

From the Editor

Happy Holidays! In this issue of *GSA Steps* you will find lots of helpful information and tips for the start of the new year. The articles provide information about the Pathway to Success & New Contractor Orientation trainings, Business Breakthrough workshops that assist companies that are no longer small businesses, online IFF payments, and updates on Environmental Icons and the OPEN process. In addition, this issue will highlight the use of Contractor Team Arrangements (CTAs) under Blanket Purchase Agreements (BPAs) and the latest on using small business set-asides on Schedules. Enjoy the 30th issue of *GSA Steps* and have a safe and warm holiday season. *We look forward to providing more exciting information in 2012!*

If you would like to provide feedback and/or have suggestions for subjects to cover in future newsletters, please feel free to contact contract.relationships@gsa.gov. ■

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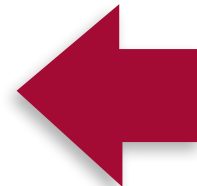
Mass Mod Reminder

To avoid error responses when accepting Mass Modifications to your GSA Schedule contract, please review and accept them in the order they were received (example: review and accept modification #13 from May 2011 BEFORE modification #14 from August 2011).

Pathway to Success & New Contractor Orientation Trainings Are Now Available Online!

GSA FAS Office of Acquisition Management is excited to announce effective October 17, 2011, the **Pathway to Success & New Contractor Orientation** trainings are available on the Vendor Education Center as Web-based on-demand trainings. Both trainings can be found here: <https://gsafas.secure.force.com/MASTrainingHome> OR under the 'TRAINING' tab on the Vendor Support Center (VSC): <https://vsc.gsa.gov/>. ■

The screenshot shows the GSA Vendor Education Center interface. At the top, it says 'GSA Vendor Education Center Federal Acquisition Service'. Below that is a 'Welcome!' message: 'The Vendor Education Center is a one-stop resource that provides GSA's commercial partners with educational seminars and materials to succeed in the federal government marketplace.' There are two main sections: 'If you are a new user please register for a new account.' which contains a 'New User Registration' form with a 'Name' dropdown and a 'Go' button; and 'If you are a registered user, please login from here.' which contains a 'Login To FAS Education Platform' form with 'Email Address' and 'Password' fields, a 'Login' button, and a 'Forgot Password' link.



If there are any questions related to the trainings, contact pathwaytosuccess@gsa.gov.

Business Breakthrough Program

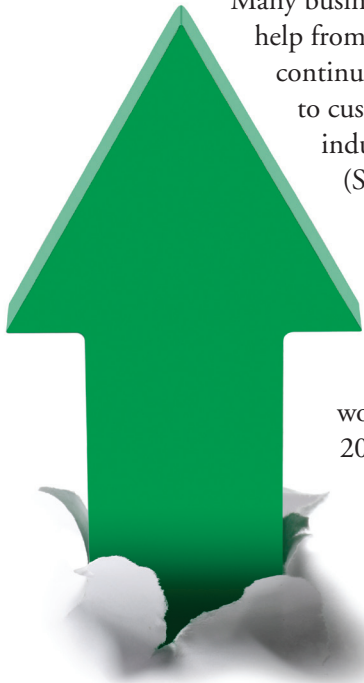
The General Services Administration (GSA) developed the Business Breakthrough Program to empower, educate and assist business owners who have successfully contracted with GSA and other federal agencies through set-aside programs but are currently no longer eligible to participate in them.

Many business owners expressed the need for help from federal agencies in learning how to continue providing quality services/products to customers after they “outgrow” their industry’s Small Business Administration (SBA) defined small business size status.

Business Breakthrough is one of GSA’s solutions. In May 2011, GSA held the first workshop in New York City, GSA’s Northeast Caribbean Region with the remaining workshops to be held by December 10, 2011. This FREE information-packed three-day workshop gives attendees a closer look into the intricacies of GSA’s procurement culture, the type of services we provide to support our federal customer agencies, strategies for successfully marketing to the

federal government, and more. Attendees learn first-hand from subject matter experts within the Federal Acquisition Service (FAS) and the Public Buildings Service (PBS), as well as engage in “hands-on” group activities that reflect real world business case scenarios. Our goal is to attract 50 of each region’s most successful business owners and demonstrate five training modules that address the most critical aspects of growing federal business. This workshop does not address small business plan development, small business certification programs (i.e. 8(a) certification, HUBZone set-asides, Woman-owned business certification, etc.), how to secure business financing, how to secure a GSA Multiple Award Schedule, or any other “start up” business-related issues. We are targeting firms that no longer meet the Small Business Administration’s definition of “small business.”

To date, Business Breakthrough has attracted over 325 attendees in workshops held in eight of GSA’s 11 regional cities. The next will be held in Washington, DC December 6-8. Please visit the program website at www.gsa.gov/businessbreakthrough to review past workshop highlights, agenda, description of each training module, workshop schedule and more! Seating is limited and time is running out, so act fast! ■



Monthly GSA Schedule Webinars

Want to learn more about using GSA Schedules effectively? Join us for our FREE monthly webinars and learn more by subscribing to the MAS Group on Interact at <http://interact.gsa.gov/groups/multiple-award-schedules>.

December Webinar Topics:

- Thursday, December 8, 1 p.m. EST: Blanket Purchase Agreements
- Thursday, December 8, 2:30 p.m. EST: Contractor Team Arrangements
- Thursday, December 15, 1 p.m. EST: Utilizing Small Business

Join the monthly webinars to educate yourself and stay current on GSA Schedules news and policy!



GREEN CORNER

Environmental Symbol Update

In March 2011, the General Services Administration (GSA) revised the symbols used to identify environmentally sustainable products on GSA Advantage![®], GSA Global Supply[™], and other ordering platforms. The revision aligned the symbols with current sustainable purchasing requirements for federal purchasers and identified additional green products on GSA contract vehicles.

Icons for several environmental programs or environmental attributes were added even though the programs were not specifically designated for federal purchase by statute or Executive Order. GSA subsequently received complaints that the inclusion of these programs was unfair since there are other programs that are equally effective. In response to these complaints, GSA intends to remove the environmental programs that are not designated for federal purchase by statute or Executive Order. Specifically, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), GreenGuard, Green Seal, and Biodegradable symbols will be removed.

GSA is participating in an inter-agency work group that is developing guidelines that can be used by federal agencies to identify environmental standards and eco-labels that are appropriate for

consideration in federal procurement. GSA intends to use the guidance from this work group to inform its methodology for selecting additional environmental programs or attributes for use on GSA Advantage![®]. It is possible that the environmental programs will be added at a later date if they are determined to meet the recommended guidelines.

No action is required by GSA contractors to effect this change. GSA apologizes for any inconvenience resulting from this action.

The symbols that will be removed are displayed in the table below:

Forest Stewardship Council



GreenGuard



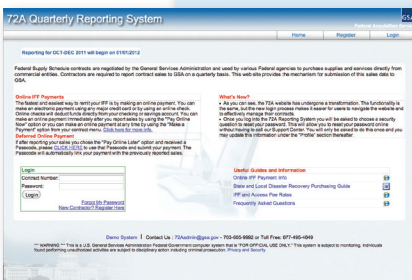
Green Seal



Biodegradable



IFF Online Payments



Are you looking for a way to save time and energy writing your IFF check to GSA? Try our online payment system, it's fast, easy, and right under your finger tips. With the government secured payment processing system (Pay.Gov) that you can trust; it will make your world a lot easier. Why write a check every quarter? Go to <https://72a.gsa.gov> and make your IFF payment online today. You can make an electronic payment using any major credit card or by using an online check. Online checks will deduct funds directly from your checking or savings account. You can make an online payment immediately after you report sales by using the "Pay Online Now" option or at any time by using the "Make a Payment" option from your contract menu.

Need help? Check out the "Online IFF Payment Info" page at: https://72a.gsa.gov/online_iff.cfm

Small Business Set-asides Now Authorized Under Schedules

What You Need To Know

An Interim Rule (FAR Case 2011-024) was published in the Federal Register with an effective date of November 2, 2011. This regulatory action changes the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) to provide agencies with the ability to set-aside orders and Blanket Purchase Agreements (BPAs) issued against Multiple Award Schedule (MAS) contracts. Before this rule, agencies were prohibited from setting aside orders under the Multiple Award Schedules program.

Unlike open market procurements, Ordering Contracting Officers are not required to set-aside orders under Schedules – it is completely discretionary. Ordering Contracting Officers may set-aside orders and BPAs to small business or the following small business subcategories:

- 8(a) Business Development Participants;
- HUBZone Small Business;
- Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB);
- Economically Disadvantaged Women-Owned Small Business (EDWOSB); and
- Women-owned small business concerns eligible under the Women-Owned Small Business Program (WOSB).

Ordering Procedures for Set-asides

Remember, Ordering Contracting Officers have discretionary authority of whether to set-aside

orders under the MAS program. It doesn't matter whether the order is above or below the current Simplified Acquisition Threshold (SAT) (e.g. \$150,000). Ordering Contracting Officers are still expected to follow the ordering procedures under FAR 8.4 for Multiple Award Schedule set-aside orders and BPAs, but restricting competition to small business or various subcategories. They are also advised to include language in their Requests for Quotes (RFQs) identifying whether the requirement is set-aside for small business or for one of the small business subcategories so that you can determine whether or not you are eligible to participate in that procurement. We are in the process of making changes to eBuy to allow RFQs to be marked and identified as requirements that are set-aside so that you can easily tell whether or not you can respond to that RFQ. It is important to point out that small businesses are not restricted from responding to RFQs that are not set-aside.

What GSA Recommends

Contractors are encouraged to follow the step below to facilitate effective use of small business set-asides under Schedules.

A Mass Mod is in process for all Schedules, incorporating the clauses necessary for conducting set-asides. Prior to these clauses being included in the base Schedule contract, ordering agencies are advised to include the relevant clauses at the order level. However, some agencies may decide to wait to exercise this new set-aside authority until the base Schedule contracts have been modified to insure no additional burden is placed on them. **It is still imperative that Mass Mod(s) are accepted in a timely manner.** Remember that it is currently not possible to accept this Mass Mod without first accepting all prior Mass Mods.

To learn more visit www.gsa.gov/schedulesandsbgoals. ■

Utilizing Contractor Team Arrangements (CTAs) under Blanket Purchase Agreements (BPAs)

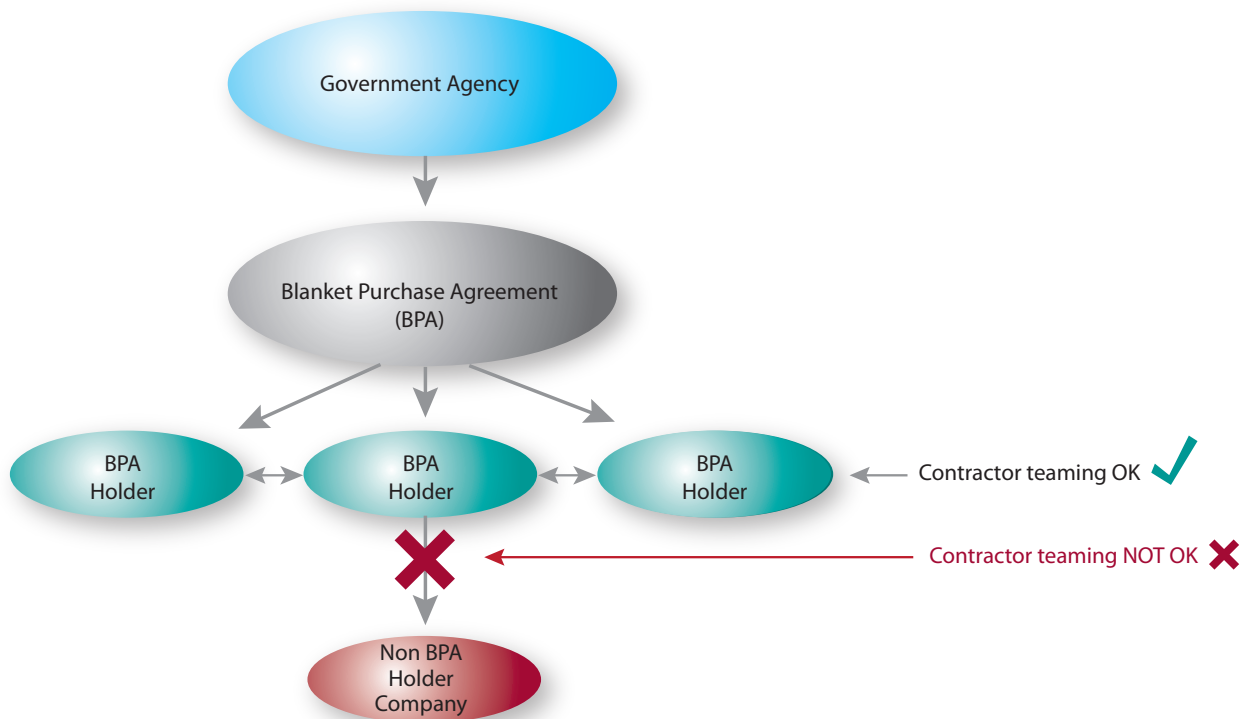
The MAS Program Management Office recently received an interesting question regarding the utilization of Contractor Team Arrangements (CTAs) under Blanket Purchase Agreements (BPAs).

Depending on the size and complexity of a particular requirement, a BPA-holder may find that it offers some, but not all of the products and/or services the ordering agency needs. CTAs can be used as a powerful tool in such cases. The BPA-holder has the option to form a CTA with another BPA-holder that offers the remaining products/services, so that they may compete for the order as a team. This is a solution that benefits BPA-holders and ordering agencies alike, as it increases competition and allows for innovative, multi-vendor solutions. Therefore,

BPA-holders are encouraged to utilize the flexibility offered by CTAs whenever necessary and appropriate.

In forming a CTA for this purpose, it is important to note that a BPA-holder cannot team with a non-BPA-holder (i.e., an FSS contractor not “awarded” under the BPA). A CTA forms a direct contractual relationship (“privity of contract”) between each CTA vendor and the ordering agency, which means that each vendor must be eligible on its own to compete for orders under the BPA. A BPA-holder attempting to “team” with a non-BPA-holder would amount to making the non-BPA-holder a direct party to a BPA it was not selected to be a part of and/or did not compete for.

For more information from GSA on BPAs and CTAs, check out gsa.gov/bpa and gsa.gov/cta. ■



Options Processes Ensuring iNtegrity (OPEN)

What does OPEN mean to a Federal Acquisition Service (FAS) Multiple Award Schedule (MAS) contract holder?

OPEN is the new process for exercising options to extend the period of a Federal Supply Service contract. The goal of OPEN is to streamline the option process and ultimately meet the FAS Commissioner, Steven J. Kempf's timeliness goal of exercising options 60 days prior to contract expiration. OPEN was released on September 24, 2011 and the initial launch included 64 MAS contract holders. From that date forward, the system will run a query every two weeks for contracts expiring in the next 250 days and send notification to the Contracting Officer (CO), Contract Specialist (CS), and Administrative Contracting Officers (ACO). Therefore over time, all MAS contract holders will become part of the OPEN process.

While the launch has been a success, as with many new software releases, FAS is experiencing initial growing pains that are being addressed with solutions to specific issues, training and communications. One change in the new system is that in order for the process to run smoothly, the contractor's authorized negotiator(s) must have a digital certificate prior to any modification being exercised. Obtaining a digital certificate is a simple process and is now mandatory. To get yours, go to the eOffer website: <https://eoffer.gsa.gov/>, click on "digital certificates" and follow the instructions. Please be mindful that the name on your digital certificate must match the authorized negotiator name in the contract file **exactly**. If the names do not match exactly, you will not be able to access the eMod system.

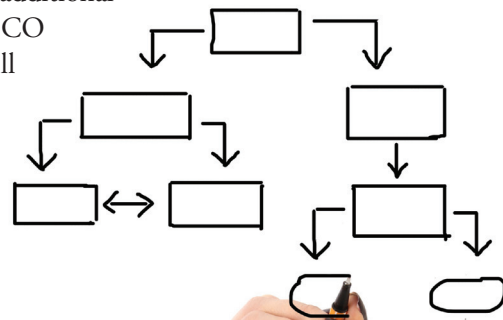
How does OPEN work?

As previously described, COs, CSs and ACOs will be notified 250 days prior to a contract expiring. Some contractors will then receive an e-mail from the CO on or about 250 to 210 days before the expiration of their contract notifying them of the government's intent not to exercise the option clause and the reason for this decision. The remaining

contractors will receive an e-mail from the CO on or about 210 days before the expiration of their contract notifying them of the government's intent to exercise the option. Copies of these e-mails ("Exclusion Determination Letter to Contractor" and "210 day Option Letter to Contractor") can be found on the VSC website (<https://vsc.gsa.gov>) under the Contract Administration tab. Then click on 'Options' under the modifications sub heading. This first batch of contractors will receive the 210 day letter around November 4, 2011.

Next steps

Contractors receiving e-mail notification to exercise the option will have two choices to make. First, they may choose not to continue with their contract. If chosen, they must notify the CO in writing or via eMod, that they do not wish to continue. Second, they may respond to the Option Letter in writing or via eMod, within 45 days with the data requirements outlined in the Option Letter. When the CO receives the contractor's response to the Option Letter, they will review the information provided and in some cases may ask for additional clarification. The CO and contractor will interact during this during this process by exchanging documents via the eMod system.



What to do if you need help:

If you have any comments or questions about the OPEN program you can e-mail us at masopen@gsa.gov. If you experience any technical problems with the eMod system call (866) 472-9114 or e-mail eoffer@gsa.gov. ■