

GSA Progresses with Implementation of Category Management Method of Acquisition

Posted At : November 11, 2014 9:21 AM | Posted By : Angie Petty

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GSA is piloting a Common Acquisition Portal (CAP) as part of its Category Management Initiative launched in April.

Category Management is the concept of grouping products and services into categories or "hallways" for access by contracting officers and program managers. Category management is how the most successful Fortune 500 companies approach acquisition. It focuses on five key areas:

- Optimizing contract vehicles and managing the landscape
- Managing data collection and analysis
- Leveraging supplier relationships
- Maximizing customer relationships
- Growing and sharing expertise

For GSA's Federal Acquisition Service, this will mean identifying core categories of business they will develop a higher level of expertise and manage like a strategic business unit. The expertise will be leveraged to direct buyers to the best solutions for them while streamlining the procurement process.

GSA officials gave a briefing on the CAP project at the recent ATC/IAC Executive Leadership Conference. "Right now there are tens of thousands of contracts across our government," said Tom Sharpe, commissioner of GSA's Federal Acquisition Service. "One company alone can have hundreds of contracts with the federal government; there is a way to radically change federal procurement, and it's as simple as working and acting as one."

Online access to CAP will occur through an "acquisitions gateway," which will guide users through their category and procurement options. The gateway is currently under development. A beta version of the gateway was launched in early October with three hallways: IT hardware, IT software and office supplies.

Over time, the hallways will be developed with information and services to continuously improve acquisition outcomes. Ultimately, the solution will provide the following capabilities:

- **Procurement Optimizer:** A comprehensive contract-comparison search engine that enhances competition for government acquisition
- **Market Intelligence Center:** Category-centric market research materials that guide purchase decisions based on category manager's government-wide expertise
- **Clear View:** Real-time data on pricing and purchasing, as well as assessment tools that help provide a big-picture view of government and individual agency spending behavior
- **Collaborative Contracting Library:** Provides a resource to jump-start procurements with a central repository of exemplary contract work for complex buys compiled by community experts.
- **eMarketplace:** An eCommerce transaction platform for simple purchases

GSA's goal is to streamline and simplify the federal acquisition process, and to help agencies be more efficient and make smarter buying choices.