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## Vendor Support Center (VSC) URL Address is Changing

Someone once said that the only thing constant is change. In that spirit, we are announcing that the URL for the Vendor Support Center is in the process of changing. The new address will be <http://vsc.gsa.gov>. Presently, either the old address or the new address will work, but you should start using the new address with this notification. Reminders will also be posted on the VSC itself.

## Proposed Rule For Mandatory CCR Registration

**Do you want the Government to pay your next invoice? If so, make sure you understand what the Central Contractor Registration (soon to be the Business Partner Network) is all about.**

The April 3, 2003, Federal Register published a proposed rule which would require contractor registration in the Central Contractor Registration (CCR) database prior to award of any contract, basic agreement, basic order agreement, or blanket ordering agreement. In addition, the proposed rule would require contracting officers to modify existing contracts whose period of performance extends beyond September 30, 2003, to require contractors to register in the CCR database by September 30, 2003. The comment period for this proposed rule closed June 2, 2003, and a final rule is expected this summer.

### What does this mean in real language?

Today, certain agencies, e.g., Department of Defense (DoD), NASA, Department of the Interior and others, require that contractors register in the CCR database in order to receive payment. For other agencies, contractors are required to submit the same information to various contracting and payment offices.

This will be changing. Soon, if you hold a contract with GSA, under the schedules program, or under the Global Supply program, or both, you will have to ensure that you are registered. No registration, no payment.

Under the proposed rule, contractors will be required to provide certain business information, including their Taxpayer Identification Number (TINs) and Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) information only once into

a common Government-wide data source. Ultimately, this will be a plus for you. You won't have to keep giving the Government the same information over and over again. It will eliminate a lot of duplication.

Remember, the proposed rule will not create a total electronic commerce environment for the Government, but it will help provide a basic framework or foundation that will allow migration to a total electronic commerce environment, a real advantage in the big picture.

Presently, approximately 10 percent of GSA Multiple Award Schedule (MAS) contractors are not registered in the CCR. We don't have the data yet for Global Supply Contractors. No matter what the numbers are, this is not a good group to find yourself in. We know that you want to be part of the majority and the companies who get paid. To register, all you have to do is go to <http://www.ccr.gov> click on "Vendor Corner;" select "Register Online" under "Quick Reference Guides." This should tell you everything that you need to know to register on the CCR.

You are responsible for the accuracy and completeness of the data in the CCR database. To remain registered in the CCR database after your initial registration, you are required to review and update this information on an annual basis to ensure that it is current and complete. If you do this, it will be shared Government-wide and you will get paid. Sounds like a plan.

## Contractor Survey Results: What Do You Really Think About Us?

The results are in! Overall, the Federal Supply Service (FSS) didn't do too badly, but according to the Contractor Satisfaction Survey, there still is a lot of room for improvement in many areas of our business.

The Contractor Satisfaction Survey was undertaken by Contract Management in FSS in January 2003. A contractor was retained to conduct the survey for FSS's four business lines [Commercial Acquisition, Supply, Travel and Transportation (combined) and Automotive]. The methodology used was the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) for all the scores and ratings. The ACSI, established in 1994, is a uniform cross-industry measure of satisfaction with goods and services available to

U. S. consumers, including both the private and public sectors. It has been adopted as the standard customer satisfaction measure by over 30 high-impact federal agencies.

Overall, you said very positive things about the people of FSS, but had concerns about the processes and systems.

### THE SCORES

Comparable Vendor Satisfaction for a large Federal Agency	.60
Federal Supply Service overall	.63
Automotive	.67
Office of Supply	.67
Travel and Transportation	.60
Commercial Acquisition (Schedules)	.56

Some folks have asked, why does FSS care? Why does GSA want to measure contractor satisfaction? Besides having a baseline metric, we want:

- To re-examine the FSS-to-vendor relationship and contractor experiences in order to identify specific areas of strengths and weaknesses
- To build and maintain strong relationships with FSS contractors and
- To link contractor perceptions of FSS to customer and employee experiences, where possible.

The results of the Contractor Satisfaction Survey report will serve as a decision tool for use in conjunction with other business partner and management information available to FSS.

We will use them to assist with:

- Determining those areas which need quality improvements
- Monitoring changes in business partner perceptions, attitudes and behavior over time and
- Evaluating the success of on-going quality improvement efforts (long term).

Over 1,000 of you responded, and you had lots to say.

**Here are some of the findings:**

**Office of Supply**

Top-priority items for the Office of Supply (GSA Global Supply) are product offerings, policies/procedures and contract administration. Some recommendations are:

- Streamline the process for adding new items and ensure contractors are aware of procedures and timelines for adding new items
- Raise awareness of the information available on Policies and Procedures, evaluate common methods of access to information resources, ask vendors for feedback, consider sending information-type bulletins to contractors
- Maintain strong relationship and high level of contractor service currently provided
- Investigate differences in service across the regions to ensure that all contractors are receiving the information and assistance they need to be "successful"

**Office of Commercial Acquisition (MAS Schedules)**

- Business partners are dissatisfied with the marketing support GSA provides and would like more opportunities for direct marketing to target agencies. Ensure that business partners better understand what marketing support GSA will and will not offer. (Look for this topic in a future issue of GSA Steps.)
- The Online Systems score shows room for improvement including the submission of information to eBay and GSA Advantage.
- Modification Process got lower scores due to timeliness of executing the modifications, the offering of new products and the changing of prices.

More positive scores were received in the areas of the Industrial Funding Fee (IFF) and the compliance Report Card Process. Business partners think of this review process as a helpful measure in their

dealings with GSA. They are particularly satisfied with the professionalism of the representatives and the ease of the review process.

**Automotive**

The Customer Satisfaction Survey score for GSA Automotive from Special Order Procedures (SOP) contractors is 67. SOP contractors rate GSA Automotive highly on their professionalism and helpfulness. The payment process seemed to be a particular strength for GSA Automotive. Time-related issues received relatively lower ratings.

**IMPROVED COMMUNICATION**

**M**any of your comments concerned communication, or the lack thereof, with FSS. Over and over again, it is suggested that FSS needs to improve its communication with contractors. Basically, contractors think that communications with FSS are not timely, consistent, understandable or available when they need them. This spanned the whole gamut of communications (verbal, written correspondence, e-mails, contracts, modifications, you name it). They complain that they cannot get return calls from FSS and they cannot get the answers they need to conduct their Government business.

According to our contractors, FSS needs to focus on improving our communication skills.

We want to thank the more than 1,000 of you who took the time and effort to share your thoughts, ideas and insights. We appreciated your candor and energy. We have already started translating some of the findings into action items. We look forward to hearing from even more with the next survey early next year.

Top-priority items for further investigation and improvement are Product Offerings, Solicitation/Contract Administration and Award Negotiation. Contractors are reportedly fairly satisfied with the fairness of the contract terms.

Automotive contractors working under the MAS Program were especially critical of Marketing Support and the Modification Process.

**Office of Travel and Transportation**

This part of the Contractor Satisfaction report deals with the FSS Office of Travel and Transportation under the CHAMP (Centralized Household Goods Traffic Management Program) or the Freight Management Program (FMP).

Overall, the Office of Travel and Transportation performs well on relationship or "people" aspects of performance, but falls short of carrier expectations in other process and information-related areas of service.

Top-priority items for improvement are the Interagency Traffic Management System (ITMS) Service Offering, Household Goods (HHG) Quality and Value Indices and Payment. Movement from the ITMS to the Transportation Management Services

Solution (TMSS) system appears to be a step in the right direction for satisfying carrier's needs.

Recommendations for this area are to investigate carriers' expectations for assistance once Tender of Service is in place; to continue improving and promoting the new TMSS; to clarify the process for HHG Quality Index and Value Index calculations; to share best practices between FMP and CHAMP; and to maintain a strong relationship and high level of contractor service currently given to carriers.

## Industrial Funding Fee (IFF) Modification Steps

So, you ask... What's all this stuff about the Industrial Funding Fee (IFF) reduction modification? How does it work? How does it affect me?

First of all, we are assuming you already know what we are talking about when we talk about the Industrial Funding Fee (IFF) reduction. If you are in the dark on this or need a refresher, you should check out Issue One of the GSA Steps, which immediately precedes this issue, or ask your GSA Administrative Contracting Officer for assistance. Now back to the modification.

The mandatory (yes, it is mandatory) IFF Modification affects all of the Federal Supply Service's (FSS's) 12,000 plus Multiple Award Schedule (MAS) contractors. For the convenience of all concerned, an automated modification model has been created for GSA-initiated mass modifications of this magnitude. The primary objective is to streamline the mass-modification process and eliminate the paperwork burden. Recently, this new model was tested on the Cooperative Purchasing modification for IT contractors and it proved to be very successful. The Modification can be found on the Vendor Support Center website @ <http://vsc.gsa.gov>.

Mid-morning on July 15, 2003, all of our MAS contractors received an email, advising that the IFF modification was ready to be accepted. It provided a direct hyperlink to the Vendor Support Center website (<http://vsc.gsa.gov>) and the specific Personal Identification Number (PIN) number associated with the contract number and specific modification and provided the instructions needed. The PIN assured security and verification in the modification process.

You will get a new PIN with each new mass modification.

A new section has been placed on the VSC homepage called "Pending Modifications." Anyone viewing the VSC website can review and choose from a list of Modifications available. Detailed information will educate the reader on the background, purpose and implications of the Modification. At the conclusion, the contractor will enter the PIN and other verification information as a means of accepting the Modification. Upon execution, a confirmation e-mail with a printable SF 30 attached will be sent to the contractor, ACO and PCO. Contractors do not have to return a signed copy of the Modification to GSA. By completing the electronic process, contractors are considered to have electronically signed the Modification.

The automated process will provide the following sequence of information:

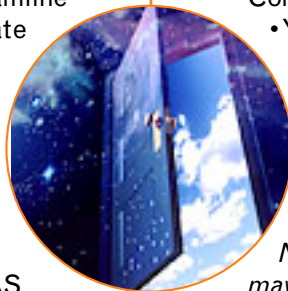
- Introduction to the Modification
- The regulatory guidance, in its entirety, as it appears in the Federal Register
- Summary of the Rule and its implications
- Sample Modification (Standard Form 30) language
  - So you can view the binding language before agreeing to it
- Authentication page
  - Refer to Required Information, below
- Confirmation page

The following Required Information will be necessary to accept or decline the Modification:

- GSA Contract Number (e.g., GS35F9999A)
- Personal Identification Number (PIN)
  - Company Name—as it appears in the contract
  - Your name
  - Your Title/Position
  - Your e-mail address
  - Your telephone number

**Note:** Only the Contact for Contract Administration or the Authorized Negotiator on file for the contract may enter into the Modification.

The Modification will remain available through the Vendor Support Center website until November 2003. At any time, the Contract Administrator or Authorized Negotiator may review, accept or decline the modification. Failure to accept the modification by November 1, 2003, will result in GSA cancelling the contract, effective December 31, 2003.





If you have questions about this modification or the process, please contact us immediately via e-mail at [contract.relations@gsa.gov](mailto:contract.relations@gsa.gov) or through the GSA Administering Contracting Officer (ACO) assigned to your contract. Either way, we will get back to you as soon as possible with an answer.

## Does Small Business Really Mean Small Business?

That is the question that The White House and other Government officials are asking. The problem (if you want to call it that) is that sometimes after a small business company gets a GSA Multiple Award Schedule or other multiple award contract they become very successful and over a period of time they outgrow their "small business" status and become other than "small." Again... and this is a problem?

The real issue is that under our procurement regulations and Small Business Administration (SBA) policy and guidelines, small and disadvantaged businesses are afforded certain protections and privileges simply because they are certified as "small business." Government agencies have goals for purchases of supplies and services from "small business." These goals are closely monitored for agency compliance and are a focus of this administration.

Currently, SBA's regulations provide that SBA determines the size of a concern as of the date the concern submits a written self-certification that it is "small" to the procuring agency as part of its initial offer. Therefore, for a Federal Supply Service (FSS) Multiple Award Schedule (MAS) or Government Wide Acquisition Contract (GWAC) or Global Supply contract, the size is determined as of the date of a concern's initial offer. If the concern is small at the time of offer, it remains "small" throughout the life of the MAS or GWAC (five to 20 years), regardless of how successful it may become. In the view of SBA this is a little misleading and we agree.

On November 15, 2002, GSA implemented a deviation to the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) requiring contractors operating under the MAS program or any other multiple award contract to re-certify that the concern qualifies as a small business each time its contract is up for renewal. Still, this means a business can represent itself as small for a full five

years. That may not be fair to small businesses. Some companies have done so well that they outgrow the small-size standard more quickly.

SBA is proposing at 13 CFR (Code of Federal Regulations) 121.404 to specifically address size as it relates to awards issued to multiple award contracts. Under the proposed rule, a firm with a MAS or other multiple award contract must certify *annually* on the anniversary date of the contract award that it continues to be a "small business" for a specified size standard. We will keep you informed as the regulatory process unfolds. In the meantime, if you want to read the backup story, check the Federal Register dated April 25, 2003 (Volume 689, Number 80) (Proposed Rules) (Pages 20350-20356).

## GSA's Senior Procurement Executive Postures Industry Partners for Homeland Defense

Events that occurred on the morning of September 11, 2001, drastically changed the perception of the world for all Americans and many others. We now live with increased surveillance of our public transportation systems, a color-coded homeland security advisory system and an enhanced awareness of the common threat that may impact our individual and collective welfare. Increased vigilance has become a common characteristic of our daily life. Due to the continuing threat, on June 4, 2003, Mr. David Drabkin, the General Services Administration (GSA) Senior Procurement Executive, issued additional guidance to agency procurement officials pertaining to the Defense Priorities and Allocations System (DPAS). Among other things, the guidance provides a contract clause for use in Schedules solicitations and contracts that advises industry partners of DPAS program requirements. The same statutory authority covers Stock and SOP, but this clause is not used in these SOP and Stock contracts.

The purpose of the DPAS is to assure the timely availability of industrial resources to meet current national defense, energy and civil emergency preparedness program requirements and to provide an operating system to support rapid industrial response in a national emergency. The primary statutory authority for the DPAS is Title I of the Defense Production Act of 1950, as amended, with additional authority from the Selective Service Act

of 1948, and the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act. Executive Orders 12919 and 12742 delegate this authority to the Department of Commerce (DOC) to administer the DPAS.

The DPAS is published in the Code of Federal Regulations at 15 CFR 700. This regulation provides an overview, a detailed explanation of operations and procedures and other implementing guidance, including information on special priorities assistance and compliance.

Orders placed under DPAS are “rated orders.” Rated orders must receive preferential treatment only as necessary to meet delivery requirements.

Rated orders are identified by a rating symbol of either “DX” or “DO” followed by a program identification symbol. All “DX” rated orders take preference over “DO” rated orders and unrated orders. All “DO” rated orders have equal priority with each other and take preference over unrated orders.

Most of all, be aware of these designations and please respond appropriately in case of a national emergency. Contracts may be modified in the future to include this clause.

For your information the exact language in the clause issued reads as follows:

#### **552.211-15 Defense Priorities and Allocations System Requirements (March 2003)**

##### **(a) Definitions.**

“Approved Program” means a program determined to be necessary or appropriate for priorities and allocations support to promote the national defense (see Schedule 1 of 15 CFR 700 for a list of Delegate Agencies, approved programs, and program identification symbols).

“Delegate Agency” means an agency of the U.S. Government authorized by delegation from the Department of Commerce (DOC) to place priority ratings on contracts or orders needed to support

approved programs.

“Defense Priorities and Allocations System (DPAS)” means the regulation published at 15 CFR 700 that requires preferential treatment for certain contracts and orders placed by a Delegate Agency in support of an approved program.

“Rated Order” means, for the purpose of this contract, a delivery or task order placed by a Delegate Agency under the provisions of the DPAS in support of an approved program and which requires preferential treatment as necessary to meet delivery requirements. This includes orders placed by the Contractor to subcontractors or suppliers for required products, materials, and services resulting from such orders.

#### **FLASH**

**At this reporting, there are 683 IT product contractors who have modified their contracts to include Cooperative Purchasing for State and Local Government. That's about 16.8 percent.**

##### **(b) Rated Order Requirement.**

From time to time, the Contractor may receive a rated order under this contract from a Delegate Agency. The Contractor must give preferential treatment to rated orders as required by the Defense Priorities and Allocations System (DPAS) regulation (15 CFR 700). The existence of previously accepted unrated or lower rated orders is not sufficient

reason to reject a rated order. Rated orders take preference over all unrated orders as necessary to meet required delivery dates. There are two levels of ratings designated by the symbol of either “DO” or “DX.” All “DO” rated orders have equal priority with each other and take preference over unrated orders. All “DX” rated orders take preference over “DO” rated orders and unrated orders. The rating designation is followed by a program identification symbol. Program identification symbols indicate which approved program is supported by the rated order (see Schedule 1 of 15 CFR 700 for a list of Delegate Agencies, approved programs, and program identification symbols).

##### **(c) Additional information.**

Additional information may be obtained at the DOC DPAS web site <http://www.bis.doc.gov/OSIES/DPAS> or by contacting the designated Administrative Contracting Officer.