reporting and the Industrial Funding Fee (IFF) responsibilities. This change provides you with one GSA contact for most of your contract administration needs.



What has changed?

The Administrative Contracting Officer (ACO) continues to manage your subcontracting plans, report card, and all delegated contracting actions. The ACO no longer manages the sales reporting and remittances of the Industrial Funding Fee (IFF), however, as the IOA are now responsible for these functions.

What does it mean to me?

In addition to assessments visits, the IOA assigned to your contract will now assist with all questions and transactions regarding sales reporting and IFF remittance.

You can locate your IOA (as well as your ACO) by visiting the Vendor Support Center (<https://vsc.gsa.gov>). Go to the Contract Administration tab and input your contract number.

- With this last quarter, Supplier Management implemented automated e-mail notices as courtesy reminders from your IOAs of your contractual responsibilities to report sales and remit the (IFF) within

30 days after the end of the quarter. You may receive up to two (2) reminders to report sales before the end of the 30-day reporting period.

- After the 30 days has passed, if you still have not reported your sales, you will receive a Sales Reporting Delinquency Notice to inform you that the deadline to report sales has passed.
- Also, after the 30 day reporting period and when the IFF amount due is over \$100, you may receive up to three (3) Delinquency Notices to inform you that you owe IFF.
- After these three (3) notices, for any IFF owed over \$100, the Contracting Officer will receive notification of the debt and a claim may be initiated. The FAR 32.603 states that any amount that is owed is a debt. GSAM 532.606 states the Contracting Officer shall notify the GSA finance office for any amount owed in excess of \$100.

The easiest way to avoid any reminders and/or notices is to report sales and remit IFF as soon as the quarter ends. Generally, once you report your sales and remit any IFF due, the system will not send you notices until the next quarter.

Finally, remember that the preferred (and easiest) option is to remit your IFF electronically with your credit/debit card or e-check at the Vendor Support Center (<https://vsc.gsa.gov>). **Remitting online will also ensure your payment is received accurately, on time, and in the proper format.** Otherwise, payment made with a paper check may take up to 10 business days to be applied to your GSA contract, and payment made via ACH/REX may take up to 4 business days to be processed.

Notes:

- In the notices, the amount of IFF owed is shown as cumulative over all quarters, not just the current quarter.
- You may still need to report/remit your IFF even if your contract is expired or terminated. If the contract was active for one day during the previous quarter, you still have to report sales (including “Zero” sales) and remit any IFF due. ■