



3 Steps to Help U.S. Businesses Access the Federal Market

The U.S. government can reduce barriers and costs for U.S. businesses entering the federal procurement marketplace by taking three steps toward more efficient and open contracting. The U.S. Government is the world's largest buyer of goods and services. Taking these three steps will allow for more significant and efficient engagement with businesses and others who use contracting data in the course of this essential function of our government. These steps engage the Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP), Department of the Treasury, and the General Services Administration (GSA). The impact will be **most helpful for small businesses, especially those outside the beltway**. If more businesses can determine what the government is buying, then more businesses can better compete for government contracts through the linking of publicly available data. Government agencies also benefit. It will be easier for Federal Contracting Officers to find and use existing contracts, understand prices paid by their or other agencies, and see a contractor's existing and previous contracts.

These three steps do not require new laws, regulations, or even new data elements. The data is already public at Data.gov, but is spread across multiple datasets, requiring better standardization so it can be linked and understood. It is too hard for businesses to analyze these datasets to learn what agencies are buying. The U.S. publishes pre-award contract solicitations on FedBizOpps.gov (FBO). Post-award information is available through the Federal Procurement Data System (FPDS) and USAspending.gov.¹

The proposed solution is the Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS) - a free and open data standard that can link this public data. Any government, business, or person can use the OCDS to publish, analyze, or re-publish contracting information. Vice President Biden recently committed the U.S. to promoting the OCDS in an international context.² The Open Contracting Partnership is ready to help stakeholders on this journey and runs a global helpdesk to support publishers. **Now is the time to connect the dots and fix this problem** because a new USAspending.gov is being redeveloped by Treasury under the DATA Act³ and a Beta version is currently online.⁴



What is open contracting?

Open contracting is about opening up public contracting through disclosure and engagement, so that the huge sums of money involved are spent honestly, fairly, and effectively. The Open Contracting Partnership (OCP) is a not-for-profit initiative that spun-off from the World Bank and is based in Washington DC. OCP is funded by various foundations to support an open, flexible, and non proprietary Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS). Federal, state, or local governments (or anyone) can use OCDS to publish and support engagement around their procurement data. The US federal government pledged to work towards implementing OCDS in the 2016, U.S.-Mexico High-Level Economic Dialogue and the 2016 UK Anti-Corruption Summit in London.



1. Ensure the solicitation number is entered into USAspending.gov.

1

Context: The Federal Procurement Data System (FPDS) standards for contract data are mirrored in the new USAspending. Both systems have a field for a solicitation number. Over a fifth of 2016 contracts in FPDS lack a solicitation ID, so linking to the public solicitation and statement of work is impossible. This is part of a broader problem with data quality.

Suggested Action: When the new USAspending is importing information from FPDS, it should report missing solicitation numbers to agencies and provide a mechanism for the agency to complete the information. The solicitation number should be a required field and validated by the system. Reports to the agencies on the completeness of the solicitation number field should be made public. There should be a commitment to data quality and reports on progress towards improvement.

2. Export from USAspending (or FPDS) to OCDS



Context: USAspending covers all federal spending including contracts. A new USAspending is currently being developed and is currently in Beta. Exporting to OCDS will allow businesses and business-to-business service providers to connect transactional data to public solicitation documents to better understand what the government is buying. The “description” field in USAspending is too generic. Businesses need the Statement of Work. **No new fields for data collection are required.**

Suggested Action: Treasury should review the OCP’s preliminary mapping of USAspending.gov contract related elements (i.e. the FPDS elements) to OCDS. The OCP is available to answer any questions or make any necessary extensions to the OCDS. Treasury should develop an API that allows USAspending to export to the OCDS. Regular releases of OCDS compliant datasets should be made available on Data.gov. (Alternatively, GSA IAE could do this mapping and develop and API that allows FPDS to export to the OCDS.)

2



3. Export from FedBizOpps to OCDS

3

Context: FedBizOpps is the public website for all U.S. government contract opportunities. It includes PDF solicitation documents, including the statement of work and the award notice. It is a great tool for accessing a specific immediate contract opportunity. However, it is not good for analyzing procurement of a specific good or services by any agency over time. No new fields for data collection are required.

Suggested Action: The GSA’s IAE team should review the OCP’s preliminary mapping of FedBizOpps.gov elements to OCDS. The OCP is available to answer any questions or make any necessary extensions to OCDS. GSA should develop an API that allows USAspending to export to OCDS. Regular releases of OCDS compliant dataset should be made available on Data.gov.

Open contracting is about disclosure and participation in government buying.

Once there are OCDS compliant datasets on Data.gov, any agency, business, or individual will be able to link and reuse the data according to their unique needs. Government engagement with stakeholders in the use of this data is important. For example, the Small Business Administration could build upon their existing resources⁵ to provide visualizations, training, and engagement with small businesses considering government contracting. Similarly, the Minority Business Development Agency could support local education and engagement at its Business Centers.

The **Open Contracting Data Standard** provides a common way to share information on all stages of the contracting process, including pre-award and post-award. The OCDS is an open, free, flexible, and extensible standard. There are no fees associated with OCDS. It was developed through grant funding by the Washington, DC-based nonprofit Open Contracting Partnership.

The OCP maintains a free helpdesk to provide pro-bono technical and policy advice and support to U.S. stakeholders to adapt and implement the OCDS.



US Secretary of State John Kerry at the UK Anti-Corruption Summit in London, May 2016, where the U.S. committed to “work towards implementation of the principles of the Open Contracting Data Standard, which are among the highest in the world and a model for other nations seeking to improve procurement processes.”

PRE AWARD

OPEN CONTRACTING DATA STANDARD

For 20% of awards, there is no link between solicitation number and contract number.

The OCDS is a free, open data standard for linking procurement datasets. (e.g. FBO.gov, FPDS.gov, USAspending.gov)

POST AWARD

Why do open contracting?

Open Contracting leads to brighter government dealmaking:

**SAVE
MONEY
AND TIME**

**IMPROVE
SERVICE
DELIVERY**

**BOOST
INTEGRITY**

**CREATE A
FAIRER
BUSINESS
ENVIRONMENT**

For more information

Including our White Paper and data element maps, please contact Lindsey at lmarchessault@open-contracting.org or Josh at jpowell@developmentgateway.org or visit www.open-contracting.org/usa.



Open Contracting Partnership

Notes

¹ FPDS and FBO are maintained by the General Services Administration (GSA) within their Integrated Award Environment (IAE) and are overseen by the Award Committee for E-Government (ACE). USAspending, which covers all federal spending including contracts, is managed by the Bureau of the Fiscal Service within the Department of the Treasury. Federal contracting policy is led by the Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) Administrator within the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

² See 2016 U.S.-Mexico High-Level Economic Dialogue Joint Statement <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/02/25/joint-statement-2016-us-mexico-high-level-economic-dialogue>.

³ See explanation of the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act of 2014 (DATA Act) on USAspending.gov at <https://www.usaspending.gov/Pages/Data-Act.aspx>.

⁴ See USAspending.gov beta site at <https://openbeta.usaspending.gov/>.

⁵ See current SBA small business contracting resources at <https://www.sba.gov/contracting>.