

Literacy — Agencies: GSA, the Procurement Backbone

The General Services Administration does not need most of what it buys — it runs the store the rest of government shops at. GSA’s role is procurement infrastructure: the schedules, the government-wide acquisition contracts (GWACs), and the buying channels that let every agency buy without running a new full competition every time. If you want to be findable to the federal market, GSA is where you get on the shelf.**

Culture: the middleman that is not a middleman

GSA is the federal government’s landlord and shopkeeper. It manages real estate, travel, vehicles, technology — and, most importantly for this course, **shared acquisition vehicles**. Its distinctive cultural fact:

- GSA is a **service to other agencies**, not a mission agency in the defense or science sense. Its “customer” is the rest of the government.
- GSA’s vehicles exist to make buying *faster, cheaper, and compliant*: instead of each agency running a full open competition for every laptop or every IT service, the agency buys off a GSA vehicle that was already competed.
- For the seller, GSA is a **gateway**: win a place on a GSA vehicle once, and every agency in government can buy from you through it without a new full competition. It is the closest thing the market has to a federal shelf.

The strategic significance cannot be overstated: **for a small or mid-size firm, getting on the right GSA vehicle is frequently the single highest-leverage business-development move available** — the difference between chasing every opportunity from zero and being a standing option agencies can already reach.

The Schedule: MAS

The flagship GSA instrument is the **Schedule** — today, the **Multiple Award Schedule (MAS)**, the modern consolidated form of the old “GSA Schedules.” (The consolidation folded dozens of legacy schedules into one MAS with large categories — another instance of the profile’s standing rule: *tools change, the function endures*.)

How it works:

- GSA competes and awards **MAS contracts** to many suppliers in a category — typically dozens or hundreds — each with its own catalog of offered items or services, terms, and prices.
- An agency can then place an **order against a MAS contract** under streamlined rules (FAR Part 8), without a new full competition. For larger or more complex orders, the agency may run a **small competition among MAS holders** (through GSA eBuy).

- The MAS catalog is published in **GSA eLibrary**, the searchable catalog of schedules and contractors — the shelf, made visible.

Being “on the schedule” does not guarantee orders — it guarantees *findability and eligibility*. The orders still have to be won.

The GWAC posture: OASIS, Alliant, Polaris, and the consolidation

Alongside the schedules, GSA runs the **government-wide acquisition contracts (GWACs)** — large multiple-award vehicles for whole categories of work. The names churn (that is the standing caution), but the shapes are durable:

- **OASIS / OASIS+** — the flagship **professional services** GWAC (management, technical, logistics, and more), organized in functional categories and pools, including small-business and socioeconomic set-aside pools. Legacy OASIS has been giving way to **OASIS+** with rolling awards and on-ramps.
- **Alliant** — the unrestricted **IT services** GWAC (the current iteration is Alliant 3).
- **Polaris** — the **small-business IT services** GWAC, the small-business counterpart to Alliant.
- **STARS** and **VETS** — the 8(a) and SDVOSB-specific IT GWACs.

The strategic lesson is the same as the DoD profile’s vehicle lesson, from the GSA side: **which GWAC you are on determines which task-order competitions can reach you**. A small IT firm’s path is often Polaris, STARS, or the set-aside pools of OASIS+; a services firm’s path is the OASIS+ small-business pool. The consolidation current in federal buying (agencies being steered toward GSA vehicles) makes the GWAC decision *more* consequential, not less.

Buying channels

When an agency actually buys, it uses GSA’s channels:

- **GSA eLibrary** — the catalog: search it to see who is on a schedule and what they offer.
- **GSA Advantage** — the online ordering portal for schedule purchases, the government’s e-commerce front end for commodity-like items.
- **GSA eBuy** — the portal where agencies post requests for quotes among schedule holders; this is where a schedule holder actually *sees* the competitions it can win.
- **GSA schedules and GWACs in use** — agencies also use GSA’s other service offerings (travel, fleet, real estate), but for this course the acquisition-facing channels are the ones above.

The pursuer’s habit: **monitor eBuy and the GWAC task-order feeds** the way a commercial firm monitors its sales pipeline. That is where the orders live.

The LPTA vs. best-value split

GSA buying spans the full evaluation spectrum, and the split is a useful lens on the market:

- **Commodity-like purchases** (standard items, well-defined) tend toward **Lowest Price Technically Acceptable (LPTA)**: once you clear the technical bar, price decides. This is the GSA Advantage world — price is the differentiator.
- **Services and complex work** tend toward **best-value tradeoff**: technical approach, past performance, and price compete, and a higher-priced offer can win on merit. This is the OASIS+ and task-order world — the win themes and discriminators from doctrine/09 decide.

The lesson from doctrine/05 applies with force: **know which game you are in before you price**. On a MAS order for a defined commodity, price-to-win is a race; on a best-value task order, it is a position.

Evaluation emphasis and past performance

At the *schedule-award* level, GSA's evaluation is about terms, conditions, and fair-and-reasonable pricing against the catalog. At the *order* level, the evaluation is set by the ordering agency — which is why your GSA vehicle is a doorway, not a win. Past performance is checked the standard federal way (CPARS/FAPIIS; see the DoD profile), and a clean record matters because agencies do not want to place orders against a contractor whose federal record is a risk. GSA itself also runs a supplier-performance and integrity screening at award time.

Set-aside landscape

GSA vehicles are one of the main ways the small-business programs reach the market:

- The schedules carry **set-aside order options** — an agency can set aside an order for small business, 8(a), HUBZone, SDVOSB, or WOSB, choosing only from the schedule holders in that pool.
- The **GWACs are organized in pools** — unrestricted, total small business, and the socioeconomic set-asides — so the vehicle *itself* is often the small-business door.
- The SBA small-business goals (the government-wide 23 percent) are satisfied substantially *through* GSA vehicles.

The practical consequence: **your certifications (8(a), HUBZone, SDVOSB, WOSB) and your vehicle choices multiply**. A HUBZone firm on the right schedule with a HUBZone set-aside order in front of it is competing against a small pool of peers — the friendlier pool from doctrine/01.

Learning pointers

Learning pointers. The GSA profile is the course's study of shared procurement infrastructure — the “shelf” the whole market shops at. - **Doctrine** — doctrine/01 (the set-aside detour made visible through GSA pools), doctrine/02 (task orders and standing competitions), doctrine/05 (LPTA vs. best value). - **Literacy** — industry-standard-canon (the canon's vocabulary), acronym-decoder (GSA, MAS, IDIQ, LPTA), further-reading (GSA eLibrary). - **Case study** — Ravonics' services NAICS codes (541512, 541330) are GSA-schedule natural fits; its HUBZone status opens set-aside order pools. - **Course** — the pricing course (undergraduate-220-pricing-and-price-to-win-fundamentals) and the contracts course (undergraduate-303-government-contracts-and-subcontracting) both exercise the schedule/GWAC decision. - **Verify** — MAS category structure, GWAC names and award status (OASIS+, Polaris, Alliant 3), and the consolidation current change over time; confirm the current vehicle list on GSA's acquisition pages before committing.