



System for Award Management (SAM): 3 Tips for Success

The government acquisition process can feel like an obstacle course for professionals working inside federal agencies. Consider this advice to streamline the process and use automation to prevent delays and waste.

The federal government acquisition process for buying a new technology solution is often a long, drawn-out ordeal that can take up to two years. By the time a vendor is awarded the contract, the product, service, or technology you envisioned implementing may no longer be the best fit or leading edge. Think of the ramifications for an agency that wants to procure an advanced cybersecurity solution. Not only could the technology be outdated in two years, but their network will lack the newer security protections in the meantime.

Acquisition planning, an early part of the government [acquisition management](#) process, is critical to streamlining this work for federal agencies. And technology plays a key role in the government acquisition process—especially automation, which can prevent delays, streamline work, and improve cost efficiency.

But both IT and line-of-business leaders face obstacles that can thwart efficiency and effectiveness during this complex process. If you're a line-of-business leader, the government acquisition process may feel convoluted and perilous. Maybe you've never done this before or you've had bad experiences with delays—a common occurrence in this highly regulated process. Additionally, acquisition regulations change frequently. You'll need to collaborate effectively and wisely leverage the [System for Award Management](#) (SAM.gov)—the official US government portal that collects and distributes information about every government award—to succeed.

Consider these expert strategies for helping business leaders navigate typical acquisition speed bumps to streamline and strengthen the process at your agency.

Learn from experts and your peers on how to improve the acquisition process.

Get the eBook: [Streamlining Government Procurement with a Modern Acquisition Management Solution](#)

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What makes federal government award management so difficult?

The government acquisition process requires agency employees to provide extensive information and documentation pertaining to the project and relevant vendors—including market research, vendor analysis, pricing information, time to implement, and so on.

That's a good thing. The federal government wants to ensure that agencies purchase the most effective product or service for their needs and use taxpayer money wisely.

The trouble lies in the complexity of submitting a complete, compliant federal acquisition request.

[The Federal Acquisition Regulation \(FAR\)](#), a 2,000+ page guide that outlines official policies and procedures for federal acquisitions, is as complicated as it is comprehensive. Written by lawyers who live and breathe acquisitions, the FAR is not only confusing for agency employees to understand and follow but also subject to frequent change as rules and regulations evolve.

To reach an award faster, employees need to take pains to submit complete applications. If the employee neglects to submit a required document or if a form is incomplete, they could be setting themselves up to embark on a months-long review process involving email communications and phone calls, and they will need to submit more documents and forms until their application is complete. If the contracting officer gets reassigned during that period, which often happens, then many of those communications will be lost, adding more delays to the process.

But being compliant with the FAR is just one part of properly completing a government acquisition request and meeting regulatory compliance standards. Consider these practical strategies to complete the award management process faster:

1. Use the System for Award Management (SAM) To Learn From Your Peers

The System for Award Management (SAM), as noted earlier, is the official US government portal that stores and shares data about every federal government award. Every government vendor must register on SAM.gov and every government award is listed on SAM. Anyone can use SAM to view contract and award information from other agencies, including the number of bids, who won, the amount awarded to the project, implementation time, and other useful competitive intelligence.

Doing thorough homework at the preparation stage will save you time in the long run. Leverage SAM early, when you're doing your market research. Mine the SAM Contract Opportunities section to see the documentation submitted and vendors considered for similar projects at other agencies. You will have different needs than other agencies and will want to tailor your submission accordingly, but looking at other agencies' documentation is a good place to start. Since their applications were successfully submitted, their documents can help you learn the proper way to fill in the required forms.

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2. Communicate Early With the Contracting Team

Contracting officers serve as the government’s agents for acquiring products and services. They alone have the authority to award, execute, modify, or terminate a contract. They are responsible for ensuring the appropriateness of source selections and awards and that the government obtains the expected value from its contracts.

As soon as you identify an acquisition need, contact your contracting officer to obtain advice and initiate early planning strategies. This is especially important for acquisitions with urgent time requirements. Early planning can significantly shorten acquisition lead times for large, complex acquisitions in particular.

During the acquisition process, be prepared to loop in additional stakeholders as needed, such as legal, finance, and auditing teams and small business representatives. When communicating with external parties, be sure to maintain complete impartiality and to adhere to the Standards of Ethical Conduct issued by the US Office of Government Ethics.

3. Work With IT to Bring Automation to Acquisition Planning

While SAM houses all vendor information, searching for it manually is extremely inefficient. It takes an enormous amount of time to collect the information you need. Manually keying in vendor information to the acquisition system is also extremely error-prone. Use modern automation technology to lessen the chance of such errors and accelerate and optimize the entire process.

SAM offers a wealth of web services and APIs. Agency professionals should work with their IT department to make sure their acquisition system integrates well with SAM. The acquisition system should pull data from SAM to instantaneously populate vendor sections of required documents with the right information and automatically check that each vendor is not an excluded party—increasing your confidence that if you engage with the awarded vendor, the project will be successful.

If you’re investigating best practices for acquisition planning and management, another area to explore is whether your IT teams make optimal use of an agile development model. The agile way of working enables faster deployments and easier updates as regulations or requirements change. An agile practice combined with an acquisition system that automates wisely and integrates with SAM enables federal agencies to accomplish their missions more efficiently, effectively, and economically. complete impartiality and to adhere to the Standards of Ethical Conduct issued by the US Office of Government Ethics.

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