

5 STEPS TO GET A GSA CONTRACT

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW

For many Contractors, getting a GSA Contract is a crucial effort for Federal Market success. There are five steps to this process, and this E-Book will guide you through each step in detail, offering the insights from a proven and trusted GSA Contacts specialist.



GSA FOCUS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction Page 2

Step 1: What GSA Schedule, If Any? Pages 3 – 4

Step 2: GSA Offer Preparation & Submission Pages 5 – 6

Step 3: GSA Clarifications & Negotiations Pages 7 – 9

Step 4: GSA Registration Pages 10 – 12

Step 5: GSA Management Pages 13 – 16

About GSA Focus Page 17

INTRODUCTION



The General Services Administration (GSA) Federal Acquisition Service (FAS) offers contract vehicles called GSA Schedules. Vendors who want to improve their marketing and efficiency of selling to the Government can acquire GSA Contracts. This cumbersome process seems to be built to frustrate, often times resulting in multiple rejections.

Unless you have someone with federal contracting experience in-house, it is a much better use of time and resources to outsource to a GSA Contract Specialist. This 5-part series will break down the process into small and intelligible parts. This will allow you to focus on each part directly to gain the best understanding possible.

If you are interested in getting a GSA Contract, please do not hesitate to reach out to us. We would love to learn about your company and answer all of your questions.



STEP 1:

WHAT GSA SCHEDULE, IF ANY?

The First Step in Getting on a GSA Schedule

Getting a GSA Contract is a big step, and research should go into making sure it is the right step for your company. You should (1) know the Agencies who buy what you sell and if they use GSA often, and (2) have a clear understanding of the marketing and administrative commitment a GSA Contract entails. without the dedicated manpower in-house to pursue federal bids and maintain the GSA Contract, you will most definitely fail.



STEP 1:

WHAT GSA SCHEDULE, IF ANY?

Which GSA Schedule is Right for You?

The first step in getting a GSA Contract is to isolate which GSA Schedule your company's products or services belong in. Between the GSA and VA FSS Contracts, there are 40 Schedules. They pull together industry-related offerings and subcategorize the offerings into Special Item Numbers (SIN's). GSA Schedules cover almost every industry you can imagine; from medical devices to engineering services, from IT services to science products, and much more. HERE is a list of all GSA Schedules:

<http://www.gsaelibrary.gsa.gov>

It is very important that the correct GSA Schedule is targeted initially, because this will govern which document package is used. The initial Solicitation documents are the backbone of an offer, however most documents must be gathered or drafted. Often times, a vendor will want to get the biggest bang for their buck, and apply for every GSA Schedule and/or SIN possible. This approach will almost definitely lead to rejection because the GSA takes the scope of their categories very seriously.

Below are some of the more popular GSA Schedules, if your company is not in this list; here is a list of the popular GSA Contracts available to your business.

- ✧ IT Schedule 70
- ✧ PES Schedule 871
- ✧ MOBIS Schedule 874
- ✧ Medical Equipment Schedule 65IIA
- ✧ Security Schedule 84
- ✧ Environmental Schedule 899
- ✧ Building Materials Schedule 56
- ✧ Facilities Maintenance Schedule 03FAC
- ✧ Hardware Schedule 51V

Full list of the GSA Schedules:

<http://www.gsascheduleservices.com/gsa-schedules/>



STEP 2:

GSA OFFER PREPARATION & SUBMISSION

The Second Step in Getting on a GSA Contract

The labor intensive, heavy lifting happens in the second step: preparing the GSA Offer and submitting. A GSA offer consists of 15-30 documents, some are downloaded in the solicitation package and completed: proposal price list, summary of offer, commercial sales practices, and other schedule-specific documents. Additionally, there are many supplemental documents that must be gathered and prepared for every GSA offer: financials, commercial price list, contracts and invoices, etc. Here are a few details that will give you insight into the process as a whole.



STEP 2:

GSA OFFER PREPARATION & SUBMISSION

The Second Step in Getting a GSA Contract

OPEN RATINGS REPORT The GSA wants to know what your customers have to say about you. So, you must submit client points of contact info to a third part service called Open Ratings. They will all be surveyed, and in the end a report will be generated outlining topics such as quality, reliability, cost, etc. In most cases, at least 5 survey must be completed.

DIGITAL CERTIFICATE The GSA has mandated that a person from within the company must have a Digital Certificate. This allows access to the GSA's e-offer system, where modifications to GSA contracts are submitted. Digital certificates are issued by third part vendors like IdenTrust and cost around \$120.

FACTORS/SECTIONS The most work (by far) goes into outlining the technical details of your company to the GSA in the format they require. Depending on the GSA Schedule you are submitting for, this is called the "Sections" or the "Factors." These requirements include many minor details about your company to assure the GSA that you have the capabilities to meet the demands that federal buyers require: financial strength, manpower, internal systems, experience, quality controls, etc.

The Technical Proposal is where contracting a GSA specialist will benefit you the most. The GSA is very touchy about Scope, and one small mis-step in the Technical Proposal can unravel the entire GSA offer. There are also some very vague requirements for project details that only a specialist knows how to answer (through trial and error themselves).

GSA OFFER SUBMISSION The GSA is as technological as any Federal Agency, and their submission system, E-Offer, is handled through the web. A Digital Certificate grants an employee or GSA specialist access to the E-Offer account for a company. The upload process involves a 7-step process: Corporate Information, Negotiators, Goods/Services, Standard Responses, Solicitation Clauses, Upload Documents, Submit eOffer. Pretty much anyone could handle the upload into the eOffer system. However, all information entered must completely match with the information in the document package, or the GSA offer may be rejected.



STEP 3:

GSA CLARIFICATIONS & NEGOTIATIONS

The Third Step in Getting on a GSA Contract

Congratulations if you make it to GSA Clarifications with your Offer, most that make it this far are awarded (eventually!). Primarily, you are celebrating that your offer has not been rejected.

It won't feel like a celebration, however, since in reality you will receive an email with a list of demands and likely a short deadline. Welcome to the GSA Clarifications stage of getting a GSA Contract.



STEP 3:

GSA CLARIFICATIONS & NEGOTIATIONS

What Are GSA Clarifications?

The GSA must (1) be fully satisfied with your document package and (2) it's contents must be consistent. GSA Clarifications handle many of the issues relating to these two topics. The offer package listed many mandatory documents that you have already submitted, but now you are at the mercy of the GSA Contracting Specialist.

Every, offer will have a few “gaps” that need to be filled in the mind of the Contracting Specialist. These “gaps” are usually just areas that need to be better supported, or they are weak points in the due diligence check into your business that must be explained away. GSA Clarifications must be handled with craftiness and timeliness to build momentum towards the next stage, Negotiations.

General Tips for Successful Clarifications

- 1) Roll with the punches – GSA Clarifications may be a painless, one-round process or it may drag on for months. You have no control here, so just persevere as best as you can.
- 2) Respond same/next day if possible – Often times, the Contract Specialist will keep momentum going on your offer if you are responsive to their document needs.
- 3) Every GSA Contracting Specialist is different – Throw out any past experience you may have with this process. Every GSA Contract review is as unique as a snowflake.



STEP 3:

GSA CLARIFICATIONS & NEGOTIATIONS

What Are GSA Negotiations?

You can truly celebrate if you make it to negotiations, because you can see the finish line. However, it is important to take this process very seriously or you could end up with a GSA Contract that doesn't much benefit your company.

GSA Clarifications are pretty straightforward, but Negotiations are where hiring an outside consultant is of great benefit. The GSA Contracting Specialist goes through these a few times every week. They are good at it, and are trained how to navigate the negotiation process. So, the cards are stacked against you. An experienced GSA Consultant will level the playing field and assure your GSA Contract benefits you in the end.

GSA Contract Negotiations cover 3 areas:

- 1) Making sure you understand the major Terms & Conditions of the GSA Contract you are about to enter into for 20 years (if all goes well).
- 2) Negotiating the General Discount, Volume/Quantity Discounts, Prompt Payment Discount, Freight Conditions, etc. of the GSA Contract.
- 3) Preparation of a Final Proposal Revisions document to wrap up the final agreed upon terms of the GSA Contract.



STEP 4:

GSA REGISTRATION

The Fourth Step in Getting on a GSA Contract

Getting a GSA Contract gives you several advantages over your competitors. The greatest of these advantages is that you are granted exclusive access to the GSA systems, which many federal buyers use on a daily basis.

These web-based systems let you know about opportunities before they are public, and they also help to advertise your company and offerings to Purchasing Contracting Officers (PCO's). After award of a GSA Contract, a Contractor should have taken the steps to participate in all of these systems.



STEP 4:

GSA REGISTRATION

GSA Advantage!

GSA Advantage! Is the Amazon.com of federal purchasing.

For those offering Products, GSA Advantage is the most valuable of these marketing tools that the GSA offers. GSA Advantage! Is a giant e-commerce system available to all federal buyers (and many state).

This is a public website, that a federal buyer can navigate to and purchase from. If the order is less than \$3,000, then they can use a Government Purchase Card, without any competition. For larger orders, up to \$30,000, a buyer can use GSA Advantage research to justify an order (gathering 3 bids without any contractors knowing).

<https://www.gsaadvantage.gov/>

<http://www.gsascheduleservices.com/info/gsa-advantage/>

GSA E-Buy

Imagine getting regular emails notifying you of federal projects that only you and a handful of others can view.

For those offering Services, GSA E-Buy is the most valuable of these marketing tools that the GSA offers. GSA E-Buy is an online bidding system where federal buyers post their needs, usually projects. GSA Contract holders get exclusive access to bidding opportunities under \$30,000 (beyond that the bids must go to FBO.gov but still may be earmarked to GSA Contract holders). Contractors can bid on an opportunity directly through this system, as well as track the progress.

<https://www.ebuy.gsa.gov/>

<http://www.gsascheduleservices.com/info/gsa-ebuy/>



STEP 4:

GSA REGISTRATION

GSA E-Library

Do you want to be listed in the “Google” of federal Contractors, so buyers can find your company?

GSA E-Library is a collection of landing pages for all GSA Contract holders. The function of these pages is to offer up the contract information for federal buyers to research on a purchase. E-Library pages have the contractor’s contact information, GSA Number, DUNS, a list of SIN’s, Set asides, and the link to the Text file. A Text File is a formatted document that lists all of the major terms of a GSA Contract (freight, delivery, volume/quantity discount, etc.).

<http://www.gsaelibrary.gsa.gov/ElibMain/home.do>

GSA Reverse Auctions

All you need to win a GSA Reverse Auction is the lowest price.

GSA Reverse Auctions are the newest addition to the list, but have been widely accepted almost immediately. Federal buyers can post their needs in this system, and GSA Contract holders (alone) can view and bid on these opportunities. It is like an auction where the lowest bidder wins.

<http://reverseauctions.gsa.gov/>



STEP 5:

GSA MANAGEMENT

The Fifth Step in Getting on a GSA Contract

After you have your GSA Contract, now you must focus on keeping it. You have two years to Sell \$25K (and every one year after that), so this is a use-it-or-lose-it situation.

So, you have only made it to the starting line after GSA Contract Award. I know that sounds bad, because you thought the race was over.

It helps to think of getting your GSA Contract as Basic Training, and now you are ready for battle. Winning with your GSA Contract takes (1) Preparation and (2) Discipline. GSA Management is not easy, but it is vital for success.



STEP 5:

GSA MANAGEMENT

Preparation – Federal Marketing

Preparation comes into play when you develop a solid marketing plan in order to sale to the federal government. This will include getting your set-asides in order, getting your GSA Contract, attending networking events, etc. Also, this means searching and tracking bid opportunities, and pursuing them with proposals. It requires a good deal of preparation, in the form of building staff and processes.

After a few weeks of GSA Management, you will likely learn that the Federal Market is very similar to the commercial market in some ways, but also very different in others. A commercial buyer has much more freedom than a federal buyer.

In business, buyers do what they want, right. This is important to keep in mind when working with a federal buyer, there are so many more hoops that they must jump through. If you can make the hoops go away, you will win their hearts and their budgets. Did you think Federal Business would be anything other than politics?

Here are some insights about the differences (and some similarities) between a Commercial and Federal Buyer:

- ✧ With both, the best value should win, but best price usually wins.
- ✧ They are both in large part offices and employees using products and services, so the needs are often similar.
- ✧ The Fed has a complicated Bidding and Acquisition process, while businesses do what they want.
- ✧ With Fed competition is limited but mandatory, while businesses can do what they want.
- ✧ Federal Contracting Officers are held accountable to taxpayers (and can be sued personally), while businesses do what they want.
- ✧ Federal awards can be protested and overturned, Businesses can do what they want.



STEP 5:

GSA MANAGEMENT

Discipline comes into play in the form of:

- (1) GSA Contract upkeep, and
- (2) GSA Contract Compliance.

Discipline – Contract Modifications

Keeping your Contract up-to-date is not fun and will not win you anything, but it will keep you out of hot water. Reputation really matters in the Federal Market, and you do not want your company to be known as the one that doesn't change their offerings enough and has to refuse orders.

The GSA has a "Contractor Report Card" that they issue twice every five years, so there is some bark to their bite.

About Modifications

Keeping your GSA offerings fresh is a significant step in GSA Contract Management. You don't want to offer a widget on GSAAdvantage! for \$100, if you are paying the Manufacturer \$120 for that item. On the flip side, if the Manufacture price drops, you want that to reflect on your GSA Contract so you can offer a more competitive price. The same goes for price changes to services.

GSA Focus performs several types of modifications to our client's GSA Contracts: Add, Price Change, Delete, Admin changes. Modifying your GSA Contract is relatively easy (especially if you are a GSA Focus Customer). There were around 30 documents involved in getting your GSA Contract, but a modification only uses 5-10 documents.

After your modifications are approved, you must post the updates to GSAAdvantage! Using their antiquated software (again, very easy if you are a GSA Focus Customer). Then, the changes are live for all federal buyers to see.



STEP 5:

GSA MANAGEMENT

Discipline – Contract Compliance

The “Contractor Report Card” also touches on compliance issues that a Contractor has. Reputation really matters in the Federal Market, and you do not want your company to be known as the one that doesn’t even know the basic complaint rules and gets in trouble.

There are a few major aspects of GSA Contract Compliance, but it is advisable that you get acquainted with all of the requirements that relate to your GSA Contract. Here are a few of the major Compliance topics:

MINIMUM SALES REQUIREMENT You must sell at least \$25,000 through your GSA Contract in the first two years, and every year after.

PRICE REDUCTIONS CLAUSE It is obvious that you cannot charge prices higher than your GSA negotiated rates. But, did you know that your agreement with the GSA reaches into your commercial practices (discounts and terms)? So, you could have major compliance issues if you do not have a standardized price list commercially that you keep to religiously.

TAA COMPLIANCE Selling Chinese products through GSA is not allowed, because of something called the Trade Agreement Act (TAA). Many other countries are not permissible either. This gets pretty complicated at times, especially when “Country of Origin” is not 100% obvious if components are made in multiple countries (where some are compliant and some are not).

WAGE DETERMINATION Service-based GSA Contract Holders are held to the local standards of the SCA or Davis Bacon wage determinations in some cases. This is hammered-out when getting a GSA Contract, and must be followed throughout the life of the contract.

OTHERS There are many other important and relevant Clauses in the Solicitation document that lead you to getting your GSA Contract. Additionally, the FAR is ever-growing. It helps to become a federal contracting nerd, so you can keep up with the changing landscape under you. It also helps to have a good Lawyer that specializes in Government Contracts to answer compliance questions that arise.



ABOUT GSA FOCUS



CONTACT

GSA Focus, Inc.
2539 John Hawkins Pkwy
Suite 101-151
Birmingham, AL 35244

Toll Free: 866-916-6484
Direct: 760-230-4188
Fax: 760-978-6282

Email: josh@gsafocus.com

Web: www.gsascheduleservices.com

SOCIAL



<https://www.linkedin.com/company/gsa-schedule-services>



<https://twitter.com/joshladick>



<https://www.youtube.com/user/gsascheduleservices>



<https://plus.google.com/104756867225844471063/posts>



<https://www.facebook.com/pages/GSA-Focus-GSA-Schedule-Services/106645616053885>

