Contracting Officer's GSS Q&A

This set of questions and answers is offered for contracting officers and buyers with the goal of helping to make your GSS experience at NITAAC easy!

We welcome feedback, suggestions and recommendations on this document; please send them to NITAACsupport@nih.gov. Any question sent here for a NITAAC contracting officer or other NITAAC staff will receive a response typically within one business day.

I don't have much time and I need to quickly learn how to buy on GSS

Are GSS commodities purchases compliant with the FAR?

Yes. Since 1996 NITAAC has been annually re-authorized by OMB to award and administer our government-wide acquisition contracts (GWAC). GSS is issued under GWAC CIO-CS Article H.15 Ramp-on Procedure. NITAAC follows the ramp-on procedures so we can ensure fair opportunity has been met for you, our agency buyers. Also, see FAR 16.505 (a)(2) for ordering requirements.

What commodities does GSS offer?

GSS offers you quick and easy ordering on items our government historically buys in high-volume. Through category management we have identified high-volume commodities and include in our GSS catalog: lightweight notebooks, notebooks, performance notebooks, desktop (small form factor), desktop (mini towers and towers), integrated (all-in-one), performance desktops (mini towers and towers), tablets and thin zero clients.

I see there are three specification versions on your site, which one should I use?

We maintain up to three versions of GSS to ensure availability for agencies who have purchased from older versions and want to keep their inventory consistent until they refresh. Once versions are obsolete, they are ramped-off. If you are not topping off an agency established inventory the best place to start is the newest version.

On the specification's spreadsheet, what do minimum specifications mean?

The specifications are refreshed annually and sent to all NITAAC CIO-CS contract holders with the invitation to participate in GSS. The contract holders who choose to participate respond by identifying commodities within those minimum specifications and within the terms and conditions. Because GSS pricing is based on high-volume purchases of commodities, these are the contract holders' best prices. The contracting officer and program official may wish to view the specifications without associated products. However, in our GSS catalog (available through e-GOS) such items show up for you with a vetted product, built-in price and are ready to order.

On the specification's spreadsheet, what do mandatory options mean?

Mandatory options are part of the specifications that are refreshed annually and sent to all NITAAC CIO-CS contract holders with an invitation to participate in GSS. Just as for the minimum specifications, participating contract holders must identify and price a commodity to NITAAC at the inception of the refreshed specifications that cover all mandatory options. Mandatory options must be pre-priced but they are add-ons (to your desktop, notebook, etc.) that the buyer can choose to add to their cart or not. The contracting officer and program official may wish to view the specifications without associated products. However, in our GSS catalog (available through e-GOS) such items show up for you with a vetted product, built-in price and are ready to order.

On the specification's spreadsheet, what do voluntary options mean?

Voluntary options are part of the specifications that are refreshed annually and sent to all NITAAC CIO-CS contract holders for the invitation to participate in GSS. The voluntary options are extra options beyond the minimum specifications and mandatory options that you can choose to add on as it meets your agency's requirement. Contract holders are not required to price voluntary options so there may be less availability on these items. The contracting officer and program official may wish to view the specifications without associated products. However, in our GSS catalog (available through e-GOS) such items show up for you with a vetted product, built-in price and are ready to order.

Are there any additional terms and conditions under GSS?

Yes. Your GSS buys include the CIO-CS GWAC pre-negotiated terms and conditions and additional GSS pre-negotiated terms and conditions. These additional terms and conditions include: EPEAT, Energy Star compliant, TAA compliant, Section 508 compliant, delivery time and a 3-year standard manufacturer warranty. These terms and conditions can vary with each annual refresh; consequently, please visit the specifications for exact details.

Can I buy any non-TAA compliant commodities under GSS?

Yes. NITAAC allows participating GSS contract holders to include some non-TAA compliant commodities. When ordering non-TAA commodities, the ordering contracting officer and the contract holder must comply with CIO-CS Article C.5 Standards and Regulations Considerations. The few items in GSS not covered by the GSS pre-negotiated TAA compliant terms and conditions are flagged in e-GOS at the item level as non-TAA compliant with a button that says "NON-OMB." Contracting officers are responsible for ensuring any non-TAA purchases, even though offered on GSS, are in accordance with their own agency's policies.

I see an item on GSS that is end-of-life, can I get the next model of this item?

Yes. GSS contract holders can request through NITAAC to delete the end-of-life item and request to upload the newest version of the same model. You may also reach out directly to our participating contract holders to ask if they have started this replacement process. Once the contract holder makes the request to NITAAC we typically have the newest version uploaded in our catalog within 24 hours.

Can program offices directly contact the participating GSS contract holders for quotes?

Yes. To avoid confusion, we advise program offices to make clear to any participating GSS contract holder they are seeking a quote under CIO-CS GSS pricing for _____ items. Our GSS participating contract holders can be found at this link: https://nitaac.nih.gov/services/government-wide-strategic-solutions Under market research, program officials may also work directly with a contract holder to discuss configurations. However, program officials are advised to make clear they are

conducting market research and have no authority to bind the government (see 5 CFR § 2635.101 number 6).

I am in e-GOS and searching GSS and I don't see my item. What do I do?

Let's say that you are seeking a 14-inch monitor as part of your package. Let's also say, in e-GOS you might only see a 13-inch monitor and a 16-inch monitor. What do you do? Consider:

1. NITAAC allows our contract holders to select and price their own commodities for GSS so one option is to ask the contract holder if they can add the item (restricted to three items per category)
2. The option to purchase under CIO-CS

Can a contracting officer buy directly from one contract holder?

Yes, given that the contracting officer has complied with FAR 16.505 (b)(ii) which states:

If the order does not exceed the simplified acquisition threshold, the contracting officer need not contact each of the multiple awardees under the contract before selecting an order awardee if the contracting officer has information available to ensure that each awardee is provided a fair opportunity to be considered for each order.

How do I navigate e-GOS to explore what is available or place an order?

To access GSS in e-GOS login to see in the upper left corner where it says "Strategic Solutions." Just below this is an orange button that says "NITAAC-GSS." Click here to explore what our contract holders have put forth to meet our specifications and terms and conditions. Also, please visit https://nitaac.nih.gov/services/government-wide-strategic-solutions and download the GSS Ordering Guide for more details.

How do I pay with a purchase card or delivery order?

Your order in e-GOS does not necessarily include payment details. If you directly place an order by adding items to the shopping cart the order will automatically go to that contract holder. That contract holder will reach out to you directly for purchase card information.

If your order is the result of a solicitation and you are issuing a delivery order, please upload the award document into e-GOS. If you are paying by purchase card follow your standard process and, if needed, contact the contract holder with your payment information.

When do I use e-GOS?

It depends on where you are in the process and how you communicate with industry as a contracting officer. Here are a few times in the process when you can make the most out of e-GOS

1. When you want to see what items and pricing are currently available
2. When you want to contact industry via market research
3. When you are seeking to directly add products to your cart and buy
4. When you want to issue a solicitation

Why do I have to use e-GOS?

To maintain contract administration under our GWAC, NITAAC requires orders be placed through e-GOS.

Background information

What is GSS and why is it important?

GSS stands for Government-Wide Strategic Solutions. The GSS program has been created by the OMB and delegated actions to a government-wide working group. NITAAC is part of this group which develops a framework and strategy to reduce costs and increase value through the application of strategic sourcing principles. NITAAC reports all expenditures under GSS to OMB; OMB then automatically gives agencies credit under Spend Under Management for purchases on GSS.

The commodities on GSS are meant for a wide swath of government purchases that most agencies have bought in high volume and will buy again. For highly specific and specialized equipment we encourage you to visit CIO-CS for non-GSS types of requirements. Please note if it's not on CIO-CS you can ask to have it added by directly reaching out to a CIO-CS contract holder or including it in e-GOS via a formal solicitation. NITAAC will work with the contract holders seeking to add in-scope commodities or commodity-enabling solutions to be on CIO-CS within 24 business hours.

Why does NITAAC only refresh these specifications once a year?

The government-wide working group, including NITAAC, meet annually to update the specifications. This process includes meetings with various original equipment manufacturers. The exchanges help refresh the specifications based on current information technology market trends. The government-wide team then vets the draft specifications through their contract holders and through the government agency Chief Information Officers, information technology program offices and agency policy offices. After this is completed all NITAAC CIO-CS contract holders are given the opportunity to participate in the current version price. The next step in the process is for NITAAC to make these quoted products and prices available on our website. Perhaps you can see how we can only do this refresh process once a year! We do our best to time it so the latest specifications are available by fourth quarter.

Is there any established government-wide policy on GSS that I can reference?

Yes. In October 2015, OMB issued M-16-02: Category Management Policy 15-1: Improving the Acquisition and Management of Common Information Technology: Laptops and Desktops. This policy mandates the use of GSS for federal agencies to fulfill the bulk of their desktop and laptop requirements.

What is e-GOS?

NITAAC offers contracting officers an electronic government ordering system or e-GOS for market research, solicitations, ordering and to help ensure fair opportunity is met under our GWACs.