

Leverage Your HIT Buying Power: Use GWACs

If you buy Health IT, read the OFPP/OMB memo on the “Development, Review and Approval of Business Cases for Certain Interagency and Agency-Specific Acquisitions”. It applies to you!

Everyone thinks their HIT applications are special and unique.

The software for health applications, health infrastructure support, or science and research has to be tailored for very specific groups ranging from clinicians to administration.

That’s OK. We get it; you have special IT application needs.

But if you think it is OK is to say you need a NEW special one-of-a-kind agency-specific contract or vehicle to buy that IT, then Dan Gordon, OFPP Administrator at OMB has one word for you before you start.

Stop!

On September 29, 2011, in a seven page memo on the “Development, Review and Approval of Business Cases for Certain Interagency and Agency-Specific Acquisitions”, Gordon wrote:

“It is critical that the Federal Government, in its procurement activity, leverage its buying power to the maximum extent as well as achieve administrative efficiencies and cost savings.

Too often, however, agencies establish new overlapping and duplicative contracts for supplies or services, because the agencies have not adequately considered the suitability of existing interagency contract vehicles: government-wide acquisition contracts (GWACs), multi-agency contracts, and blanket purchase agreements (BPAs).

Similarly, in those situations when a suitable interagency vehicle does not exist, agencies have not adequately

considered the opportunity to leverage the agency’s own buying power, and achieve administrative efficiencies, through the use of an agency-specific contract. This failure to make maximum appropriate use of interagency vehicles and agency-specific contracts results in higher prices and unnecessary administrative costs.”

The message is clear: Before you start working on a new contract, FIRST look for an existing contract that might do the job.

In fact, maybe it’s time to make the acquisition and contracting professionals who run government-wide acquisition contracts (GWACs) your new best friends.

They can help. They are there to help you.

Proven To Serve Taxpayers Well

A GWAC is a pre-competted, multiple-award, indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity (IDIQ) contract that agencies can use to buy customized, total IT solutions.

OMB has given GSA, NASA and NIH (run by NITAAC — the NIH Information Technology Acquisition and Assessment Center) the authority to establish and administer these interagency vehicles and they are open to every IT buyer — including those in DOD — in government.

Mary Armstead, NITAAC program director, predicts more people will know about GWACs in the next year, if they don’t know about them now. That’s because of concerted administration efforts (e.g. the memo) to get buyers to use GWACs instead of standing up their own vehicles.

Leverage, Leverage and Then Leverage Some More

“The threshold and the bar have been raised requiring Federal agencies to establish business cases,” Armstead told *On The FrontLines* in a recent interview. “Putting the onus on the agencies to develop a business case adds another dimension,” she said. “It makes them think twice about not utilizing what is already out there.”

She explained that when agencies stand up their own contracts they undermine the basic philosophy of existing contracts, which she says are designed to “leverage, leverage and then leverage some more. When you are not doing that, then you are missing an opportunity to utilize proven vehicles and compromising your ability to obtain the best or most efficient pricing.”

“Initiation of new multiagency and individual agency instruments to acquire products and services available under existing GWACs can undermine efforts to benefit from economies of scale,” Armstead noted. “So driving everyone — or the attempt to drive folks to a single spot, GWACs — is

Learn More About GWACs

GSA
www.gsa.gov/gwacs

NASA SEWP
www.sewp.nasa.gov

NIH NITAAC
nitaac.nih.gov/nitaac

GWAC benefits

Premier IT Product and Service Providers

Access to exceptionally qualified IT service providers enabling innovative solutions at competitive prices. Two levels of contract competition — one at the master contract level and another at the delivery order level. No need to synopsise or post requirements according to FAR Subpart 16.505(a)(1)

Worldwide IT Solutions

You can use GSA GWACs to develop IT solutions anywhere in the world. Access to ancillary support GWACs facilitate a total integrated solution on a single task order by providing access to ancillary support, such as products and services that are integral and necessary to an IT effort.

Save Time and Money With Streamlined Contracting

GWACs are pre-competed contracts offering a full range of contract types (all types of fixed-price, cost-reimbursement, labor-hour, and time-and-materials) to make your procurement planning easier.

Streamlined Ordering Procedures Save Time And Money In Starting Your Acquisition.

GWAC task orders can be issued in considerably less time than conventional open market procurements. Customer can select awardees based on their best value criteria.

Customized terms and conditions relevant to your task or delivery order can be easily added

Free Scope Compatibility Reviews

NITAAC can help determine whether your requirement is within scope of a GWAC within 1 business day. NITAAC performs a comprehensive analysis of requirements and provides feedback to customers in order to assist in defining and strengthening the solicitation package.

Complies With OFPP Policy

The Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) also asks agencies to look to interagency contracts like GWACs first for efficiencies and cost savings in its September 2011 memo, Development, Review and Approval of Business Cases for Certain Interagency and Agency-Specific Acquisitions (PDF).

Additional benefits from FAR Part 16:

DoD, NASA and Coast Guard: No protest on orders under \$10 million, except on the grounds that the order increases the scope, period or maximum value of the GWAC; orders in excess of \$10 million may be protested. Other Agencies: No protest on any order except on the grounds that the order increases the scope, period or maximum value of the GWAC.

Sources: GSA (www.gsa.gov/gwacs); NITAAC

a very good thing to do for the federal government and the taxpayer as well.”

It is not just about delivery of healthcare IT, it is also about saving taxpayer dollars and GWACs are proven instruments for doing just that.

Armstead does not deny that some agencies have special needs. “Look at DHS. There are agencies with special unique requirements that need a set of vendors that really understand that.

But we are going to see a change as it relates to individuals very casually standing up these new instruments. Across the landscape, three solid GWACs already exist that — between the three of them — can supply every need one may have around IT.”

Rigorous Award Process, Proven Capabilities, Continuous Validation

For IT buyers, GWACs provide confidence.

First buyers can be confident GWAC holders have been validated through a rigorous approval process said Armstead. “It’s a huge process. People don’t see the inner workings of a GWAC program and all that is done to stand up awards.”

She explained the way that GWACs are established ensures contract holders have undergone every single vetting process that the federal government has. They can’t become contract

holders without having proven capabilities and solutions. All contract terms and conditions are out front. Yet, agency-specific terms and conditions can be negotiated.

Armstead explained that “the vetting really begins very publically through FedBiz Opps with a draft communication soliciting inputs from industry to help shape the content within the RFP. “We had very lengthy process back and forth with industry before we went out on the street with the formal RFPs. They helped inform the process,” Armstead noted.

She described how the second piece is the rigorous technical review process and the review of any other dimensions including past performance, price and cost.

“We take our time with it through day-to-day activities that will culminate into meaningful results and eventual formal award announcement of CIO-SP3.”

Armstead acknowledged that she still has plenty of work to do to educate IT buyers about the benefits of using GWACs and how cutting edge the vendors really are.

“We don’t talk enough about the proven capability of the vendors on the contracts enough,” she said. “The vetting of the vendors is something people need to understand.”

Now that OMB has moved agencies to a point where they have to look at the GWAC instead of standing up their own mechanism, buyers are going to want to hear that part of the discussion. ■

CIO-SP2 has been extended
until CIO-SP3 is in place.

Rx: For Your HIT Needs, Take A Healthy Dose Of NITAAC

Turn to the NITAAC — The NIH Information Technology Acquisition and Assessment Center — CIO-SP and ECS GWACs to get the HIT products and services you need.

Health Applications, Health Infrastructure Support, Science and Research Based Technology. Where do you find the companies that deliver these specialized research and health-related IT needs?

Look no farther than the NITAAC HIT specific web page. There you will find a detailed listing of HIT specific products and services you can buy, along with case studies and direct links to the CIO-SP and ECS contracts.

“Our specific vendors have been in the health IT arena for some time now,” Mary Armstead, NITAAC program director told *On The FrontLines* in a recent interview.

“We are not a run-of-the-mill, vanilla GWAC; we specialize in health IT,” explained Armstead. “What we want to communicate is that our vendors are cutting edge, they are relevant and up-to-date with the latest technologies.”

“Health applications, health infrastructure support and research based technologies can all be provided through our vehicles,” noted Armstead. “So people who are searching and can’t distinguish us from another GWAC can come to this page and really feel the difference.”



Mary B. Armstead
NITAAC
Program Director

NITAAC contract holders are pre-screened, highly qualified companies, many of whom have already participated in the largest Federal initiatives said Armstead.

Providing Flexibility from SOW to Delivery

NITAAC contracts are “structured in a manner so they can evolve; so that no matter where we are in time, we will be able to fulfill the IT needs of our customers, the Federal agencies,” Armstead said.

At the beginning of the process, the NITAAC team can help buyers hone their Statement of Work (SOW).

“We have a team of specialists that conduct comprehensive scope reviews to help the program officials better define their requirements,” Armstead said.

The process actually includes an analysis of the entire requirements package in order to ensure optimal structuring of the SOW and evaluation criteria.

Further, the team explains to both program and contracting officials what flexibilities are inherent in these agile contracts that would allow one to slice and dice

requirements in any manner desired — 6 month modules, 12 months, or 5 years, and incorporate performance-based features.

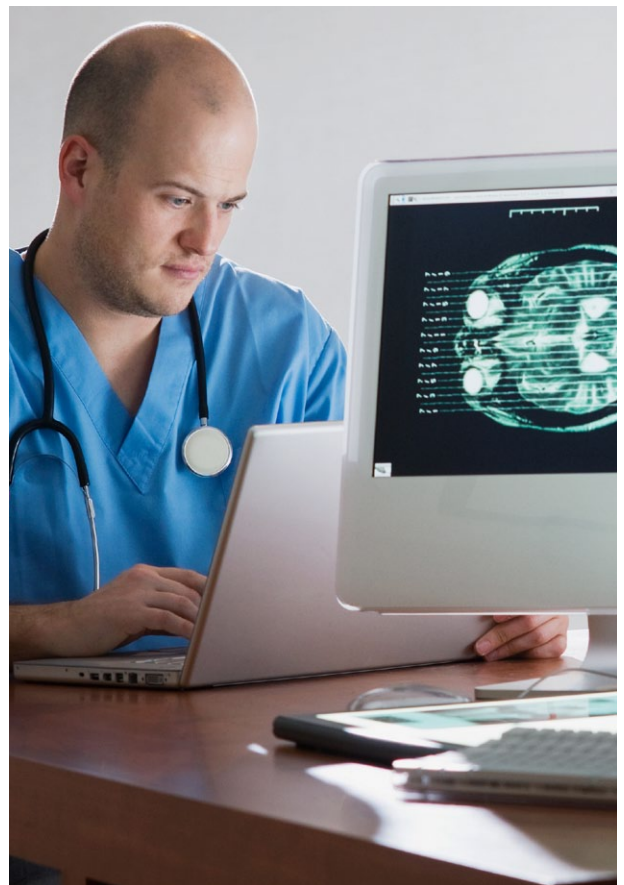
Also, hybrid contracts (combination of fixed price and cost type contracting) can be structured to accommodate complex cost/pricing arrangements.

“We provide the talent the expertise to let them know optionally the types of flexibilities inherent in our instruments,” Armstead said,

“We will help make recommendations if we have a clear reading of really what their bottom line is.”

That could mean buying complete systems with all the supporting services. But often that means helping buyers buy IT in bite size quantities they can afford, simply because they don’t want technology to pass them by.

Click here to learn more about NITAAC CIO-SP and ECS GWACs. ■



NITAAC GWACS

ECS III

Use for Products/Services such as hardware, software and peripherals or warranty services and maintenance.

CIO-SP2i

Use for IT Services/Solutions that require customized programming or applications such as data capture, research analytics, cloud computing or IT consulting.

NITAAC Case Studies

CIO-SP and ECS are being used to buy IT products and services in these and many other health-related and non-health related programs.

- Office of National Coordinator's Meaningful Use Program
 - Development of Use Cases Defense Health Information Management System Computer Based Training
 - NRC — Health portal public and private websites.
 - VA — Information Assurance and IT Security Support Services
 - VA — VLER (Virtual Life Electronic Record)
 - DOD — TRICARE Certification and Accreditation (C&A)
 - ONC — Nationwide Health Information Network (NHIN) --- Secure Digital EHRs and Secure HIEs
 - Molecular Biology and Genomics Information — Software Support
 - eClinicalWorks — Hardware, Software & Support
- Read more case studies.

Find The Solutions You Need

NITAAC GWACS provide you with both general and health IT products and services from a group of pre-screened, highly qualified companies, many of whom have already participated in the largest Federal initiatives.

Contract holders were selected to meet research and health-related IT needs including:

Health Applications

- Enterprise wide health information
- Federated clinical data interoperability
- Population health and safety solutions
- Epidemiological surveillance
- Digitized information archives
- Enterprise EHR systems, implementation and training
- Health data warehousing, management and analytics
- Adverse event reporting, tracking and monitoring
- Claims processing
- Chronic disease management
- Global medicine

Health Infrastructure Support

- NHIM connectivity
- Cyber security
- System administration and service desk

- Grants management
- Provider performance/quality
- Cost management/efficiency
- Supply chain and materials management
- Workflow process
- Sustainable business models
- Systems development and integration
- Systems deployment, training and sustainment
- Program integrity and fraud protection
- Regulatory compliance support
- Clinical operations, research and information management

Science and Research Based Technology

- Geospatial systems
- Advanced data extraction
- Multimodel biometrics
- Positive patient identification
- Bioinformatics and computational analysis
- Medical science and research
- Clinical trials object modeling
- Virtual information exchange
- Health informatics
- Research, data management and analysis
- Scientific programming and analysis
- E-prescribing
- Physicians orders
- Disease monitoring

Source: NITAAC