

# EVALUATION OF SBA ACQUISITION PLANNING FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

September 18, 2020

**PREPARED FOR:**

**U.S. SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION  
OFFICE OF PROGRAM PERFORMANCE, ANALYSIS, AND EVALUATION**

**Contract No. 73351018A0036/Task Order No. 73351019F0236**

**PREPARED BY:**

Kassim Mbwana, MPP  
Daniel Kaufman, MA  
Christine Lee, MA  
Kami Ehrich, MPP  
Teresa Kline, MA  
Kellen MacBeth, MPM

**Summit Consulting, LLC**

601 New Jersey Ave. NW  
Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20001  
[www.summitllc.us](http://www.summitllc.us)





## DISCLAIMER

This report was prepared for the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), Office of Program Performance, Analysis, and Evaluation, under Contract Number 73351018A0036/Task Order 73351019F0236. The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the SBA, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement of same by the U.S. Government.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) Office of Program Performance, Analysis, and Evaluation staff for their direction and support during this project. In particular, we thank Shay Meinzer for her input on the study design and draft report. We would also like to thank Brittany J. Borg, who provided feedback and context for our study design.

We would also like to thank Susanna Sprinkel and Melissa Cichantek for their valuable contributions in preparing this report.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
OBJECTIVE 1: IDENTIFY FACTORS THAT IMPEDE THE SBA’S ABILITY TO IMPROVE ITS ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS...	2
OBJECTIVE 2: ASSESS PROGRAM MANAGER SATISFACTION WITH THE ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS.....	4
OBJECTIVE 3: IDENTIFY HOW THE SBA CAN IMPROVE ITS ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS .....	5
RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN ACQUISITION PLANNING AT THE SBA .....	7
<b>1 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 PROGRAM BACKGROUND.....	1
1.2 OVERVIEW OF ACQUISITION ACTIONS .....	5
1.3 ACQUISITION STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES.....	7
<b>2 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1 OVERVIEW OF EVALUATION METHODOLOGY .....	10
2.2 DATA SOURCES .....	10
2.3 ANALYTIC APPROACHES .....	13
2.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODOLOGY AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES .....	15
<b>3 CURRENT SBA ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS.....</b>	<b>16</b>
3.1 OVERVIEW OF THE ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS .....	16
3.2 DETAILED VIEW OF THE CURRENT (AS-IS) ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS .....	17
3.3 IT-RELATED REVIEWS .....	21
<b>4 FINDINGS FOR EVALUATION OBJECTIVE 1: IDENTIFY FACTORS THAT IMPEDE THE SBA’S ABILITY TO IMPROVE ITS ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS .....</b>	<b>23</b>
4.1 FACTORS THAT IMPEDE THE SBA’S ABILITY TO IMPROVE ITS ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS .....	23
4.2 CONCLUSIONS.....	28
<b>5 FINDINGS FOR EVALUATION OBJECTIVE 2: ASSESS PROGRAM MANAGER SATISFACTION WITH THE ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS .....</b>	<b>29</b>
5.1 PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS AND FAMILIARITY WITH ACQUISITION PROCESS .....	29
5.2 PERSPECTIVES ON CURRENT ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS .....	30
5.3 OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES WITH ACQUISITION PLANNING.....	31
5.4 SATISFACTION WITH PROGRAM OFFICE AND ACQUISITION DIVISION CONTACT .....	32
5.5 CONCLUSIONS.....	33
<b>6 FINDINGS FOR EVALUATION OBJECTIVE 3: IDENTIFY HOW THE SBA CAN IMPROVE ITS ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS .....</b>	<b>34</b>
6.1 FINDINGS ON IMPROVEMENTS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY .....	34
6.2 FINDINGS ON PERSPECTIVES FROM SBA STAFF INTERVIEWS ON HOW THE SBA CAN IMPROVE THE ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS .....	35
6.3 FINDINGS ON PERSPECTIVES FROM BENCHMARKING OTHER AGENCIES .....	39
6.4 CONCLUSIONS.....	45
<b>7 OVERALL EVALUATION CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>8 RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN ACQUISITION PLANNING AT THE SBA .....</b>	<b>47</b>
8.1 UNDERTAKE PROACTIVE ACQUISITION DIVISION ENGAGEMENT .....	47



8.2 CONDUCT ACQUISITION PLANNING TRAINING FOR PROGRAM OFFICES ..... 48

8.3 IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN THE OCFO AND PROGRAM OFFICES ..... 49

8.4 CONDUCT RISK-BASED ACQUISITION PLANNING ..... 49

8.5 ASSIGN PROGRAM OFFICE ACQUISITION COORDINATORS..... 50

8.6 ASSEMBLE INTEGRATED PROCUREMENT TEAMS..... 50

8.7 CONDUCT PROACTIVE OCIO ENGAGEMENT ..... 51

8.8 HIRE ADDITIONAL CONTRACTING OFFICERS..... 51

**APPENDIX A INTERVIEW INSTRUMENTS.....A-1**

**APPENDIX B CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY INSTRUMENT ..... B-1**

**APPENDIX C SURVEY SUMMARY STATISTICS ..... C-1**

**APPENDIX D DETAILED EVALUATION METHODOLOGY.....D-1**



## LIST OF TABLES

Table ES-1: Evaluation Objectives Matched with Data Sources and Methods.....	ES-1
Table ES-2: Number of Data Collection Sessions and Number of Individuals by Data Collection Method .....	ES-2
Table 1-1: Summary of Findings from 2018 and 2019 Cornerstone Assessments .....	2
Table 2-1: Evaluation Objectives Mapped to Data Sources and Methods .....	10
Table 2-2: Number of Data Collection Sessions and Number of Individuals by Data Collection Method ..	10
Table 3-1: Key Components of the IT Review Process.....	21
Table 5-1: Which Offices Were Respondents From? .....	29
Table 5-2: Which of the Following Activities Do You Perform at the SBA with Respect to the Acquisitions Process? (Select all that apply.).....	30
Table C-1: Question 1 – Which of the Following Activities Do You Perform at SBA with Respect to the Acquisitions Process? (Select all that apply.).....	1
Table C-2: Question 2 – Are Acquisition-Related Functions, including Acquisition Planning, Part of Your Primary Duties? .....	1
Table C-3: Question 3 – Are You Currently a Contracting Officer’s Representative (COR)?.....	1
Table C-4: Question 4 – What Office Do You Work In? .....	2
Table C-5: Question 5 – How Familiar Are You with the Acquisition Planning Process (e.g., data needs, tasks, timelines)? .....	2
Table C-6: Question 6 – How Clear Are the Individual Roles and Responsibilities for All People Involved in Acquisition Planning in Your Office? .....	2
Table C-7: Question 7 – In Your Opinion, How Important Are the Following Outcomes of the Acquisition Planning Process? .....	3
Table C-8: Question 8 – On Average, How Long Before a New Contract Award Do You Begin to Identify Your Acquisition Needs?.....	4
Table C-9: Question 9 – On Average, How Long Before a Recompete Contract Award Do You Begin to Identify Your Acquisition Needs?.....	4
Table C-10: Question 10 – How Often Do You Use Backward or Reverse Acquisition Planning? .....	4
Table C-11: Question 11 – Who Do You Coordinate with to Identify and Plan Acquisition Needs? (Select all that apply.) .....	5
Table C-12: Question 12 – How Often Do You Coordinate with Each Staff to Identify and Plan for Future Acquisition Needs?.....	5
Table C-13: Question 13 – How Helpful Is Each Staff in Acquisition Planning? .....	6
Table C-14: Question 14 – Which Obstacles Prevent You from Defining Acquisition Needs 2–3 Years in Advance of Contract Award? (Select all that apply.) .....	7
Table C-15: Question 15 – How Challenging Do You Find the Following Parts of the Acquisition Planning Process? .....	7
Table C-16: Question 16 – On Average, How Efficient Is Your Office at Identifying Future Acquisition Needs? .....	8



Table C-17: Question 17 – How Often Do You Think That Your Office’s Acquisition Planning Process Consistently Contributes to..... 9

Table C-18: Question 18 – Overall, How Would You Rate Your Acquisition Division Contact?..... 9

Table C-19: Question 19 – How Often Do You Interact with Your Acquisition Division Contact on Acquisition Planning Activities? ..... 10

Table C-20: Question 20 – On Average, How Effective Do You Feel the Acquisition Division Is in Helping to Identify and Plan for Your Office’s Future Acquisition Needs? ..... 10

Table C-21: Question 21 – How Often Do You Agree with the Following Statements? My Acquisition Division Contact (contracting officer, procurement analyst): ..... 10

Table D-1: Evaluation Objectives Mapped to Data Sources and Methods ..... 1

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure ES-1: Feasibility and Impact of Recommendations to Strengthen Acquisition Planning at the SBA ..... ES-7

Figure 1-1: Total Action Obligations: Small vs. Other Than Small Businesses ..... 5

Figure 1-2: Top 10 Product and Service Categories, FY19 ..... 6

Figure 1-3: Number and Total Dollar Value of Contract Actions by Date Signed, in millions, FY 2019 ..... 7

Figure 3-1: Value Stream Map of Current Acquisition Planning Process (As-is)..... 20

Figure 5-1: Respondent Reports of When Program Offices Begin to Identify Needs for New Contracts and Recompetes ..... 31

Figure 5-2: How Often Do You Agree with the Following Statements? My Acquisition Division contact (Contracting Officer, Procurement Analyst) ... ..... 33

Figure 8-1: Feasibility and Impact of Recommendations to Strengthen Acquisition Planning at the SBA ..... 47

Figure 8-2: To-Be Value Stream Map of Proposed Future State of the Acquisition Planning Process ..... 52



## GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAS	Advanced Acquisition Strategy
ARB	Architecture Review Board
BMO	Business Management Office
BPA	Blanket Purchase Agreement
BTIC	Business Technology Investment Council
CAM	Commerce Acquisition Manual
CFO	Chief Financial Officer
CIO	Chief Information Officer
CO	Contracting Officer
COR	Contracting Officer's Representative
CTO	Chief Technology Officer
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DOC	Department of Commerce
EA	Enterprise-wide Architecture
FAR	Federal Acquisition Regulation
FITARA	Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act
FPDS-NG	Federal Procurement Data System - Next Generation
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GSA	General Services Administration
HSAM	Homeland Security Acquisition Manual
IDIQ	Infinite Delivery/Indefinite Quality
IPT	Integrated Procurement Team
IRB	Investment Review Board
ITART	IT Acquisition Review Tracker
ITIA	IT Investment Authority
JAAMS	Joint Administrative Accounting Management System
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
OCA	Office of Capital Access
OCFO	Office of the Chief Financial Officer
OCIO	Office of the Chief Information Officer
OCPO	Office of the Chief Procurement Officer
ODA	Office of Disaster Assistance
OFPP	Office of Federal Procurement Policy
OIG	Office of the Inspector General
OII	Office of Investment and Innovation
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
OPB	Office of Planning and Budget
PA	Procurement Analyst
PIL	DHS Procurement Innovation Lab
PM	Program Manager
PRISM	Procurement Request Information System



RFI	Request for Information
SAT	Simplified Acquisition Threshold
SBA	Small Business Administration
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
VSM	Value Stream Map



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Federal acquisition guidelines (FAR Part 7.1) and the Small Business Act (amended) require the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to conduct acquisition planning. The acquisition planning process encompasses defining the need and business case for an acquisition, developing basic requirements, conducting market research, drafting procurement documents and an acquisition strategy, and procuring an awardee. A key part of this process is the submission of an acquisition package, which includes the acquisition plan, performance work statement, independent government cost estimate, and other documents.

The Summit Team conducted a process evaluation of the current SBA acquisition planning process to understand barriers that impede the acquisition planning process and recommend improvements to the process. Based on the objectives listed in the statement of work, refined through scoping discussions with the SBA, there are three core objectives for this evaluation:

- **Objective 1:** Identify factors that impede the SBA’s ability to improve its acquisition planning process
- **Objective 2:** Assess program manager satisfaction with the acquisition planning process
- **Objective 3:** Identify how the SBA can improve its acquisition planning process

As shown in **Table ES-1**, key data sources for conducting this mixed-methods evaluation include a literature review, program documentation and acquisition data, interviews with program managers and staff in program offices and the Acquisition Division, focus groups with stakeholders who participate in acquisition planning, value stream mapping (VSM), and a customer satisfaction survey of program managers who perform acquisition planning. Notably, rather than gather information from every program office, we focused the various data collection efforts on key program offices mutually identified with SBA. While acquisition needs and processes differ across product and service categories and across program offices, certain elements of the process and associated pain points are relevant across multiple product or service categories and SBA offices. For example, we developed value stream mapping from conversations with the four offices most involved in IT-related acquisitions—Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO), Office of Capital Access (OCA), Office of Disaster Assistance (ODA), and the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO). Notably, IT-related acquisitions comprise over 70 percent of all SBA acquisitions.

**Table ES-1** maps the evaluation objectives to the data source(s) and methods used in the evaluation.

**Table ES-1: Evaluation Objectives Matched with Data Sources and Methods**

Evaluation Objective	Data Sources	Methods
1. Identify factors that impede the SBA’s ability to improve its acquisition planning process	Documents and program data, interviews, focus groups	Descriptive statistics, issue reporting, as-is VSM
2. Assess program manager satisfaction with the acquisition planning process	Customer satisfaction survey	Survey analysis, to-be VSM
3. Identify how the SBA can improve its acquisition planning process	Literature review findings, interviews, focus groups, customer satisfaction survey	Literature review, issue reporting, as-is and to-be VSMs, best practices review, descriptive statistics, survey analysis, benchmarking



**Table ES-2** outlines the number of participants for each of the various data collection methods deployed for the study.

**Table ES-2: Number of Data Collection Sessions and Number of Individuals by Data Collection Method**

Data Collection Method	Number of Sessions	Number of Individuals
SBA Interviews, Phase 1	10	14
SBA Interviews, Phase 2	8	10
Focus Groups	3	18
Value Stream Mapping	2	8
Customer Satisfaction Survey	N/A	18
Benchmarking Interviews with Other Federal Agencies	4	4

### OBJECTIVE 1: IDENTIFY FACTORS THAT IMPEDE THE SBA'S ABILITY TO IMPROVE ITS ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS

Through the interviews and focus groups, the Summit Team identified a variety of acquisition planning challenges. The root cause of many of these challenges is communication. Specifically, **lack of communication or miscommunication among the main actors in the acquisition planning process**—program offices, contracting officers (COs) and the Acquisition Division, and Office of the Chief Information Officer—are significant factors that impede the SBA's ability to improve the acquisition planning process. These communication challenges include unclear direction and expectations about roles and process, which in turn can indicate **a lack of transparency**, ultimately leading to **variations across the SBA in the approach to acquisition planning**. Participants also noted a **culture slow to adapt to change**, and communication-related difficulties with managing the rollout of organizational change, including new acquisition processes and tools. These four overarching factors that impede SBA's acquisition planning process include the following specific challenges:

- Delayed and Infrequent Communication between Program Offices and Contracting Officers.** Challenges occur in both the day-to-day communication between the program offices and the contracting officer. They also hinder the program office's visibility into the acquisition process once the acquisition package moves to the contracting officer for review and approval. For example, one challenge is the lack of contracting officers dedicated to specific program offices, and the assigning of the contracting officer after basic requirements and market research are complete. A program manager noted that reaching out to the contracting officer prior to developing paperwork would alert them early on if they are going down the wrong path and eliminate extra work. A low ratio of contracting officers to customers reduces the communication between contracting officers and program offices, reducing the quality of planning and procurements.
- Lack of Transparency.** When program managers submit an acquisition package to the contracting officer, they are unsure where it goes or feel like a nuisance asking about its status. Differing contracting officer communication styles compound this challenge. Some contracting officers take longer to answer questions or provide updates.
- Variations Across Program Offices.** Study participants noted a wide variety in how program offices conduct acquisition planning and the challenges they face. For example, one program office noted that they use historical data to plan their future acquisition needs. Another office,



with similar historical data, takes the approach that they cannot plan because they do not know what they will need each year. These different approaches to using historical data illustrate the differences across program offices in acquisition planning. Any future improvements or changes to the acquisition process at the SBA must account for these differences among program offices.

- **Culture Slow to Adopt Change.** While the changes made within the last few years around procurements are largely positive, many program managers, contracting officers, and procurement analysts noted the culture is slow to shift. Along with some general resistance to changes within SBA program offices, many participants noted a lack of knowledge about changes in the acquisition planning process contributing to the slowness of culture shift. One program manager stated: “... we may have some old COs that we have been working with and [they] are used to doing things one way. Once there’s a change in leadership and things [are done] differently, [COs] don’t understand the process leadership is giving them.”

These overarching challenges manifest in six areas, ordered by most frequently discussed by participants to the least:

1. **Uncertainty about Budget Allocation and Timing.** Program offices highlighted several issues pertaining to their budgets as acquisition planning challenges—budget uncertainties, delayed appropriations, and changing priorities cause problems in timing for the acquisition planning process. Some program offices used historical data to project budgetary expectations and began acquisition planning prior to final budget allocations in January, 3 months into the fiscal year. Other program offices preferred to wait for annual budget allocations due to a reluctance to identify needs and develop business cases that could ultimately go unfunded. The lack of clear directive from the Acquisition Division on how to operate in this environment leads to the program office and the contracting office operating under different assumptions as to what is a good use of time in the acquisition planning process.
2. **Lengthy and Unclear IT Review Processes.** Feedback provided in nine of the 21<sup>1</sup> interview and focus group sessions referenced either general Office of the Chief Information Officer reviews or the IT Acquisition Review Tracker (ITART) review as a challenge. As discussed in the communications challenges above, the perceived lack of clarity and consensus on the reviews creates friction around the review processes. Participants cited a prolonged or repetitive IT review process as delaying acquisition package preparation. Participants also acknowledged an informal review process conducted by the Office of the Chief Information Officer for acquisition projects less than \$50,000. Existing draft guidance for this review process are awaiting approval and formal implementation. Some participants indicated adherence to the informal review process is ad hoc.
3. **Staffing Location, Capacity, and Leadership Changes.** The geographic location of contracting officers in the Denver Acquisition Office or Washington, DC, senior leadership turnover, and the number of staff within the Acquisition Division also present challenges. Program managers noted an improvement from moving some contracting officers from Denver to Washington, DC. However, some interview participants identified the time difference between Washington, DC and Denver (where many of the contracting officers are located) as a challenge, although most contracting officers work modified hours that align with Washington, DC work schedules. Finally,

---

<sup>1</sup> 21 refers to the number of sessions, specifically: 10 Phase One interview sessions, eight Phase Two interview sessions, and three focus group sessions.



the small number of contracting officers and the variety of contracts they handle make it difficult to help along all of the projects that go through the office.

4. **Introduction of New Tools and Processes.** Participants discussed a lack of awareness and understanding of new processes. For example, some program managers were not aware or familiar with the new standard operating procedures pertaining to acquisitions. In addition to this lack of awareness, participants noted the need for additional training when introducing new tools or processes (e.g., the Mongoose system). The lack of communication on the most up-to-date processes for documentation, tools, and systems presents another roadblock.
5. **Difficulty in Finding and Using Appropriate Documentation and Resources.** In addition to the introduction of new SOPs, some participants noted challenges finding the necessary forms for completing their acquisition packages. In particular, there are outdated templates housed on SharePoint and varying customizations to the existing templates by contracting officers.

Participants also cited challenges with the presence and use of multiple tools—including the Procurement Request Information System (PRISM), Joint Administrative Accounting Management System (JAAMS), Mongoose, Hyperion, and Oracle. Notably, Mongoose and Hyperion are the same system (different name) with data from Mongoose/Hyperion, JAAMS, and PRISM stored in Oracle. The existence of multiple acquisition management systems adds further confusion.

6. **Inconsistency in Conducting Formal and Informal Market Research.** Some program office participants noted a shift from issuing requests for information or conducting formal market research to doing informal market research to avoid the lengthy formal process of engaging the contracting officers for guidance on issuing requests for information. As an unintended consequence, this barrier limits the program office's ability to perform market research and for the program office and contracting officer to jointly choose an appropriate acquisition strategy. These decisions are made without the contracting officer's input and potentially without industry input (a best practice).

---

## OBJECTIVE 2: ASSESS PROGRAM MANAGER SATISFACTION WITH THE ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS

The Summit Team administered an online survey to 54 SBA program managers identified from the SBA's Program Management Inventory—two had no role in acquisition planning for a final sample size of 52 respondents.<sup>2</sup> The survey focused on the program manager's experience with the SBA's acquisition planning process. In addition to assessing customer satisfaction, the survey asked about potential improvements to this process.

A total of 21 individuals accessed the survey with 18 full responses and one partial response.<sup>3</sup> Respondents represented 11 program offices. Half the respondents (10) were contracting officer's representatives, and almost 70 percent (13) had experience with acquisition planning and other acquisition-related functions.

---

<sup>2</sup> All respondents were GS-15 or SES. The list does not include Associate Administrators and Deputy Associate Administrators as they are categorized as Portfolio Managers who oversee SBA PMs.

<sup>3</sup> Two individuals were screened out from completing the survey because they play no role in acquisition planning



The survey asked respondents about their perspectives on planning acquisitions. Program offices tend to plan their recompetes further in advance as compared to new contracts. 64 percent begin planning 9 or more months in advance, compared to 36 percent for new contracts. The most often cited obstacles that impeded respondents from planning acquisitions 2 to 3 years in advance were budget uncertainties and changing program priorities. When asked how challenging parts of the acquisition planning process were, 60 percent of respondents found determining the appropriate contract vehicle a challenge.

Overall, most respondents expressed satisfaction with the acquisition planning process. 83 percent indicated their program offices were efficient and rated interactions with their Acquisition Division contact favorably. Most respondents thought their contacts were honest with them, understood their needs, looked out for their best interests, were knowledgeable about the acquisition process, communicated information clearly, and made them look forward to working with them in the future. Finally, while more than half thought the Acquisition Division contacts anticipated their needs, this was the lowest rated positive attribute about the Acquisition Division contact.

---

### **OBJECTIVE 3: IDENTIFY HOW THE SBA CAN IMPROVE ITS ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS**

**Findings on Improvements Currently Underway.** The SBA has taken steps to implement recommendations from 2018 and 2019 Cornerstone Assessments,<sup>4</sup> including but not limited to: establishing an Acquisition SharePoint site, updating the acquisition SOP, establishing regular meetings between the Acquisition Division and program offices, and hiring additional acquisition procurement analysts. The interviews and focus groups provided positive feedback on these changes and identified additional recent improvements implemented by the acquisition office, namely:

- Relocating some Denver-based acquisition staff to Washington D.C. enabled more program managers to increase engagement with the acquisition team
- Setting April 1 (6 months before the end of the fiscal year) as the acquisitions action lead time due date for acquisitions encourages advance preparation and limits last-minute acquisitions
- Instituting monthly and quarterly meetings between the Acquisition Office and Program Offices has improved communication

**Findings on Perspectives from the SBA Staff Interviews.** Throughout the interviews and focus groups, participants in 12 out of 21 interviews and focus groups suggested at least one of the following potential improvements for communication:

- Increased communication between program managers, COs, and Office of the Chief Information Officer
- Clear delineation of process steps and accountability
- Updating communication platforms
- Buy-in from senior leadership
- Assigning the COs earlier in the acquisition planning process

---

<sup>4</sup> In 2005, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) developed a framework to promote top-down assessments of strengths and weaknesses of the acquisition function at federal agencies. The framework has four cornerstones: (1) organizational alignment, leadership, and acquisition workforce; (2) internal controls, policies, and processes; (3) knowledge and information management; and (4) measurement and reporting for functional success. In May 2008, OMB issued Guidelines for Assessing the Acquisition Function, which integrates the Four Cornerstones Acquisition Assessment Template.



**Findings on Perspectives from Benchmarking Other Agencies.** The Summit Team conducted a benchmarking review based on interviews with the Department of Commerce (DOC) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) acquisition officials and a review of publicly available information for these agencies. The Summit Team also conducted a targeted review of acquisition-related documents for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) based on information that was readily available to the team. In addition to harmonizing the IT review process with the IT acquisition life cycle, other best practices the Summit Team learned are outlined.

Best practices pertaining to the timing and level of detail for acquisition planning distilled from the Summit Team’s review include:

- Creating a tiered structure for advance planning that requires an earlier start date for larger and more complex acquisitions
- Creating standard acquisition planning levels based on factors such as dollar amount, contract type, level of competition, and whether the acquisition includes IT components
- Developing user-friendly templates and checklists to assist staff in developing acquisition plans and establish consistency in format and content across acquisitions

Best practices pertaining to Program Staff engagement with Acquisition Staff include:

- Using Integrated Procurement Teams (IPTs) for large or complex acquisitions
- Increasing consistency in COs assigned to work with program offices
- Facilitating early engagement—prior to developing the acquisition plan—between acquisition teams and senior procurement staff for larger and more complex acquisitions

Best practices pertaining to market research and industry engagement include:

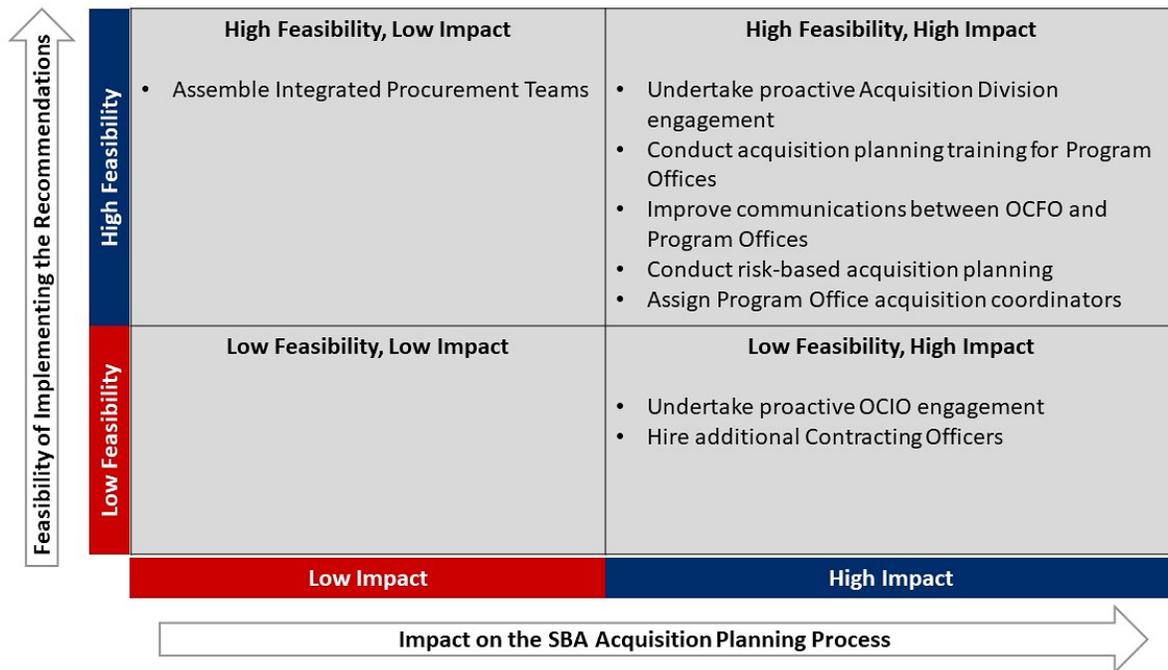
- Requiring CO input into market research activities
- Developing templates and checklists to create consistency in market research content, and structure them across acquisitions; tailor the amount of detail based on acquisition type
- Providing guidance to increase balanced levels of industry engagement in market research activities
- Implementing a strategy of continuous industry engagement to increase competition and bid quality



## RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN ACQUISITION PLANNING AT THE SBA

To conclude the evaluation, Summit Team drew best practices from the evaluation activities and coupled with their subject matter expertise offered eight recommendations, ordered from the highest to lowest feasibility. **Figure ES-1** provides a matrix outlining the degree of feasibility of implementation (i.e., cost to SBA) and impact (i.e., potential to improve SBA's acquisition planning process).

**Figure ES-1: Feasibility and Impact of Recommendations to Strengthen Acquisition Planning at the SBA**



1. **Undertake Proactive Acquisition Office Engagement.** Program offices and the Acquisition Division should communicate about requirements early, addressing the communications challenges identified in Objective 1. In turn, SBA could and should assign contracting officers to acquisitions as early in the acquisition planning process as possible, preferably immediately following definition of need. Contracting officers should try to meet with the acquisition owner prior to market research to discuss the acquisition planning strategy and provide advice and guidance. They should also continue to serve as a resource and source of guidance throughout each phase of the acquisition planning process.
2. **Conduct Acquisition Planning Training for Program Offices.** The Office of the Chief Financial Officer should develop roles-based training for program offices to improve understanding of the SBA's acquisition planning process. The training should include basic education in the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), market research techniques, acquisition strategy development, solicitation document development, and acquisition planning best practices.
3. **Improve Communication between the Office of the Chief Financial Officer and Program Offices.** The Office of the Chief Financial Officer should improve acquisition-related communication to program offices through the following steps:
  - Maintain an up-to-date SharePoint site with only current templates and tools.



- Effectively communicate changes to acquisition policy, processes, and tools to program offices.
  - Adopt organizational change management techniques to prepare program offices for change (i.e., communicate and train), execute the change (i.e., roll out new policy, process, or tool), and reinforce the change (i.e., provide coaching and refresher trainings, and collect continuous feedback and satisfaction data from customers).
  - Ensure alignment and coordination with the Office of the Chief Information Officer on policies, processes, and tools related to IT acquisitions so that all stakeholders understand and can comply with requirements.
  - Adopt a customer experience focus to keep interactions and engagement with program offices focused on the SBA's mission and program execution and acquisition policies, processes, and tools that improve the program office's experience first and foremost.
4. **Conduct Risk-Based Acquisition Planning.** Because of budget uncertainty and frequently delayed appropriations, the Office of the Chief Financial Officer should develop a risk-based acquisition planning tool to assist program offices with evaluating risks associated with delaying or proceeding with acquisition planning for projects without confirmed funding. The tool would help them determine whether to delay an acquisition until funding is secure or proceed with acquisition planning in the absence of secured funding.
  5. **Assign a Program Office Acquisition Coordinator.** Each program office should assign one resource for monitoring acquisition planning timelines and needs. This resource should also coordinate with program managers and acquisition owners to ensure planning starts at the appropriate time (6, 12, 18, or 24 months prior to award).
  6. **Assemble Integrated Procurement Teams (IPTs).** Assemble integrated procurement teams for large or complex acquisitions to ensure consultation with key stakeholders (e.g., contracting officer, Office of General Counsel, Office of the Chief Information Officer) at critical points in the acquisition planning process to integrate stakeholder perspectives and requirements into the solicitation documents and strategy.
  7. **Conduct Proactive Office of the Chief Information Officer Engagement.** The Office of the Chief Information Officer should assign liaisons for each program office to assist with developing acquisition packages, serve on integrated procurement teams, and provide guidance on IT acquisition requirements. The Office of the Chief Information Officer should also develop clear communication regarding when each type of review is required, and which acquisitions are subject to what review.
  8. **Hire Additional Contracting Officers.** The Office of the Chief Financial Officer should consider hiring additional contracting officers to reduce the number of different contracting officers that interact with specific program offices. Increased consistency may enhance the ability of program offices and contracting officers to collaborate and produce acquisitions of higher quality and more effective planning.



## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Summit Team—Summit Consulting, LLC (Summit) and Industrial Economics, Inc. (IEc)—presents this evaluation of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) acquisition planning process. This Section begins with an overview of the SBA’s acquisition background followed by a review of ongoing SBA acquisition actions and a summary of the new acquisitions standard operating procedures.

### 1.1 PROGRAM BACKGROUND

Federal acquisition guidelines and the Small Business Act (amended) require the SBA to conduct acquisition planning. The Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) also requires acquisition planning; for instance, Section 7.104 states that “Acquisition planning should begin as soon as the agency need is identified, preferably well in advance of the fiscal year in which contract award or order placement is necessary.”

Acquisition streamlining efforts at the SBA are ongoing. Use of a one-size-fits-all approach, contracting officer (CO) workloads, and other complicating factors may impede long-term acquisition forecasting. However, these factors prevented the SBA from improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the acquisition planning process in line with FAR requirements. Typically, the SBA publishes acquisition requirements in the fourth quarter of each fiscal year with a forecast limited to the following year. In light of these challenges, the SBA engaged the Summit Team to conduct an independent evaluation of the SBA acquisition planning process to identify needed changes and practical solutions to ensure an effective, efficient, and compliant process. The process evaluation of the current SBA acquisition planning process identified pain points, potential inefficiencies, and structural factors that may present challenges to improving the process. The team also considered ways to improve the customer experience and promote innovative methods to ensure the program managers (PMs) and Acquisition Division team members work more efficiently and effectively. The team’s review included key acquisition processes and the acquisition package (which includes the acquisition plan, performance work statement, independent government cost estimate, and other documents) to identify practical implementation solutions. Using these findings, the team crafted the recommendations in this report to improve acquisition planning at the SBA.

#### 1.1.1 Existing Efforts to Improve the SBA’s Acquisition Planning Process

In its 2018 report, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) noted that the SBA spends over \$100 million annually on contracts for goods and services. The SBA has been working to improve its acquisition process. Each year, the OIG reviews SBA activities for the preceding fiscal year and prepares a report identifying and offering recommendations on the most serious management and performance challenges facing the SBA for the current year. The 2013–2017 editions of the OIG annual reports identified challenges for the acquisition program to ensure that the SBA obtained quality goods and services on time and at a fair price. For example, the SBA did not always comply with federal regulations when determining whether to use interagency acquisitions, and it inadequately planned requirements for obtaining IT products and services.

The OIG report noted that the SBA took appropriate actions in FY 2017 to address challenges in its acquisition program, including hiring a senior procurement executive responsible for managing and directing the agency’s acquisition system and implementing new policies, regulations, and standards;



addressing deficiencies identified in its assessment of internal controls, for example, updating the Government Acquisition Program SOP; investing in improvements to human capital; and making significant improvements to information systems.

As part of its ongoing improvement efforts, the SBA conducted Cornerstone Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-123 Assessments of its acquisition function in 2018 and 2019. Management's Responsibility for Internal Control in the Circular requires agency managers to continuously monitor and improve the effectiveness of internal controls associated with their programs, including their acquisition programs.<sup>5</sup>

The 2018 Cornerstone Assessment entailed interviewing or surveying the SBA acquisition non-management staff to assess organizational risk and comparing the responses to Acquisition Division file reviews to validate or provide additional data for interpreting the findings. For example, the majority of survey responses indicated use of the Invoice Review Process Checklist; however, other responses indicated the need for a more efficient checklist or invoice review process. The Cornerstone Assessment was repeated in 2019 and included two additional groups: Acquisition Management and External Customers. Additionally, the 2019 Assessment included a follow-up analysis from the 2018 Cornerstone Assessment, comparing 2018 survey responses and risk matrix with 2019 survey responses and risk matrix.

**Table 1-1** outlines the key findings from each Assessment, listing the most likely or frequently occurring critical or catastrophic issues identified by respondents, in descending order of risk.

**Table 1-1: Summary of Findings from 2018 and 2019 Cornerstone Assessments**

2018 Cornerstone Assessment	2019 Cornerstone Assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of a well-defined peer review process</li> <li>• Prevalence of improper invoice payments</li> <li>• Need for collaborative tools such as SharePoint</li> <li>• Need to foster cross-functional teams</li> <li>• Need to address internal validation and verification between PRISM* and FPDS-NG<sup>††</sup> systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for process efficiency in procuring and managing Blanket Purchase Agreements (BPAs) or Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity (IDIQs) contracts</li> <li>• Reiteration of the need for improved communication, and for cross-functional teams and collaboration, especially for forecasting and planning cycles</li> <li>• Need for management to improve communications about the SBA and FAR policies using collaborative tools</li> </ul>

A comparison between the 2018 and 2019 non-management surveys also showed the transition of respondent perspectives on whether “goods and services could be acquired more efficiently” moved from a marginal risk to a catastrophic risk, perhaps underscoring the need to streamline acquisition functions.

The SBA has been acting on the recommendations from the Cornerstone Assessments, and in 2018 the OIG dropped the acquisition management challenge carried over from its 2017 and earlier assessments. The SBA has taken the following steps to implement some of the Cornerstone Assessment recommendations.

<sup>5</sup> In 2005, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) developed a framework to promote top-down assessments of strengths and weaknesses of the acquisition function at federal agencies. The framework has four cornerstones: (1) organizational alignment, leadership, and acquisition workforce; (2) internal controls, policies, and processes; (3) knowledge and information management; and (4) measurement and reporting for functional success. In May 2008, OMB issued Guidelines for Assessing the Acquisition Function, which integrates the Four Cornerstones Acquisition Assessment Template.

\* PRISM stands for Purchase Request Information System.

<sup>†</sup> FPDS-NG stands for Federal Procurement Data System – Next Generation.



**Setting Up and Updating an Acquisition SharePoint.** Policy staff have been identified to manage and maintain the SharePoint site. Best-in-class contract vehicles identified by OMB or federal procurement policy have been posted on the site for reference. Active SBA BPAs or IDIQs have been listed on SharePoint for reference.

**Setting Up Cross-Functional Teams.** A cross-functional team was developed with Acquisition and OCIO staff to address the transition to Enterprise Infrastructure Solutions contracting vehicle for telecommunications and IT infrastructure services, the follow-on to the Networx and the Washington Interagency Telecommunications System.<sup>6</sup>

**Updating Key Staff Information.** Contracting officer's representative (COR) point of contact information, Acquisition staff information, and purchase card information have been updated and posted.

**Updating the SOP.** The SBA rewrote and updated its acquisition SOP to provide for better collaboration and dialogue in all phases of the acquisition process—especially during market research and in the course of action development and acquisition planning. This is a joint function with the program office and with the CO in the lead.

**Updating the Acquisition Portal.** The SBA Acquisition Division updated the Acquisition Portal to provide timely information on actions throughout the fiscal year.

**Establishing Regular Meetings.** The SBA Acquisition Division established monthly meetings to occur throughout the fiscal year. The SBA senior leadership has begun requiring monthly meetings with heads of office and the Acquisition Division. The meetings mostly focus on what is happening in the current year (i.e., are there problems on a contract that is already underway?) and what is upcoming for the next year (i.e., less than 1 year out).

**Increasing Staffing.** The SBA hired two additional acquisition procurement analysts (PAs).

Other organizational recommendations from the Cornerstone Assessments have been challenging to implement, for example, the suggestion to improve the organization of acquisition roles and responsibilities across SBA offices and to add more warranted COs. The SBA is also working to make additional updates to templates and using the Federal Acquisition Institute Training Application System information and FAI training to apprise CORs of changes to federal acquisition requirements, policies, and procedures.<sup>7</sup> The SBA has not yet but remains interested in establishing a Customer Advisory Board. The agency previously took a one-size-fits-all approach to meeting its predominantly IT-related and professional services acquisition needs but is now trying to match the program office need to the appropriate contract vehicle. However, this step requires working with program offices earlier in the

---

<sup>6</sup> "EIS is the successor vehicle required for GSA to continue fulfilling its Congressional mandate to provide telecommunications services for the Federal Government [Section 5124(b) of the Clinger-Cohen Act]... The EIS program, successor to Networx, WITS3 and Regional Local Service Agreements will make it easier for agencies to acquire their enterprise telecommunications and IT infrastructure services from a single source versus having to coordinate multiple acquisitions to meet their enterprise needs." General Services Administration, *EIS Fact Sheet*, July 2019. <https://www.gsa.gov/technology/technology-purchasing-programs/telecommunications-and-network-services/enterprise-infrastructure-solutions>

<sup>7</sup> The SBA's *Management Response to the 4 Cornerstone Assessment Fiscal Year 2019* includes a proposed action by SBA Management to "Leverage FAITAS information and FAI Training and other training sessions with CORs." This was a proposed action under "Critical Success Factor: Regulatory Compliance," which includes "To assign a designated staff member to monitor and maintain a SharePoint site that allows for regular updates and dissemination of FAR changes, policy and procedural notices."



acquisition planning process. Overall, the SBA has made progress but needs additional steps to address the 2018 and 2019 Cornerstone Assessment recommendations.

### 1.1.2 Evaluation Purpose and Objectives

This evaluation focuses on the SBA's overall acquisition planning process, rather than on the day-to-day acquisition process. Acquisition planning is a leadership priority. The SBA wants to avoid "late to need" acquisition packages and to work 1, 2, or 3 years out like other federal agencies. In addition to fulfilling FAR requirements and addressing the Administrator's priorities, the SBA's acquisition leadership seeks to improve the acquisition planning process in the following areas:

- **Timeliness of the forecast:** forecasting the SBA's acquisition needs 2 or more years in advance
- **Accuracy of the forecast:** ensuring the acquisition forecast is as close as possible to what the agency ultimately purchases
- **Quality of bids:** ensuring bids comply with the SBA's quality specifications as stated in the request for proposals/request for quote; may also address the bidder's experience, technical approach to the work, and proposed delivery schedule
- **Communication between program office and contracting personnel:** enhancing the timeliness, quality, and quantity of communication between the program office and contracting personnel throughout the acquisition planning process
- **Variability and quality of the information that program offices submit to COs to meet program office acquisition requirements:** ensuring program offices consistently submit high quality information to COs
- **Quality of final delivery from vendors:** increasing the probability that the actual product or service provided by the selected vendor(s) meets the agency's quality specifications; this is an intended downstream outcome of a well-planned and well-executed acquisition process

Through this evaluation, the SBA aims to understand barriers in the acquisition planning process and to develop recommendations to improve the process. Based on the objectives listed in the statement of work, refined through discussions with the SBA, there are three core objectives for this evaluation:

- **Objective 1:** Identify factors that impede the SBA's ability to improve its acquisition planning process
- **Objective 2:** Assess program manager satisfaction with the acquisition planning process
- **Objective 3:** Identify how the SBA can improve its acquisition planning process

The rest of Section 1 reviews ongoing SBA acquisition actions and the updated Government Acquisition Program Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). Section 2 describes the team's methodology for evaluating the process. Section 3 provides an overview of the SBA's current acquisition planning process. Sections 4 to 6 provide the findings for each evaluation objective. Sections 7 and 8 provide the evaluation conclusions and recommendations.

Notably, rather than gathering information from every program office, Summit Team focused the various data collection efforts on key program offices mutually identified with SBA. For example, we developed the value stream mapping (VSM) from conversations with the four offices most involved in IT-related acquisitions (which comprise the over 70 percent of all acquisitions): Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO), Office of Capital Access (OCA), Office of Disaster Assistance (ODA), and the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO). While acquisition needs and processes differ across product and service categories and across program offices, certain elements of the process and associated pain points are relevant across multiple product or service categories and SBA offices.



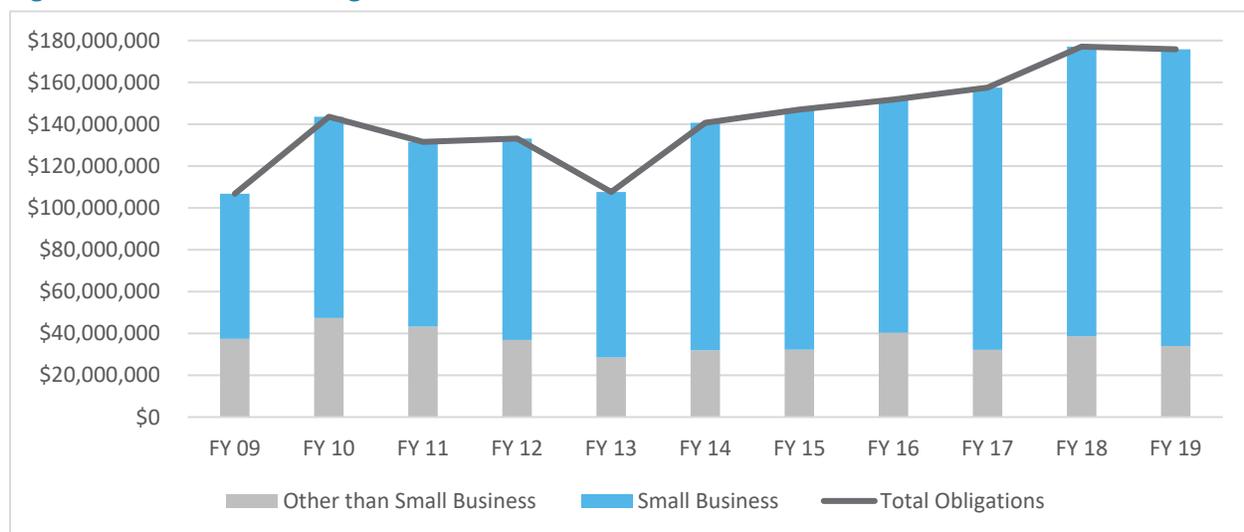
## 1.2 OVERVIEW OF ACQUISITION ACTIONS

The Cornerstone Assessments for 2018 and 2019 provide findings and recommendations from previous reviews of the SBA's acquisition process (see Section 1.1.1). Other important contextual information includes an analysis of total action obligations to gain an understanding of the SBA's acquisition portfolio. The Summit Team also reviewed data provided by the SBA on rushed acquisition packages, a potential indicator of the timeliness and adequacy of acquisition planning.

### 1.2.1 Acquisition Actions and Obligations

The volume of total action obligations<sup>8</sup> from FY 2009 through FY 2019 has fluctuated annually, with general trending upward, increasing from \$106.8 million in FY 2009 to \$175.8 million in FY 2019 (**Figure 1-1**). Awards to small businesses accounted for 74 percent of obligations, increasing over time from 65 percent in FY 2009 to 81 percent in FY 2019. Moreover, the vast majority (89 percent) of action obligations from FY 2009 through FY 2019 went toward service-related contracts with the share of performance-based services increasing from 22 percent of total action obligations in FY 2009 to 50 percent in FY 2019.

**Figure 1-1: Total Action Obligations: Small vs. Other Than Small Businesses**



### 1.2.2 FY 2019 Contract Actions and Late-stage Acquisition Packages

The SBA executed 1,271 contract actions<sup>9</sup> in FY 2019. Five offices accounted for 56 percent of these actions: OCIO, OCA, ODA, OCFO, and Office of Investment and Innovation (OII). Of the 1,271 contract

<sup>8</sup> An action obligation is the dollar amount obligated for a single contract action and is a term specific to the Federal Procurement Data System-Next Generation (FPDS-NG). There is also a "Total Contract Value" field that represents the full value of the contract. There can be many actions for a given contract, and this amount will be zero in the case of no-cost modifications.

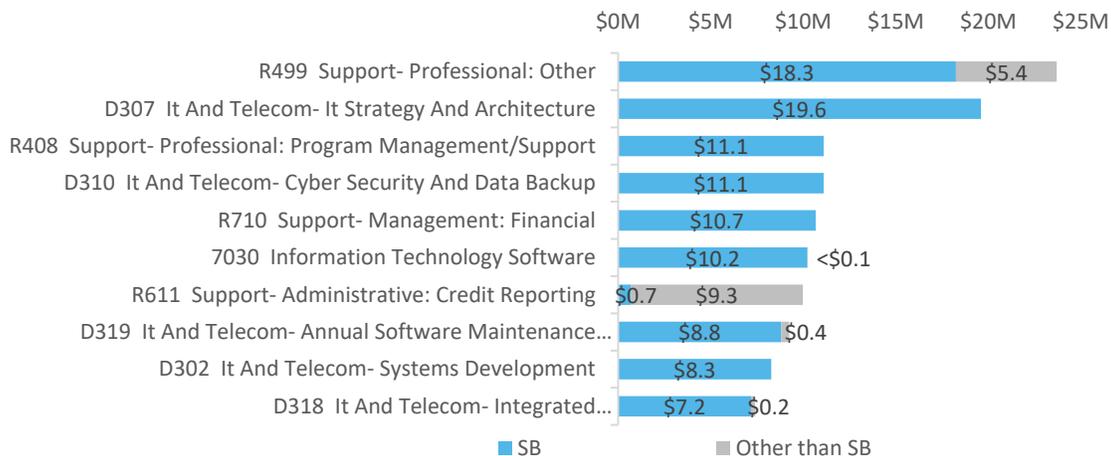
<sup>9</sup> A contract action is a single award, deobligation, or no-cost modification under a contract. There will always be a contract action to start, then subsequent modifications, options, increases or decreases are all captured as separate contract actions.



actions, 19 percent were Simplified Acquisition Threshold (SAT) actions, 13 percent negotiated quotes,<sup>10</sup> 10 percent single source awards, and 58 percent completed through another method.

89 percent of SBA acquisition action obligations from FY 2009 to FY 2019 are for service contracts with IT and professional service contracts collectively accounting for 69 percent of total award dollars in FY 2019 (\$121.3 million of the \$175.8 million), as shown in **Figure 1-2**. This is consistent with observations from the interviews and focus groups, which identified “IT and professional services” as accounting for most of the SBA’s acquisitions.

**Figure 1-2: Top 10 Product and Service Categories, FY19**



**Figure 1-3** shows the distribution of contract actions, by number and dollar amount, across FY 2019. The left y-axis shows the number of contract actions broken out by no-cost actions and deobligations versus greater-than-zero cost actions. The first quarter of FY 2019 (October to December 2018) had a sizeable volume of contract actions with a spike in December and consisted mostly of no-cost actions and deobligations. The number of contract actions dropped in January, then gradually increased in each subsequent month, reaching its highest level in September 2019 (i.e., the last month of the fiscal year). The right y-axis shows the distribution of contract actions across FY 2019 by dollars (in millions). Similar to the number of contract actions, dollars spiked in December 2018, then decreased in January 2019. The dollar amount increased somewhat in March and April (i.e., the new submission deadline), then dropped in May, and subsequently increased for the rest of the year. Notably, the dollar amount more than doubled between August and September from \$20 million to \$50 million. Measured in both number and dollars, September had the most contract actions.

The SBA also provided information on rushed acquisition packages<sup>11</sup> in FY 2019, using April 1, 2019, as the cutoff for a rushed acquisition package.<sup>12</sup> In FY 2019, 371 acquisition packages were rushed. The 371

<sup>10</sup> This is another specific field from FPDS-NG, which the CO completes as part of the total contract action record. The field indicates whether the contract was a “negotiated quote” or not.

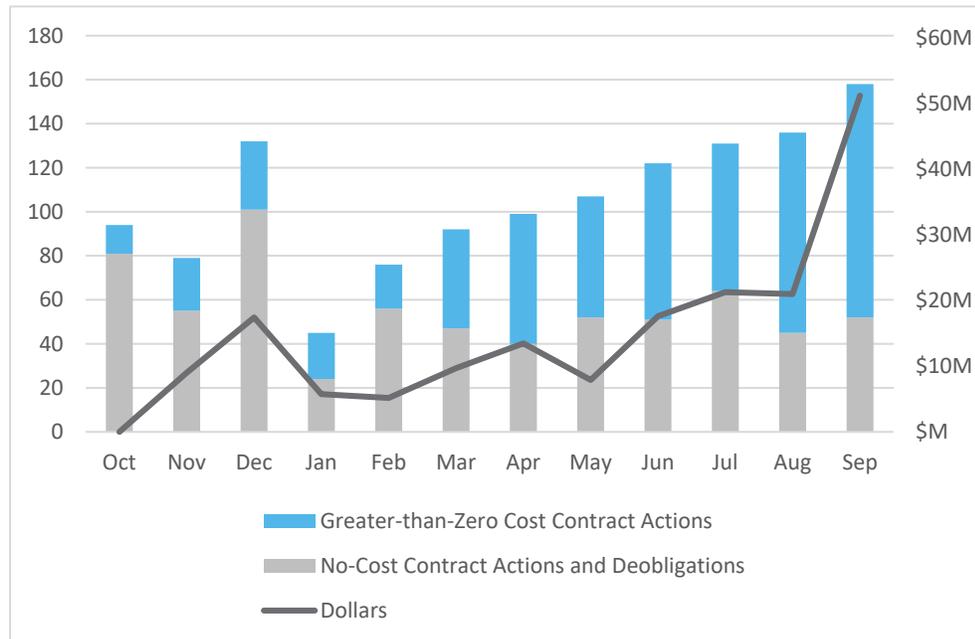
<sup>11</sup> Submitting an acquisition package is the first step to initiate a contract action; ultimately the CO takes the acquisition package and converts it into a contract award at the end of the process.

<sup>12</sup> The date for this analysis is based on the creation date, while the previous figure was based on the date signed, and therefore the data does not exactly match. Still, it provides another useful data point for understanding the current acquisition process.



late-stage acquisition packages include 191 zero-dollar planning Procurement Requests<sup>13</sup> and 180 acquisition packages with a value of \$69.2 million.

**Figure 1-3: Number and Total Dollar Value of Contract Actions by Date Signed, in millions, FY 2019**



Overall, the acquisitions data for FY 2019 is consistent with observations raised during the interviews and focus groups about rushed/"late to need" acquisitions, underscoring the importance of an evaluation of acquisition planning at the SBA.

### 1.3 ACQUISITION STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

In November 2019, the SBA updated the acquisition SOP (Section 1.1.1).<sup>14</sup> The purpose of the updated SOP was to "improve the efficiency, effectiveness and compliance of the acquisition process at the SBA and to foster enhanced partnering between acquisition stakeholders." The SOP is organized into nine chapters. Chapter 2 focuses on acquisition planning and describes contracting personnel as business advisors who work with the program office to help develop requirements descriptions. The SOP states that contracting personnel should "regularly engage with their customers to find out about new requirements and provide assistance in developing requirements packages. Waiting for a complete acquisition package does not meet this requirement nor does it allow contracting to perform its crucial role as a business advisor."<sup>15</sup> According to the team's interviews with senior procurement personnel, this is one of the most substantial changes in the updated SOP. The SOP also states that acquisition planning should begin "as soon as an agency need is identified," which is consistent with the procurement office's expressed desire to engage in longer-term acquisition planning.

<sup>13</sup> The tracking sheet was not updated after submission. Some amend the PR once the amount is known, but others open a new PR. This is not matched or tracked.

<sup>14</sup> Office of the Chief Financial Officer, U.S. Small Business Administration. *SOP 20 21 1, The Small Business Administration Acquisition Program*, November 23, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.



The SOP addresses the Advanced Acquisition Strategy (AAS), “an annual summary, used as a budget and acquisition forecasting tool, [that] is prepared by requiring activities to support funding requests submitted to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). It must be accomplished by August of each year.”<sup>16</sup> According to the SOP: “The planning version of the AAS is subsequently refined to reflect actual funding and collected at the beginning of each fiscal year, for the purpose of identifying new, potential contract and Interagency Agreement efforts as well as current efforts which the agency desires to continue. Continued efforts include requirements that continue in future fiscal years and awarded via the exercise of options or via award of a successor contract, order or agreement.” The SOP indicates that the senior procurement executive will publish a list of planned acquisitions on the SBA’s public website, including a basic description of the supply or service, quantities if known, and the calendar quarter of the current fiscal year during which solicitation is planned.

Chapter 9 of the SOP provides additional information for acquisition planning and reemphasizes two key themes first identified in Chapter 2—timeliness and collaboration: “Acquisition planning should begin as soon as the agency need is identified, preferably well in advance of the fiscal year in which contract award or order placement is necessary. In developing the plan, the planner shall form a team consisting of all those who will be responsible for significant aspects of the acquisition, such as contracting, fiscal, legal, and technical personnel.”<sup>17</sup> The SOP links the two themes of timeliness and collaboration between the program office and the CO: “Involving the Acquisition Division early in the process will only enhance the final acquisition package and help alleviate delays in the procurement process.”<sup>18</sup> This includes conducting market research, which may include communication with industry.<sup>19</sup> The CO, as a business advisor, can participate in one-on-one or group meetings with vendors, contractors, or industry representatives; schedule and chair industry or small business conferences, including pre-solicitation and pre-proposal conferences; assist in performing and obtaining market research; issue pre-solicitation notices such as requests for information (RFIs); issue draft solicitations; and schedule pre-solicitation product demonstrations.<sup>20</sup>

“Acquisition planning should begin as soon as the agency need is identified, preferably well in advance of the fiscal year in which contract award or order placement is necessary... the planner shall form a team consisting of all those who will be responsible for significant aspects of the acquisition...”

In addition to coordinating between the CO and program offices, coordination with the OCIO is required for procurements with an IT component. Specifically, the SOP requires procurements with an IT component to be “coordinated with and approved by the OCIO. Verification of OCIO approval must be provided to the CO.”<sup>21</sup> The acquisition SOP does not provide specific details about the IT review process, which is addressed in the SOP for Managing SBA IT Investments and the Federal Information Technology

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>19</sup> As stated in the SOP, “OCFO strongly encourages a robust dialogue with industry throughout the acquisition life cycle ... Early, frequent, and constructive engagement with industry is important.” Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 36.



Acquisition Reform Act (FITARA) Implementation Plan.<sup>22</sup> The VSM in Section 3 provides more information about the IT review process, and how this fits into the overall acquisition planning process.

The SOP requires procurements with an IT component to be “coordinated with and approved by the OCIO. Verification of OCIO approval must be provided to the CO.”

---

<sup>22</sup> Office of the Chief Information Officer, U.S. Small Business Administration. *SOP 90-82, Procedure for Managing SBA IT Investments, Investment Review Board (IRB)*, January 7, 2020; and U.S. Small Business Administration, *Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act (FITARA) Implementation Plan*, December 30, 2015.



## 2 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Section 2 describes the team’s methodology for evaluating the SBA’s acquisition planning process. This section includes an overview of the methodology; description of data sources and methods, and how they were used to address each objective; and limitations of the methodology and mitigation strategies.

### 2.1 OVERVIEW OF EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

As described in Section 1, the SBA has three core evaluation objectives: (1) identify factors that impede the SBA’s ability to improve its acquisition planning process; (2) assess PM satisfaction with the acquisition planning process; and (3) identify how the SBA can improve its acquisition planning process. The Summit Team designed the evaluation methodology to address these objectives.

**Table 2-1** maps the evaluation objectives to the data sources and methods used in the evaluation. The Summit Team conducted two rounds of interviews with SBA managers and staff, two VSM sessions, three focus groups, a survey of SBA PMs who perform acquisition planning, and benchmarking interviews with other federal agencies. **Table 2-2** summarizes the number of sessions and the number of individuals who participated in each session.

**Table 2-1: Evaluation Objectives Mapped to Data Sources and Methods**

Evaluation Objective	Data Sources	Methods
1. Identify factors that impede the SBA’s ability to improve its acquisition planning process	Documents and program data, interviews, focus groups	Descriptive statistics, issue reporting, as-is VSM
2. Assess PM satisfaction with the acquisition planning process	Customer satisfaction survey	Survey analysis, to-be VSM
3. Identify how the SBA can improve its acquisition planning process	Literature review findings, interviews, focus groups, customer satisfaction survey	Literature review, issue reporting, as-is and to-be VSMs, best practices review, descriptive statistics, survey analysis, benchmarking

**Table 2-2: Number of Data Collection Sessions and Number of Individuals by Data Collection Method**

Data Collection Method	Number of Sessions	Number of Individuals
SBA Interviews, Phase 1	10	14
SBA Interviews, Phase 2	8	10
Focus Groups	3	18
Value Stream Mapping	2	8
Customer Satisfaction Survey	N/A	18
Benchmarking Interviews with Other Federal Agencies	4	4

### 2.2 DATA SOURCES

This section describes the data sources and types of data for the evaluation: (1) literature, (2) program data and documentation, (3) interviews and focus groups, and (4) customer satisfaction survey.



### 2.2.1 Literature

The Summit Team reviewed a variety of literature on this topic: FAR; the SBA's Cornerstone OMB A-123 Assessments of the Acquisition Division and OIG report on acquisition services; the SOP for the SBA's Acquisition Process and the SOP for Managing SBA IT Investments; the FITARA Implementation Plan; and the SBA's Acquisition Review Form and Acquisition Review Process. The team also reviewed reports from the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) related to acquisition processes of other federal agencies; the Department of Commerce (DOC) Acquisition Manual; and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Acquisition Manual, Acquisition Planning Guide, and Market Research Guide to provide context for the evaluation and inform the best practices review.

The literature review provided important context to inform other evaluation activities.

1. A brief discussion of federal guidelines on implementing acquisition planning processes
2. An overview of frameworks and guidelines for acquisition planning
3. A review of challenges associated with acquisition planning, focusing on federal agencies
4. An overview of acquisition planning at other federal agencies to identify best practices
5. A review of the SBA's experience with acquisition planning based on findings from the OIG and Cornerstone OMB A-123 Assessments

### 2.2.2 Program Data and Documentation

In addition to the SBA documentation and literature, other important contextual information includes a spend analysis of the types of services and products that the SBA is purchasing and associated contracting information. The SBA provided this information for FY 2009 through FY 2019. The SBA also provided data from the monthly Acquisition Division Dashboard Reports (awards through September 2019) and information on late-stage acquisition packages in FY 2019, as well as information on SBA Funds Availability (FY19 Final) that compares each program office's budget to the amount of budget used in FY 2019.

The Summit Team reviewed, organized, and integrated information from these data sources provided by the SBA. This provided some quantitative information to inform our evaluation. These data are summarized and presented in Section 1.2.

### 2.2.3 Interviews and Focus Groups

**Interviews.** The team conducted 18 interviews with a variety of stakeholders who participate in the SBA's acquisition planning process. The interviews helped identify factors that impede the SBA's acquisition planning process and ways the SBA can improve the process.

We conducted the interviews in two phases. We conducted the Phase 1 interviews early in the evaluation process to inform the VSM and focus group discussions. Following the values stream mapping and focus groups, we conducted Phase 2 of the interviews. Phase 2 addressed targeted questions and confirmed or elaborated on information collected from the VSM and focus groups. The team conducted 10 interviews in Phase 1 and eight interviews in Phase 2.



We used a purposive sampling<sup>1</sup> approach to identify interview candidates, working with the SBA to identify individuals who could provide diverse perspectives from across the agency, including the Acquisition Division and multiple program offices, to maximize insights and learning relevant to the core evaluation objectives. Nearly all the interviews addressed timeliness, quality, and roles and responsibilities; other topics were relevant for a subset of interviews. The interview guides are provided in **Appendix A**.

Each interview was approximately 60 minutes in length. To encourage candor, the team assured interviewees of confidentiality in their responses. We also recorded the interview sessions (with each participant's permission) and took notes during the interviews to ensure accuracy.

The team recorded, summarized, and coded the interview data for analysis. First, we reviewed the interview notes for clarity and identified themes that might be included in the coding structure. Second, we coded the interview findings using qualitative research software (NVivo). Third, we created summaries of the interview findings.

**Focus Groups.** The Summit Team conducted three focus groups—with PMs performing acquisition planning, COs, and acquisition PAs, respectively. Each focus group was 60 minutes in length. To encourage candor, we assured participants of confidentiality and that we would report their responses in aggregate. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all focus groups were virtual by webinar.

The focus groups accommodated 18 participants, including program offices and COs, and the participants were able to build on each other's comments for a better understanding of similarities and differences in the acquisition planning process across offices. Learning about the challenges faced by both sides of the acquisition process (program offices and COs) provided a holistic view of the SBA acquisition planning process as we identified pain points and developed recommendations.

The team coded and analyzed the focus group responses, organizing responses to each major topic/question and coding the key themes in NVivo along with the interview notes. This process allowed us to identify areas of consistency or divergence and to group consistent findings in our summary of findings.

**Triangulating the Interviews and Focus Groups.** We looked for areas of convergence or divergence between the interviews and focus groups, for example, between PMs and COs and across different program offices. The analysis helped to identify findings and recommendations that may apply across SBA acquisition projects.

#### 2.2.4 Customer Satisfaction Survey

We conducted an online satisfaction survey using SurveyMonkey of the Acquisition Division's internal customers (PMs performing acquisition planning). The survey focused on the PM experience with the SBA's acquisition planning process. In addition to assessing customer satisfaction, the survey helped inform the to-be VSM. **Appendix B** includes the survey questionnaire. We received 18 viable responses (21 total: one incomplete, two from respondents that had no role in acquisition planning) out of 54

---

<sup>1</sup> A purposive sample (a judgmental or expert sample) is a nonprobability sample. It's main objective is to produce a sample that can be logically assumed to be representative of the population by applying expert knowledge of the population to select in a nonrandom manner a sample of elements that represents a cross-section of the population.



potential respondents, for a 35 percent response rate. We deployed the survey at the height of the SBA's implementation of the Paycheck Protection Program, which may have affected response rates.

The team downloaded and cleaned the survey responses and validated their quality. For the questions that used a multiple-choice option, the team calculated the percentage (or count) of respondents in each choice category and generated descriptive statistics. The team extracted key themes from open-ended questions.

---

## 2.3 ANALYTIC APPROACHES

The Summit Team used a combination of analytic approaches to assess and synthesize the data collected for the evaluation. Our main methods included creation of “as-is” and “to-be” VSMS and a best practices review. This section describes these methods in further detail. We also describe the approach to synthesizing the data and findings to address each of the research objectives.

### 2.3.1 Value Stream Maps

To identify pain points and ideas for improvement in key SBA acquisition planning functions, the Summit Team developed value stream maps to identify the as-is or current process for the Program Offices more frequently involved in IT-related acquisitions, which typically take longer to develop and award, are more complex, and have long-term life cycle cost implications. We focused on IT-related acquisitions because they have a detailed multi-step acquisition planning process that could potentially include all the typical steps in acquisition planning: defining the need, assessing basic requirements and conducting market research, and developing the acquisition package. These IT-related acquisitions also include various IT-related review processes. These factors enabled the team to define the acquisition planning process in sufficient detail to develop the VSM.

We developed the VSM with the four offices most involved in IT-related acquisitions: OCIO, OCA, ODA, and the OCFO. Although acquisition needs and processes differ across product and service categories and across program offices, certain elements of the process, and associated pain points, are relevant across multiple product or service categories and SBA offices.

During the VSM exercise, we drew the current state to learn about the system from end to end; learned about the system from the customer's perspective (PMs who perform acquisition planning); developed an understanding of the process from the perspective of others in the system; and highlighted the pain points in the current process.

We conducted the VSM exercise using a two-phase approach: (1) a top-level review with office leadership, and (2) review with second-line program office staff. Prior to the first VSM session, we conducted a 1-hour video webinar to orient participants to VSM.

In our subsequent interviews and focus groups with PMs from program offices, we presented key findings from the VSM exercise and probed the extent other program offices and product and service categories had similar acquisition processes and/or challenges. This step helped validate and refine our VSM findings and recommendations to be more broadly applicable across the SBA.



**Developing As-is and To-Be VSMs.** The Summit Team developed as-is and to-be process maps based on the VSM exercise and the focus groups and follow-up interviews. As noted in Section 2.2.4, the customer satisfaction survey also contributed to the to-be process map. The as-is process map identifies barriers in the current process, while the to-be process map identifies solutions. We validated and refined our findings and recommendations through the focus groups, survey, and follow-up interviews.

### 2.3.2 Best Practices Review

The best practices analysis addresses how the SBA can improve its acquisition planning process. We conducted the best practices review based on interviews with DOC and DHS acquisition officials and a review of publicly available information for these agencies. During interviews, we inquired about the acquisition planning challenges the agencies faced, how they have tried to address those challenges, and the results of these efforts.

### 2.3.3 Evaluation Objective 1: Identify Factors that Impede the SBA's Ability to Improve its Acquisition Planning Process

The Summit Team used documents and program data, interviews, VSM, and focus groups to address Objective 1. We reviewed the acquisition SOP and acquisition data provided by the SBA to identify issues that should be probed in the interviews. The interview topics that were especially relevant for Objective 1 included: roles and responsibilities, timeliness and quality of submissions, amount of back-and-forth, acquisition workload and competing priorities, and observed pain points. The value stream mapping defined the current process for technology-related acquisitions; we analyzed the as-is VSM to identify bottlenecks and pain points. We also used the VSM as a discussion tool in the focus groups. The focus groups with PMs from other offices, COs, and acquisition PAs solicited feedback on the VSM and helped to identify other barriers. We created the as-is VSM, summarized available acquisition data, and conducted issue reporting for the interviews and focus groups.

### 2.3.4 Evaluation Objective 2: Assess Program Manager Satisfaction with the Acquisition Planning Process

The customer satisfaction survey was the main data source for evaluation Objective 2. We calculated descriptive statistics of the multiple-choice responses and coded open-ended responses. The survey responses also informed the to-be VSM by soliciting respondent perspectives on potential changes to the acquisition planning process. **Appendix C** includes summary tables of all survey questions.

### 2.3.5 Evaluation Objective 3: Identify How the SBA Can Improve its Acquisition Planning Process

The Summit Team used all our data sources and methods to address Objective 3. The literature review identified acquisition best practices. The interviews identified opportunities for improvement. Based on our analysis of the value stream mapping exercise, subsequent focus groups and interviews, and customer satisfaction survey, we identified ways to improve the process and developed the to-be VSM. We also developed a summary of best practices for DOC and DHS that describes how these agencies improved their acquisition process and the implications for the SBA.



## 2.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODOLOGY AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Although the SBA has taken steps to improve the acquisition planning process, there is no uniform, standardized process currently in place. Therefore, the evaluation draws heavily on self-reported experiences, opinions, and insights from the SBA personnel from across program offices and the Acquisition Division who are involved in acquisition planning. While the Summit Team reached many key acquisition planning stakeholders, we were unable to conduct in-depth interviews with all relevant stakeholders, and not everyone responded to the survey – the interview and survey findings may not be fully generalizable to the SBA. In addition, the findings and recommendations were based entirely on information reported by participants in the acquisition process.

The evaluation built in steps to mitigate these limitations. We used a purposive sampling approach for the interviews and focus groups to obtain diverse and relevant perspectives. We combined the interview and focus group findings with a survey of PMs and triangulated across data sources to cross-check and validate our findings. The best practices review involving DHS and DOC provided a broader context for interpreting the information provided by SBA stakeholders. Meanwhile, the interviews, focus groups, and VSM allowed us to develop tailored recommendations for the SBA.



### 3 CURRENT SBA ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS

This Section provides an overview of the SBA’s current acquisition planning process complemented with an as-is VSM of the current process at the SBA. In addition to reviewing program data and the acquisition SOP, the Summit Team engaged in preliminary meetings with key SBA stakeholders, interviews, and moderated group discussions aimed at constructing VSMS<sup>24</sup> of the current as-is process, highlighting the steps, which personnel are involved, and pain points.

Ideally, acquisition planning begins at least 1 to 2 years in advance. As shown in **Figure 3-1**, the VSM of the acquisition planning process developed from in-person interviews with senior leadership from OCIO, ODA, OFCO, and OED, straddles at least 2 fiscal years, with the federal fiscal year beginning on October 1. In **Figure 3-1**, the Previous FY refers to the “previous fiscal year” since any acquisition planning during this period (before October 1) are plans for activities anticipated in the following fiscal year and the outyears. In this section “current fiscal year” and Current FY in **Figure 3-1** refers to any acquisition planning that takes place in the 12 months after October 1.

---

#### 3.1 OVERVIEW OF THE ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS

Located within the OCFO, the Office of Planning and Budget begins the acquisition planning process by sending a spreadsheet to program offices outlining each program’s budget, including, contracts, travel, grants, and other expenditures from the previous year. For example, to develop the FY 2022 acquisition strategy, the Office of Planning and Budget would send the spreadsheet to program offices in early summer of 2021. In anticipation of the spreadsheet, some program offices begin their acquisition planning in spring (April) by outlining their anticipated high-level needs. Each program office modifies the spreadsheet to reflect what they expect to spend in FY 2022 and 1 to 2 years in advance. Acquisition priorities for each program office are largely set by the head of the respective program office within their defined budget.

The program offices enter the information from the updated spreadsheets into the SBA’s acquisition system, specifically the Purchase Request Information System (PRISM), submitting them to the OCFO by late July to enable them to begin financial forecasting. The Acquisition Division, which is also housed under the OCFO but is separate from the Office of Planning and Budget executes the acquisitions, in collaboration with the program office, and provides cradle-to-grave acquisition support for the programs’ acquisition needs.

In summary, based on preliminary discussions and the interviews with the SBA, acquisition planning and potential preparation of acquisition packages begins in April or May of the previous fiscal year for a few program offices. However, in some program offices, preparation of acquisition packages begins in January of the current fiscal year with the formal approval of program office budgets and ends in September—the last month of the federal fiscal year. This timeline leaves insufficient lead time for course corrections. Ultimately, rushed acquisition planning hinders the acquisition process. Thus, long-term acquisition planning would enable the SBA to streamline the acquisition process and potentially improve the quality and cost-effectiveness of the services and supplies procured.

---

<sup>24</sup> VSM is a visual presentation of all the key steps in a process highlighting activities that add value while pin-pointing those that are not of value (pain points). VSMS can also depict the time each activity takes to complete, including the time work is delayed or not touched. VSMS are used to depict the current process (as-is) and to design a desired or future process (to-be).



## 3.2 DETAILED VIEW OF THE CURRENT (AS-IS) ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS

As shown in **Figure 3-1**, of the VSM, there are five primary steps in the current acquisition planning process. As previously noted, the majority (70 percent) of SBA acquisition dollars go toward IT-related projects, and the steps outlined focus on this segment.

### 3.2.1 As-Is Process Step 1: Requesting Business Case or Recompete—Defining the Need

The head of the program office and the senior leadership team initiates all acquisitions for their program office. The head of the program office works with their deputy and staff to identify potential needs based on upcoming recompetes, evolving program needs, the SBA Strategic Plan, and the SBA Administrator’s priorities. The head of the program office and their team develop a business case for each of the identified potential project needs. The program office staff research these business cases, which could be developed into acquisition packages.

While each program office initiates their internal acquisition planning process, the Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) initiates SBA’s acquisition forecasting process by sending a spreadsheet to program offices outlining each program’s budget from the previous year. The program offices respond by completing the spreadsheet in PRISM, inputting information for business cases they wish to pursue for the current and upcoming fiscal years. OPB uses this and other information to begin financial forecasting and preparing approved budgets for each respective program office.

**Potential pain points.** Potential challenges that arise include uncertainty about budgetary allocations for the program office, and hence a reluctance to identify needs and develop business cases that could ultimately go unfunded. In addition, the frequency and timing of program office leadership changes inherently introduced competing program office goals and priorities.

In the study’s Customer Satisfaction Survey, **82%** of respondents cited budget uncertainties as a major challenge to acquisition planning.

**Timing and Sequencing.** Program offices reported wide variation in when they would begin identifying their program office needs and developing the business case. They noted instances where the program office was assured of approximate funding levels based on historical data (e.g., the ODA annual budgetary allocation) and could begin identifying needs and developing the business case as early as April (previous fiscal year), beginning the acquisition plan in advance. Program offices that opted to wait for budgetary allocations may in some instances identify their high-level needs in the previous fiscal year but would start developing their business case in January (second quarter of the current fiscal year) once the OCFO had approved budgets. Program offices typically developed their recompute actions as early as July (previous fiscal year), and for five program offices 1 to 2 years in advance.

**Duration.** Program offices do not face significant challenges in developing the business case once a need has been identified and approved by the head of the program office. Program offices reported taking approximately 1 month to completely define the needs of the acquisition project.

### 3.2.2 As-is Process Step 2: Basic Requirements and Market Research

Once the program office has identified the business cases to pursue, they are defined in Basic Requirements and Market Research Step. Notably, program offices define business cases that the OCFO approves in the budget or that they anticipate approval—not all business cases get integrated into the



approved budget and hence do not enter Step 2 of the acquisition planning process. Specifically, the program office staff assigned to the business case begin defining the basic requirements for the procurement—that is, determining what problem the program office is trying to solve or purchase and the performance and financial parameters that must be met. At this stage, the program office could conduct formal market research by issuing an RFI or holding industry events to learn more about current solutions in the market. Some program offices conducted internal informal market research using resources (such as company websites or discussions with other program offices) that faced similar needs in the past. At this phase, once the program office receives approval from the OCFO the business case begins to be defined as an acquisition package.

**Potential pain points.** Per the SOP and detailed in **Table 3-1**, all IT and IT-related procurements above a \$50 thousand threshold need to undergo various IT reviews including the Architecture Review Board (ARB), Business Technology Investment Council (BTIC), or IT Acquisition Review Tracker (ITART) reviews. The IT reviews could potentially introduce significant delays to developing the acquisition package.

From the Customer Satisfaction Survey, six of 10 respondents found ARB and BTIC reviews challenging, while five of nine reported ITART reviews as challenging.

Some program offices opted to conduct informal market research during this phase rather than engage in lengthy formal market research. Depending on the complexity or dollar value of the acquisition, COs would sometimes ask program offices to revisit the market research phase and conduct formal market research. This rework may include issuing an RFI or conducting industry days well into the acquisition package development process, making the process more challenging for all parties.

**Timing and Sequencing.** Program offices typically engaged in basic requirements gathering and market research between March and May, 5 to 6 months into the fiscal year they are planning for, primarily due to awaiting approved budgets that were typically issued in January, 3 months into the fiscal year. Notably, program offices defined some business cases as early as July of the previous year and began taking steps to gather requirements prior to January.

**Duration.** Program offices reported that the typical acquisition package, absent any delays, could take from a few weeks to several months to conduct the basic requirements and develop the market research, depending on the complexity of the acquisition. IT-related reviews, namely ARB, BTIC, or ITART, could introduce 2 weeks to several months to the typical development time of the acquisition package.

### 3.2.3 As-is Process Step 3: Drafting the Acquisition Package

After completing basic requirements gathering and market research, a program office would complete the various forms and parts of the acquisition package—the acquisition plan, statement of work, and independent government cost estimate. The program office would then submit the completed acquisition package to the acquisition office for final approval.

**Timing, Sequencing, and Duration.** Program offices reported that this phase could take a couple of weeks and typically occurred between April and May.

**IT Timing and Sequencing.** IT reviews could delay the program office's completion of the acquisition package adding weeks to several months to the review process.



### 3.2.4 As-is Process Step 4: Acquisition Strategy and Approvals

Once the program office submits the acquisition package to the acquisition office, a CO is formally assigned to continue working with the program office to review the acquisition package, determine the optimal acquisition strategy, and complete all reviews and approvals. The CO provides templates or plans and sets milestones for the program office to develop the acquisition strategy and Policy for Approval process. The CO also ensures the acquisition package meets the IT review expectations and that competition requirements are addressed. Other reviews also occur at this step, such as those by the SBA Small Business Specialist, the procurement center representative, the senior procurement executive, and the Office of the General Counsel.

In the study's Customer Satisfaction Survey, **60%** of respondents found it challenging to determine the appropriate contract vehicle.

**Potential pain points.** While some program offices engage COs informally prior to this step, in other cases the CO is seeing the acquisition package for the first time. COs could ask program offices to revisit earlier steps to make corrections, such as requesting IT reviews for procurements errantly defined as non-IT or requesting formal market research. These extra steps delay finalizing the acquisition package.

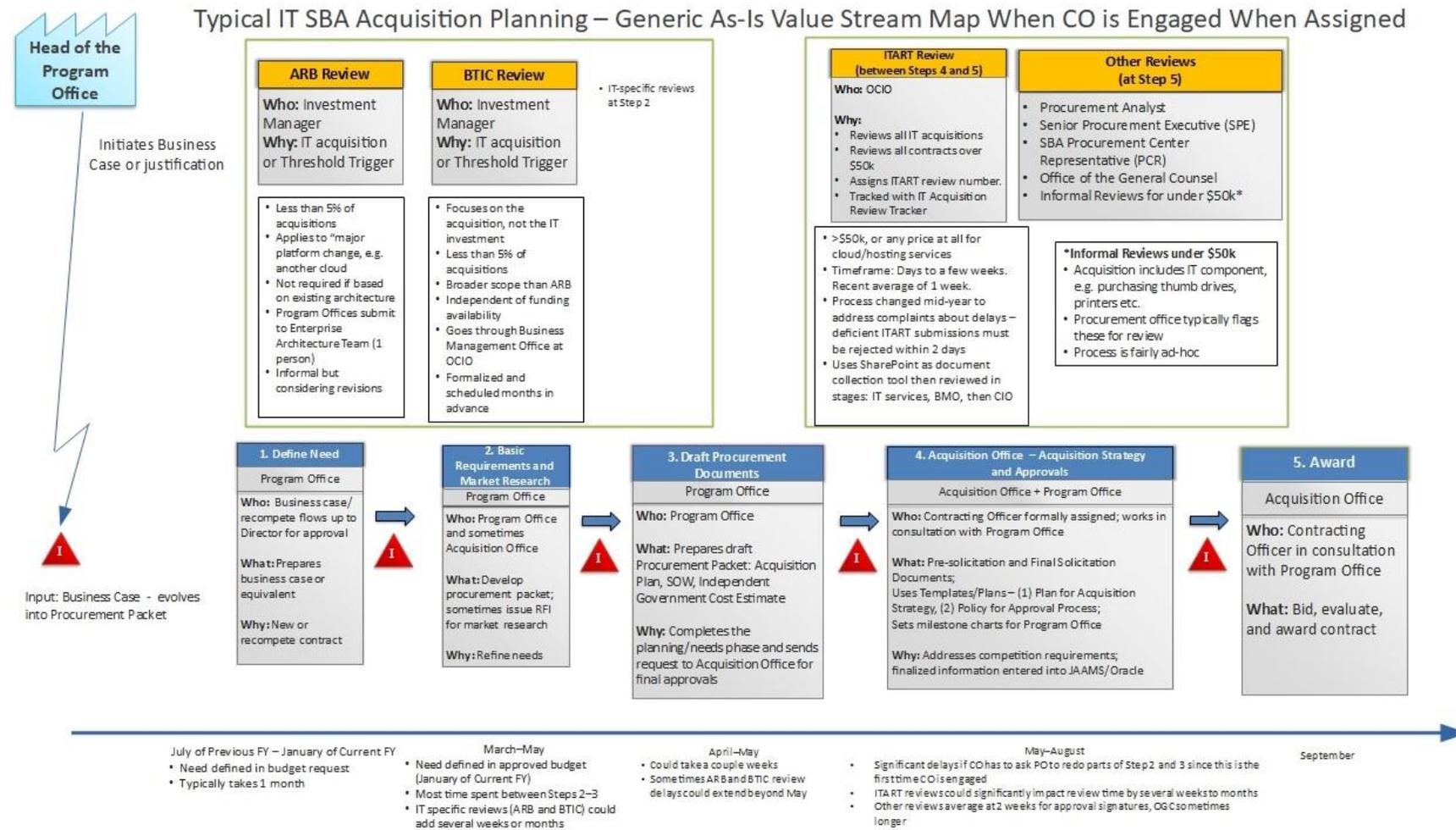
**Timing and Sequencing.** These steps typically take place from May to August. Business cases identified as early as July of the previous year begin this process much earlier, formalizing final decisions after the budget approvals in January.

**Duration.** Non-IT-related reviews typically take 2 weeks for approvals and signatures. As noted in Step 3, required IT reviews that were not communicated by COs or OCIO to the program offices during the earlier phases of the acquisition planning could add several weeks or months to the acquisition planning process.

**Figure 3-1** shows the as-is VSM depicting the aforementioned steps.



Figure 3-1: Value Stream Map of Current Acquisition Planning Process (As-is)





### 3.3 IT-RELATED REVIEWS

As highlighted in Section 3.2.2 and 3.2.3, IT reviews play a significant role in most SBA acquisition plans. **Table 3-1** summarizes the key components and impacts of each of these reviews.

**Table 3-1: Key Components of the IT Review Process**

IT Review Process	Key Findings
<p><b>Architecture Review Board (ARB):</b> The ARB acts as the governance body to oversee SBA’s Enterprise-wide Architecture (EA), ensuring that SBA investments conform to an overarching SBA EA in providing enterprise-level solutions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ARB applies to acquisition projects that, according to an interview participant, constitute a “major platform change in the agency such as bringing in another cloud or software service.”</li> <li>• ARB review is not required for systems that are based on existing architecture</li> <li>• &lt;5% of acquisitions undergo ARB review.</li> <li>• Program offices are supposed to bring applicable acquisition projects to the EA team for review within OCIO—the team currently comprise one person due to the departure of other EA staff.</li> <li>• ARB Review is informal at present, but OCIO is in the process of revisiting it and considering revisions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Business Technology Investment Council (BTIC) Review:</b> The BTIC serves as SBA’s Investment Review Board and as the principal governance body in managing SBA IT investments. The BTIC is also responsible for implementing key provisions under FITARA.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• &lt;5% of acquisition projects, or around 20 per year, undergo BTIC review; it is reserved for major investments (e.g., a new IT system).                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– BTIC relies on a slightly broader criteria than ARB. If the IT acquisition project is being built on existing SBA enterprise architecture, a BTIC Review may apply, but not an ARB Review.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• BTIC approval does not imply that the acquisition project will receive funding to begin.</li> <li>• BTIC Reviews are typically managed by the Business Management Office (BMO) within OCIO, and the BMO manages that process and the investments being reviewed.</li> <li>• BTIC includes the Chief Technology Officer (CTO), Chief Information Officer (CIO), Deputy CIO, heads of various program offices, and representation from the OCFO.</li> <li>• The process has been formalized and is scheduled months in advance.</li> </ul>
<p><b>IT Acquisition Review Tracker (ITART) Review:</b> The ITART is required for acquisitions greater than \$50,000, and for all acquisitions of cloud/hosting services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ITART applies to IT acquisition projects greater than \$50,000, or of any price for cloud/hosting services.</li> <li>• ITART Reviews take a few days to a few weeks; the average time for review during the current fiscal year has been 1 week.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Some program offices have noted that ITART Review may take months to complete. However, the process changed in the middle of the current fiscal year during this evaluation. OCIO staff must now affirmatively reject the ITART submission package within 2 days and send it to the program office. In the past, packages sometimes would sit in the queue, and program office staff came to believe that it took months to obtain OCIO approval.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The acquisition package goes through a staged review process in which each component (sub-office) within OCIO reviews; sub-offices include IT Services, IT Security, and BMO. The CIO provides final approval based on sub-office recommendations.</li> </ul>



IT Review Process	Key Findings
<p><b>Informal review process:</b> The informal review process applies to acquisitions less than \$50,000.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An informal review process conducted by the OCIO may be followed for acquisition projects less than \$50,000. There is draft guidance for this review process, but the guidance has not been approved or formally implemented. Some interview participants indicated adherence to the review process is ad hoc.</li> <li>• Examples of acquisition projects that may go through informal review process include some IT-related components, which could include small purchases like thumb drives, headphones, phones, printers, or scanners.                         <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The SBA has an approved devices and software list, but many program offices do not use it, and OCIO does not update the list on a regular basis.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



## 4 FINDINGS FOR EVALUATION OBJECTIVE 1: IDENTIFY FACTORS THAT IMPEDE THE SBA'S ABILITY TO IMPROVE ITS ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS

This objective addresses the SBA's core impetus for the evaluation—identifying the pain points, inefficiencies, and structural factors that challenge the acquisition planning process. One goal of this evaluation is to identify challenges in the current acquisition process and determine whether they prevent the SBA from improving the process. In this section, we present our findings for Objective 1.

### 4.1 FACTORS THAT IMPEDE THE SBA'S ABILITY TO IMPROVE ITS ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS

Through the interviews and focus groups, we identified a variety of acquisition planning challenges. The root cause of many of these challenges is communication failures; it permeates most if not all of the challenges discussed in this section. Specifically, lack of communication or miscommunication among the main actors in the acquisition planning process (program offices, COs/Acquisition Division, and OCIO) are significant factors that impede the SBA's ability to improve its acquisition planning process. These communication challenges include lack of clear direction and unclear expectations about roles and process, which in turn can be perceived as a lack of transparency, and ultimately lead to variations across the SBA in the approach to acquisition planning. Participants also noted a culture slow to adapt to change, and communication-related difficulties with managing the rollout of organizational change, including new acquisition processes and tools.

**Communication between Program Offices and Contracting Officers.** Communication challenges arise between program offices and the COs. Challenges occur in both the day-to-day communication between the program offices and the CO as well as in the program office's visibility into the acquisition process once the acquisition package moves to the CO for review and approval. One challenge brought up in both the CO and PM focus groups is the lack of COs dedicated to specific program offices, and the assigning of the CO after basic requirements and market research are complete. Program offices often do not interact with the CO until the acquisition package is in the system with completed requirements and solicitation documents (i.e., at Step 4). One PM noted that acquisition planning was more successful when only one or two COs coordinated all their contracts. Another PM noted that reaching out to the CO prior to developing all the paperwork would alert them if they are going down the wrong path and eliminate extra work. Determining what the CO wants can sometimes become a bottleneck when interacting with several different COs who each have their own way of doing things. During the CO focus groups, a participant mentioned they could help out more if they had additional information on upcoming acquisitions or if requirements to complete the acquisition package were communicated to customers early. A low ratio of COs to customers reduces the communication between COs and program offices, which affects the quality of planning and acquisitions.

**Transparency.** Three PMs noted lack of transparency as a challenge in the acquisition process. When they submit an acquisition to the CO, they are unsure where it goes or feel like a nuisance when asking about status. Differing CO communication styles compound this challenge. Some COs take longer to answer questions or provide updates. One suggestion was the creation of a dashboard or something similar for checking the acquisition status.

**Variations across Program Offices.** In addition to challenges noted during the interviews and focus groups, participants were also asked what works well for their offices. In looking at the responses, there



is a wide variety in how program offices conduct acquisition planning and the challenges they face. One program office noted the use of historical data to plan their future acquisition needs. Another office, with similar historical data, takes the approach that they cannot plan because they do not know what they will need each year. These different approaches to using historical data illustrate the differences across program offices in acquisition planning. Any future improvements or changes to the acquisition process at the SBA must account for such differences among the program offices.

**Culture Slow to Adopt Change.** While the changes made within the last few years around acquisitions are noted as largely positive, many PMs, COs, and PAs noted that the culture is slow to shift. One participant noted a “culture of resistance” surrounding the new changes, stating “...in the past, it has been very much: every office does their own thing, and we can’t afford to do that anymore.”

Along with general resistance to changes within the SBA, many participants also noted that lack of knowledge about changes contributes to the slowness of culture shift. One PM stated: “... we may have some old COs that we have been working with and [they] are used to doing things one way. Once there’s a change in leadership and things [are done] differently, [COs] don’t understand the process leadership is giving them.”

These challenges manifest in six areas, ordered by most frequently discussed to least:

1. **Budget Constraints:** Delays in budget finalization and unclear communication from the SBA on how to operate in this environment
2. **IT Review Processes:** Unclear expectations on the OCIO reviews, in particular the ITART review
3. **Staffing Location, Capacity, and Leadership Changes:** Challenges arising from senior leadership turnover, the number of staff within the Acquisition Division, and the location of COs in Denver (although most COs in Denver work modified hours that align with DC schedules)
4. **Introduction of New Processes and Tools:** Delays in adopting and difficulty understanding new processes and tools, and the need for more training to correspond with the changes
5. **Documentation and Resources:** Inability to find the correct forms, and the fact that a number of systems do not interact
6. **Formal and Informal Market Research:** Participants sometimes opting for informal market research, which may lead to rework

#### 4.1.1 Budget Constraints

Program offices highlighted two issues pertaining to their budgets as acquisition planning challenges—budget constraints and the SBA’s communication on expectations on how to operate in this environment. The SBA’s budget is contingent on several factors within the federal government and is not guaranteed from year to year. Eight participants out of 32 from the focus group and interview sessions mentioned budget uncertainty as one of their challenges.

**82%** of survey respondents cited budget uncertainties and **70%** cited changing program direction and priorities as a major challenge to acquisition planning.

Program offices took different approaches to planning acquisitions before their budget was finalized. Many did not see the purpose in planning ahead for acquisitions if the budget was not guaranteed. As one PM stated, “...it would be wasting the CFO’s time to have millions of contracts ready to go and then not to have any money for it.” For the COs, the program office’s reaction to the budget uncertainty was



the greatest challenge regarding the budget. Unlike the program offices, the contracting office saw no issues with the program offices doing acquisition planning—including identifying requirements, conducting market research, and developing an acquisition strategy—before the budget is finalized. From one CO perspective, the budget uncertainties only delay when they are able to post solicitations or finalize actions but should not affect their ability to plan acquisitions.

Waiting until the budget is in place to begin acquisition planning can lead to rushed acquisitions and negatively impact acquisition quality, particularly if the rush at the end of the fiscal year results in less rigor in the acquisition planning process. One PM said, “There needs to be a standard format, a clear line or deliverables, and standard requirements [for processes and deliverables].” An individual from the OCFO suggested that “program offices must look at their budgets and make sure ongoing systems are included in the base budget and not left out of the base budget.”

#### 4.1.2 IT Review Processes

There are many types of reviews conducted during acquisition planning. Program offices cited multiple levels of review for IT acquisitions as presenting a challenge in completing timely acquisitions. In particular, nine participants from the combined 21 interview and focus group sessions referenced either general OCIO reviews or the ITART review as a challenge.

One PM described the challenge of requesting signoff for acquisitions that may not be primarily IT-focused and stated that obtaining the OCIO’s approval “can be 30-50 days sometimes, sometimes it can be a five day turnaround, it just depends.” In contrast to the program office view, the OCIO sees the challenges with the review process as something the program offices could remedy. According to the OCIO, “people wait until the last minute to submit something that might take us two weeks to review it, where if they had just come and talked to us six months earlier, we could help.”

One participant expressed concern with the current rushed approach to IT-related reviews reducing OCIO’s engagement to a more bureaucratic and perfunctory process and missing opportunities to improve IT acquisition outcomes as a result. Similarly, another participant felt some may view OCIO’s role as more focused on oversight rather than solutions. While OCIO’s review responsibilities include ensuring agency compliance with applicable IT-related statutes and policies, OCIO can also help program offices improve IT acquisition outcomes and, in some cases, save money. Program offices are not always aware of existing IT solutions that may be able to meet their needs at no cost or at a lower cost than publishing a bid for an entirely new IT product or service. There is a clear difference in opinion and experience between the program offices and the OCIO.

The difference in opinion and experience within the review process is not limited to the program offices and OCIO. The COs also identify the review process as a challenge, though they feel this results from a lack of awareness of what the program office and OCIO are doing during the reviews. One CO reported that if OCIO approval is obtained before engaging the CO, the acquisition package may need to be resubmitted for OCIO approval if the CO’s review of the acquisition packages results in changes to the acquisition project. In other situations, the contracting office does not have insight into whether OCIO approval has been obtained when the CO receives the acquisition package. One CO noted their preference, “I don’t think an acquisition package should be developed until we know it’s been approved.”

One CO noted a consistent pattern of submitted acquisition packages without the required ITART approval and suggested the root cause of this pattern is a lack of understanding among program offices



concerning when ITART approval is required. Another CO made a similar observation about acquisitions that have an IT-related component but fall below the ITART review threshold. One of the COs expressed that contracting personnel have been acting as “compliance police” to ensure acquisitions with IT-related components obtain OCIO approval before issuing the solicitation. In particular, draft guidance—which at the time of this evaluation has not been approved or officially implemented—indicates that acquisition projects with an IT-related component that fall below the ITART review threshold still require OCIO review. Although this is happening in some cases, it does not happen consistently before the acquisition package reaches the CO. In these situations, the CO routes the acquisition package to OCIO for approval. One CO stated that the process for obtaining OCIO approval for acquisitions below the ITART threshold has not been clearly communicated, making it difficult for staff to follow the new process.

#### 4.1.3 Staffing Location, Capacity, and Leadership Changes

Staffing of the contracting office was also noted as a challenge by participants in eight of the interviews and focus groups. In addition, one CO acknowledged that the significant amount of turnover that has occurred within the Acquisition Division in the last year has likely contributed to confusion among program offices regarding both who should be engaged from the Acquisitions Division and when they should engage. Several interview participants also noted that turnover at the senior leadership level (e.g., heads of office) can pose challenges for long-term acquisition planning.

**Geographic Location.** PMs noted that moving some COs from Denver to Washington, DC improved collaboration between contracting personnel and program offices. Some interview participants identified the time difference between Washington, DC and Denver (where many of the COs are located) as a challenge, although most COs work modified hours that align with Washington, DC work schedules.

**Number of Staff.** During the CO focus group, participants noted that “the SBA doesn’t have a ton of contracting officers, we’re a fairly small crew, and the amount and variety of stuff that people procure is all over the map.” The small number of COs and the variety of contracts they handle make it difficult for them to help along all of the projects that go through the office. This challenge puts a greater onus on the program offices to reach out to COs for assistance.

**Leadership Changes.** During three of the interviews, a challenge arose related to federal agencies and the leadership turnover that occurs when an administration changes. One PM noted “the hardest part [of conducting acquisition planning] is having continual changing leadership...” Acquisition planning, as noted in the VSM and related discussions, often trickles down from the heads of program offices. The heads of program offices (e.g., Associate Administrators) tend to be political appointees and therefore change every few years. This change makes it difficult for program offices to plan for acquisitions and stick to them.

#### 4.1.4 Introduction of New Tools and Processes

Managing new processes and tools were also cited as challenges for acquisition planning. Participants noted a culture slow to adopt changes within the SBA, difficulty understanding the new processes and tools, and lack of training to correspond with the changes.

**Introduction of New Processes and Tools.** Participants discussed a lack of awareness and understanding of new processes. This was highlighted clearly when participants were asked about their familiarity with



the new SOP 20 21 1, effective November 23, 2019. Three PMs noted that they were not aware of the SOP prior to the interview. One PM noted that they were only aware of the SOP after receiving our interview topics. One possible reason for the lack of familiarity noted by a PM was, "... it just wasn't advertised enough for people to be able to go in and do research and make sure we're in compliance." Another PM searched on the employee gateway to find the SOP prior to our interview and found one from 27 years ago, not the most current version: "I have no idea where to even find the current SOP to find what things I'm required to do."

The COs also noted that the program offices have difficulty understanding the new processes: "SBA has been going through a lot of changes in the past few years—and I think our customers are just having a hard time following it." As mentioned in the Communication section, while the culture of the SBA surrounding acquisitions may be slow to change, the lack of communication surrounding the new processes and requirements is also a contributing factor.

**Training for New Processes and Tools.** In addition to lack of awareness of the new SOP, PMs noted a lack of training when rolling out a new system for acquisition management. Participants cited Mongoose as a particularly problematic system that rolled out with minimal training. The lack of communication on the most up-to-date processes for documentation, tools, and systems presents a roadblock for program offices in acquisition planning.

One PM expressed confusion about where to begin and a lack of training on what to do and when, "It is difficult for [PMs] and staff to keep up to date on the latest trainings if they are unaware of what those are." Another PM expressed the need for more training and the importance of conveying expectations to everyone involved. The same PM expressed the need for mentoring on the acquisition process and templates, and for guidance on what to include in required forms. COs stated that different program offices have varying numbers of acquisitions each year, and the acquisition planning skills of program office staff are often related to their direct experience. The lack of training makes it challenging for staff with less exposure to acquisition planning to adequately prepare and improve.

#### 4.1.5 Documentation and Resources

The resources used during the acquisition process also present a challenge. These resources include the necessary forms to complete the acquisition package as well as the systems used to store information and track the acquisition.

**Forms.** Along with the newest SOP, three PMs expressed difficulty finding the necessary forms to complete an acquisition package. Several offices noted receiving their acquisition package back from the CO because they used the wrong form. One CO stated during a focus group that "There is a SharePoint site, [but] I wouldn't necessarily say that its always up-to-date with the latest templates, and [that] can be frustrating to some of us in the operational field." Another CO suggested the templates currently available on the SharePoint site are mostly outdated and, in their experience, most staff simply reuse forms from prior acquisitions. Sending forms back to program staff that do not reflect the latest approved format can result in delays. The same individual also noted that COs have a fair amount of autonomy as long as the end product complies with the FAR. One consequence of this approach is that templates are sometimes specific to a CO—a template that one CO may require that is not acceptable to another. Another problem with the SharePoint site is that many documents have been removed because they were not 508 compliant.



**Systems.** In addition to the OneDrive and SharePoint site, participants mentioned five additional systems used for acquisitions: PRISM, JAAMS, Mongoose, Hyperion, and Oracle. Mongoose and Hyperion are the same system (different name). Data from Mongoose/Hyperion, JAAMS, and PRISM are stored in Oracle. The existence of multiple systems for acquisition management adds further confusion to an already confounding situation. One PM mentioned “a disconnect between JAAMS and Mongoose so that you have to enter something twice.” This system of multiple entries adds another layer of confusion and the possibility of miscommunication. In addition to these systems, another program office also described a complex system of spreadsheets that the OCFO and acquisition office require them to update with the complete information for acquisition planning. They described this as “more than a little frustrating.”

#### 4.1.6 Formal and Informal Market Research

Some program office participants noted that they had shifted from issuing RFIs or conducting formal market research to informal market research because they did not want to partake in the formal paperwork and process with the CO. The unintended consequence of this barrier is that it limits the program office’s ability to perform market research and for the program office and CO to jointly choose an appropriate acquisition strategy, since these decisions are made without the COs’ input and potentially without industry input (a best practice).

---

## 4.2 CONCLUSIONS

Communication challenges, coupled with lack of transparency, variation in procedures across program offices, and a culture slow to adopt change, are the primary drivers of many of the factors that impede the SBA’s ability to improve its acquisition planning process. These challenges manifest in unclear communication on how to handle acquisition planning amidst budget uncertainty; unclear expectations on IT reviews, particularly ITART; lack of clarity on the new acquisition procedures and the roles of the acquisition stakeholders; difficulty understanding new processes and tools; inability to find the correct forms and resources; and participants sometimes opting for informal market research, which may lead to rework. These challenges result in a non-standard application of the acquisition process across the SBA, with potential impacts on the efficiency of the acquisition process and the quality of acquisitions.



## 5 FINDINGS FOR EVALUATION OBJECTIVE 2: ASSESS PROGRAM MANAGER SATISFACTION WITH THE ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS

The purpose of this objective is to assess the satisfaction of PMs who plan acquisitions with the acquisition planning support they receive from the Acquisition Division team. We collected their perspectives through an online survey.

The Summit Team administered an online survey to 54 PMs identified from the SBA’s Program Management Inventory. The survey focused on the PM experience with the SBA’s acquisition planning process. In addition to assessing customer satisfaction, the survey asked about potential improvements to SBA’s acquisition planning to inform the to-be or desired state VSM. Key findings are presented in this section. **Appendix B** includes descriptive counts for all questions asked.

### 5.1 PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS AND FAMILIARITY WITH ACQUISITION PROCESS

The Summit Team received 21 total responses. Two responses were incomplete, and two had no role in acquisition planning. Partial responses from the incomplete survey were used, and findings are reported from 19 respondents.

**Table 5-1** shows the 11 program offices represented.

**Table 5-1: Which Offices Were Respondents From?**

Program Office	Count
Office of Performance Management and the Chief Financial Officer	6
Office of Disaster Assistance	4
Office of Government Contracting and Business Development	2
Office of Entrepreneurial Development	1
Office of International Trade	1
Office of Veterans Business Development	1
Office of Capital Access	2
Office of Investment and Innovation	1
Office of Communications and Public Liaison	1
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>19</b>

Half the respondents (10) were CORs, while almost 70 percent (13) had experience with acquisition-related functions, including acquisition planning. Four of the CORs were from the Office of Performance Management and the Chief Financial Officer, two were from ODA, two were from the Office of Government Contracting and Business Development, and two were from other offices. Nearly all respondents were familiar with acquisition planning processes such as data needs, tasks, and timelines—nine were *very familiar* and seven *somewhat familiar*. Moreover, most respondents (16) were clear about the roles and responsibilities for all those with acquisition-related roles and responsibilities in their respective offices.

**Table 5-2** outlines the primary duties of respondents. Most were familiar with the various acquisition planning activities.



**Table 5-2: Which of the Following Activities Do You Perform at the SBA with Respect to the Acquisitions Process? (Select all that apply.)**

Option	Count
Develop business cases for new program needs	11
Track contract spending and periods of performance	12
Identify new program needs and/or acquisition needs	16
Approve budgetary and/or acquisition needs	9
Other Role in acquisition planning/forecasting	6
Manage ongoing program and/or acquisition needs	15
Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting	2
<b>Total Number of Respondents</b>	<b>21</b>

Overall, respondents represented a range of program offices, responsibilities, and familiarity with the acquisition process.

## 5.2 PERSPECTIVES ON CURRENT ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS

The survey asked respondents about their perspectives on how they plan acquisitions. As shown in **Figure 5-1**, respondents tend to plan recompetes further in advance compared to new contracts. Among the respondents that use recompetes, 64 percent begin planning 9 or more months in advance compared to 36 percent of new contracts. Respondents in the ODA, the OCFO, and the Office of Veterans Business Development reported planning the furthest out for new contracts with at least one respondent stating they plan 1 year to less than 2 years. In addition to those three program offices, for recompetes, the OCA, the Office of International Trade, and the OII also report planning 1 year to less than 2 years out.

Respondents tend to plan recompetes further in advance compared to new contracts.

In addition, among the 16 respondents familiar with reverse acquisition planning, approximately half reported using backward or reverse acquisition planning *always* (3) or *frequently* (5). “Backward” or “reverse acquisition planning” refers to a process that starts by defining the desired outcome from the acquisition (e.g., achieving the program’s mission) and then working backward to define the acquisition requirements that will lead to the desired goal. The offices that had at least one respondent reporting using backward or reverse acquisition planning were also on the list of those who plan the furthest out for either recompetes or new contracts, including the OCA, the ODA, the Office of Veterans Business Development, the OCFO, and the Office of International Trade.

Respondents who responded that they are CORs were more likely to plan 9 months or more in advance for new contracts (5) over those who are not CORs (2). The pattern holds true for recompetes with seven respondents who are CORs responding that they plan 9 months or more in advance over only four non-COR respondents.

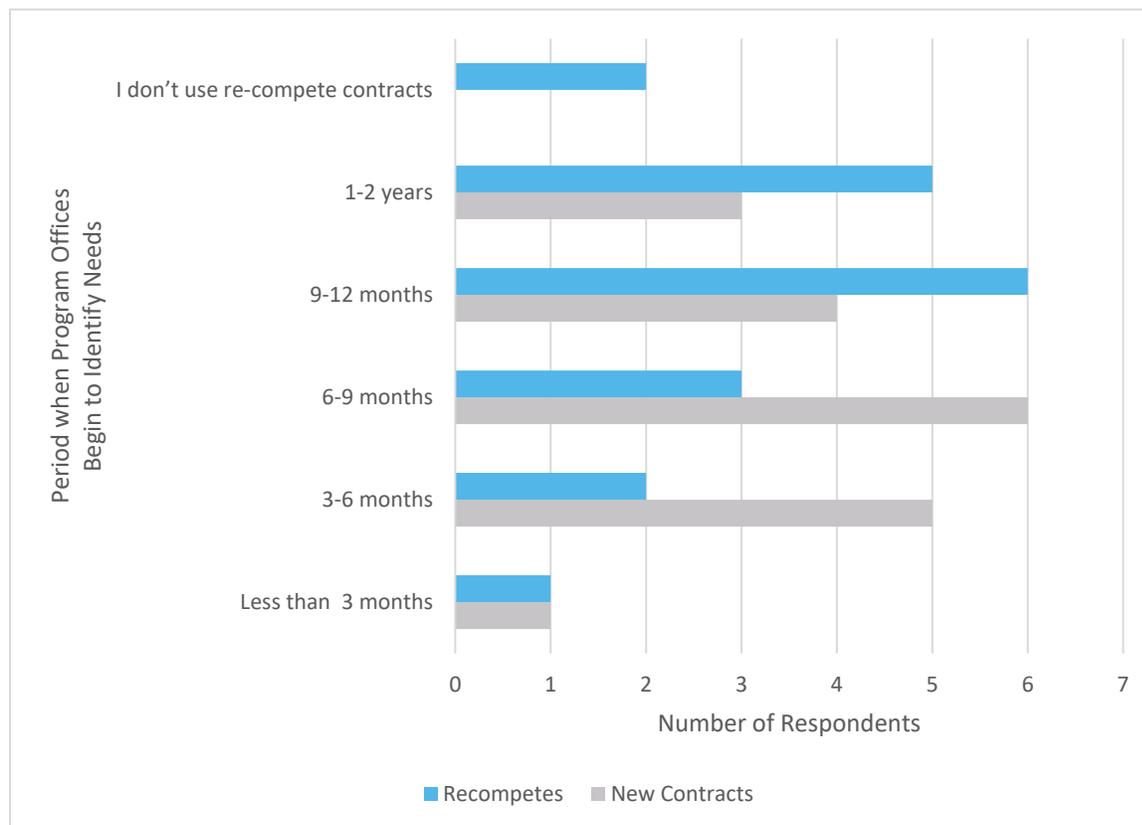
Similarly, respondents who noted they are *somewhat familiar* or *very familiar* with the acquisition planning process were more likely to begin acquisition planning 9 months or more in advance for new contracts (7) than those who are *somewhat unfamiliar* or *very unfamiliar* (0). Again, the pattern holds true for recompetes with nine respondents *familiar* with acquisition planning indicating they plan 9 months or more in advance compared to two respondents *unfamiliar* with acquisition planning. Finally,



familiarity with the acquisition planning process also indicates a higher likelihood of using backward or reverse acquisition planning. Eight respondents who are familiar with the acquisition planning process *always* or *frequently* use backward or reverse acquisition planning while no unfamiliar respondents do. These findings underscore the potential value of training and retraining program office staff on approaches to acquisition planning.

Respondents were consistent in that they routinely coordinated with various staff during the acquisition planning process—no respondent indicated that they *rarely* or *never* communicated with any of the indicated staff. Respondents indicated they most commonly coordinate with program office staff: Eight *always* or *frequently* coordinate with other PMs in their office, 12 with senior program staff in their office, and nine with budget staff in their office. In comparison, respondents coordinated with staff outside of the program office less frequently, such as only five coordinating with staff in the OCFO’s budget office. Contracting officers are the exception with eight respondents indicating they *always* or *frequently* coordinate with the COs.

**Figure 5-1: Respondent Reports of When Program Offices Begin to Identify Needs for New Contracts and Recompetes**



### 5.3 OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES WITH ACQUISITION PLANNING

The most cited obstacles to define acquisition needs 2 to 3 years in advance of contract award were budget uncertainties (82 percent) and changing program direction and priorities (70 percent). Other less



cited obstacles were insufficient staff resources (30 percent), confusion about information needed for acquisition planning (30 percent) and lack of communication from the Acquisition Division (18 percent).

When asked about challenges in the acquisition process, most respondents reported few challenges. Over half of respondents were comfortable with (i.e., responded *not very challenging* or *not at all challenging*):

- Describing and defining the programmatic need (72 percent)
- Basic requirements gathering (66 percent)
- Conducting market research (59 percent)
- Competition justification (68 percent)
- Obtaining independent government cost estimate (60)

Notably, respondents found it challenging to determine the appropriate contract vehicle (60 percent). Most respondents cited ARB, BTIC, and ITART reviews as not being part of their role (17 collective respondents). Among those respondents who reflected on how challenging the aforementioned reviews were, six of 10 respondents found ARB and BTIC reviews challenging, while five of nine reported ITART reviews as challenging.

When respondents were asked an open-ended question about what they would change or streamline to make future acquisition planning easier, the two most cited suggestions were to provide additional training about the acquisition process and staff roles ( 5 respondents) and transparency or earlier budgetary appropriations (3 respondents).

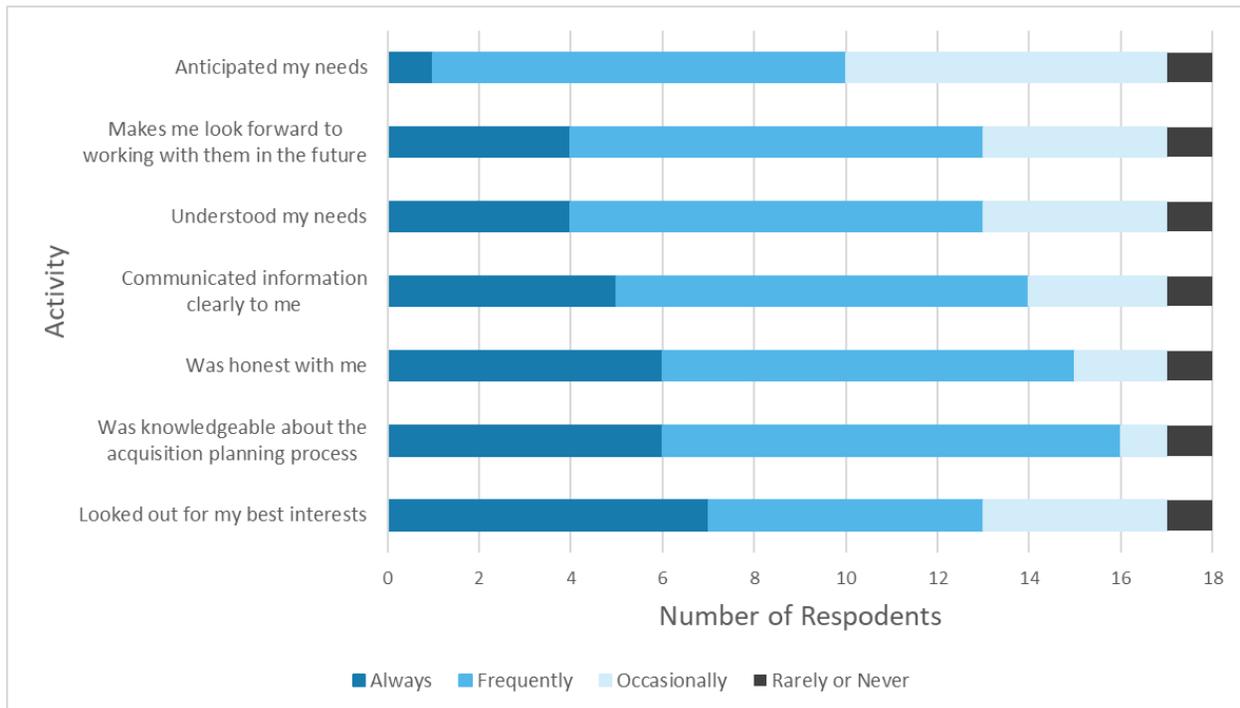
---

#### 5.4 SATISFACTION WITH PROGRAM OFFICE AND ACQUISITION DIVISION CONTACT

Most respondents thought their program offices were *very efficient* (22 percent) or *somewhat efficient* (61 percent). In addition, 67 percent thought their office's acquisition processes contributed to high quality acquisitions or timely acquisitions, and nearly 83 percent rated interactions with their Acquisition Division contact as very or somewhat favorable. Among respondents who directly interacted with the Acquisition Division, half interacted continuously throughout the year, and four interacted more frequently. Over 60 percent of respondents thought that the Acquisition Division was *very* or *somewhat effective* in helping them to identify and plan for their office's future needs. The majority respondents thought their contacts were honest with them, understood their needs, looked out for their best interests, were knowledgeable about the acquisition process, communicated information clearly, and made them look forward to working with them in the future. Finally, while more than half thought that the Acquisition Division contacts anticipated their needs, it was the lowest rated positive attribute about the Acquisition Division contact. **Figure 5-2** depicts these responses.



**Figure 5-2: How Often Do You Agree with the Following Statements? My Acquisition Division contact (Contracting Officer, Procurement Analyst) ...**



## 5.5 CONCLUSIONS

Survey responses were self-reported (anonymously) and represent perspectives from PMs at 11 program offices. Most survey respondents reported satisfaction with the Acquisition Division and their program office's interactions with individual COs. Approximately 60 percent of survey respondents thought the Acquisition Division was very effective or somewhat effective in helping them to identify and plan for their office's future acquisition needs. Over 70 percent of respondents rated their Acquisition Division contacts highly on attributes such as knowledge and communication. Although survey respondents reported some challenges (e.g., with the IT review process), the overall sentiment expressed in the survey responses is positive. The survey findings suggest it is possible to establish good lines of communication between program offices and COs to address the SBA's acquisition planning challenges.



## 6 FINDINGS FOR EVALUATION OBJECTIVE 3: IDENTIFY HOW THE SBA CAN IMPROVE ITS ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS

Objective 3 outlines potential approaches the SBA can implement to improve the acquisition planning process. We first provide an overview of several changes recently implemented by the SBA to improve its acquisition planning process. Next, we summarize opportunities for improvement as identified by the SBA staff through interviews, focus groups, and an online customer satisfaction survey. We then summarize the findings from a best practices review of the acquisition processes for two federal agencies: DOC and DHS.

### 6.1 FINDINGS ON IMPROVEMENTS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY

As discussed in Section 1.1.1, the SBA has taken steps to implement recommendations in the 2018 and 2019 Cornerstone Assessments, including but not limited to: establishing an Acquisition SharePoint site, updating the acquisition SOP, establishing regular meetings between the Acquisition Division and program offices, and hiring additional acquisition PAs. The interviews and focus groups provided feedback on these changes and identified additional recent improvements implemented by the acquisition office, as described below.

#### 6.1.1 Moving Staff to Washington, DC

Four acquisition staff recently moved to the Washington, DC office from Denver. The first CO who relocated to Washington, DC did so at the beginning of FY2020 (October 2019) and the other three relocated to DC in December 2019/January 2020. 1 months later, the COs and PMs began working from home due to COVID. Despite the brief overlap between the COs and PMs prior to everyone working from home, three PMs identified the relocation of acquisition staff to Washington, DC as a recent improvement to acquisition planning. One PM said, “Having our acquisition specialist here in DC [enables us to] meet with them any time of the day, [which] makes it a million times better for us than when they were in Denver.”<sup>1</sup> According to the PMs who commented on the move from Denver to Washington, DC, the move was beneficial not only for the interactions of the COs with the program offices but also for the acquisitions office’s ability to attend industry liaison and acquisition innovation events.

#### 6.1.2 Earlier Due Dates

Other improvements include setting April 1 as the acquisition action lead time due date for acquisitions, and an attempt to improve communication between the acquisition office and the program offices. Setting the due date as April 1—6 months before the end of the fiscal year—encourages advance preparation and limits last-minute acquisitions. While this improvement was mentioned three times, only one office noted that pre-positioning contracts based on the April 1 date helped minimize last-minute contracts and improve timeliness.

#### 6.1.3 Communication between Acquisition Office and Program Offices

Steps that the acquisition office has taken to improve communication with program offices include regular monthly and quarterly meetings, which aim to provide more consistent guidance to the program

<sup>1</sup> Direct quotations have been edited slightly for grammar and context. Line edits or additions are noted in brackets.



offices on acquisition planning and to clarify upcoming acquisition needs (Section 1.2). One program office noted that the monthly meetings alleviate pressure by enabling a platform for expressing what it wants. The monthly meetings are a communication tool to assist with any problems. Two program offices noted that the quarterly meetings where the supervisory CO and the senior procurement executive meet with program offices are also helpful. These meetings are more program office-specific and foster a conversation about where the program offices are and where they are going with their acquisitions.

---

## 6.2 FINDINGS ON PERSPECTIVES FROM SBA STAFF INTERVIEWS ON HOW THE SBA CAN IMPROVE THE ACQUISITION PLANNING PROCESS

As the discussion of challenges made clear, communication is a major roadblock for improving the acquisition process. Throughout the interviews and focus groups, participants in 12 out of 21 interviews and focus groups suggested at least one of the following potential improvements for communication:

1. Increased communication between PMs, COs, and OCIO
2. Clear delineation of process steps and accountability
3. Updating communication platforms
4. Buy-in from senior leadership
5. Assigning the CO earlier in the process

### 6.2.1 Improving Communication

**Increased Communication between PMs, COs, and OCIO.** The most frequently mentioned improvement opportunity was increasing the amount and having earlier communication between the primary stakeholders in the acquisition planning process: PMs, COs, and OCIO. Multiple participants highlighted the value of an acquisition process that operates as an ongoing and iterative conversation rather than a series of transactional review processes. Approaching the acquisition process as a conversation, beginning at Steps 1 or 2, allows key stakeholders to discuss and understand acquisition needs and then collaborate to develop an effective acquisition strategy, leveraging each party's institutional knowledge and subject matter expertise. One CO noted that it would be a "great step forward" if PMs would use Acquisition Division personnel as a resource for expertise in navigating the acquisition process. Another participant noted that COs involved earlier in the process can better understand the acquisition, provide advice, and identify appropriate sources and contract vehicles. Early collaboration between the CO and program office can streamline later parts of the process.

One PM noted his practice of engaging acquisitions staff in developing the acquisition strategy, as acquisitions staff often have knowledge of contract vehicles that program offices may not be aware. The same PM said, "We expect some [acquisition documents] will need rework, but if we have been talking with [acquisitions] over time, we should know [what those pieces] are already beforehand," which in turn speeds the review time. This engagement reduces back-and-forth discussions between the reviewer and the program office as well as the amount of time the CO and other reviewers would need to spend researching work that was already completed. Equally important, multiple participants also noted that increased communication would likely lead to improved acquisition outcomes (e.g., delivery of higher quality products and services at lower cost to the agency).

**Clear Delineation of Process Steps and Accountability.** Another aspect of communication that was mentioned for potential improvement is clear delineation of steps in the acquisition planning process and accountability for those steps. One PM noted that having multiple players with split responsibilities



causes delays. Another PM suggested a process map that outlines the different roles and when they come into play. This process map would help the program office know what activity needs to happen when and who they need to engage. Similarly, another PM stated that templates describing the acquisition process and requirements would be helpful, particularly for agency staff with less acquisition experience. One CO identified the BTIC and ITART review processes as examples of steps in the process that could benefit from greater clarity on the basic questions of who, what, how, and why: What needs BTIC or ITART approval, who is responsible for submitting, what is required for submittal, how does one obtain approval, and why is the review important. Another CO stated that the approval process for acquisitions with IT-related components below the ITART threshold should be better defined and communicated.

**Updating Communication Platforms.** Another potential communication improvement would be to update communication platforms, including SharePoint, more regularly. As noted in Section 4.2, the SharePoint site contains old and outdated forms. Participants recommended keeping the SharePoint site updated. Program offices want a website where “every time you start a new acquisition package, [you] always go download the most up-to-date form we posted there.” The CO focus group noted that the current process involves going through the OCIO to update the forms, and they would prefer to update the forms themselves. One issue with this proposed solution is the requirement for 508 compliance.

**Buy-In from Senior Leadership.** Additionally, participants in the CO focus group suggested that “there needs to be some more socialization between senior leadership that we’re pushing documents to their office.” There needs to be more buy-in and support at the senior leader level when there are new process changes, and “it needs to be distributed widely from the top rather than relying on each CO to speak with their customers.” Communication between senior leadership and the staff in their offices needs to be clear, and directions need to be clearly communicated from leadership throughout the offices.

**Assigning the CO Early in the Process.** Finally, assigning COs earlier in the process will both improve the acquisition planning process and acquisition outcomes. One CO noted the value of assigning COs even as early as Step 1, defining the need. Another CO suggested that program offices should engage with the CO in Step 2 to develop the acquisition plan and requirements documents, and further suggested that program offices that identify a requirement with IT-related components should immediately engage the OCIO. The assigned CO may not be the same CO that will work on the final stages of the acquisition, but the suggestions underscore the importance of having at least some engagement between the program and contracts office in the early phases of acquisition planning.

The issues of new processes and changes is compounded by COs not knowing in advance who their customers will be. This means COs are not able to provide advice and guidance before acquisitions decisions are made, educate customers on which review process applies, or ensure customers conduct advanced market research. Knowing which CO the program office will be interacting with for the acquisition opens communication channels earlier, which encourages more communication and ultimately results in a smoother and more timely process to develop, publish, and award contracts. As one PM stated, “As long as communication is open, [the acquisition process] goes a lot more smoothly.”

Multiple participants suggested assigning COs dedicated to each program office to strengthen working relationships between the program and acquisitions offices. Currently, only OCIO and ODA have contracts staff dedicated to their office, and the remaining 23 program offices effectively share COs located in the Denver acquisitions office. However, one participant in the Acquisition Division stated that



previous efforts to assign COs to specific program offices did not work in terms of balancing contacting personnel's workload, but that COs have specialized in "functional areas" to the extent possible. Another CO similarly noted that the variation in the number of requirements pursued by program offices each year requires workload management. As a result, it may not be possible to dedicate a single CO to each program office, but greater efforts to coordinate program offices with a group of COs dedicated to their office may be feasible.

### 6.2.2 Automating Parts of the Acquisition Planning Process

The interviews and focus groups identified challenges around the accessibility and usefulness of acquisition tools, resources, and documentation (Section 4.2). Key challenges included lack of integration between different technology systems used in the acquisition planning process, and unclear or outdated guidance for developing an acquisition package. Participants provided several suggestions for automating or streamlining parts of the acquisition planning process, including how information is entered and kept within the systems and the process of putting together an acquisition package.

**Entering and Storing Information.** One suggestion was automating the entry and maintenance of information in different systems. One PM mentioned the difficulty with entering the same information into different systems and suggested a system that automatically creates different documents based on input that is entered only once. A similar suggestion was to improve the communication between existing systems, such as PRISM and JAAMS, to share information and remove the need to enter the same information into both systems.

**Menu of Services.** One participant suggested the creation of a menu of services that provides information on successes from other acquisitions. This menu would list attributes of an acquisition and how long each type of acquisition takes. For example, "You've elected a type of acquisition that can be done in 30 days." Along this line of thinking, one PM suggested greater transparency on what various offices across the agency are trying to put through the acquisition process. If one program office is doing an acquisition for a specific product, another office may be able to join the same acquisition if they have the same need. This suggestion lines up with another to find commonalities between program offices so acquisitions can plan and develop contracting vehicles that will work for multiple offices. However, this suggestion requires more upfront work to put together the IDIQ vehicles or BPAs but reduces the transaction time for individual task orders once in place. Another PM recommended greater use of BPAs to streamline the acquisition process for task orders.

**Digital Acquisition Library.** Another participant suggested developing a library that contains different types of formatted performance work statements, statements of work, and independent government cost estimates. The library could alleviate some of the back-and-forth that currently happens. The ability to choose from already prepared documentation could also prevent additional rework from incorrectly populated documents.

### 6.2.3 Improving Training

The interviews and focus groups identified the need for additional training in acquisition planning approaches, tools, and resources to implement the acquisition process effectively (Section 4.2). Participants in eight interviews and focus groups suggested an increase in the training of program offices and acquisition staff. For program offices, training topics identified include:



- Defining requirements and building requirement documents
- Developing performance work statements
- Filling out required forms

One CO recommended refresher training for all staff on services and understanding which acquisitions are subject to ITART review. Another participant suggested a short training session (30 to 60 minutes) that walks through the entire acquisition process as outlined as part of this study. Each step of the session could discuss roles and responsibilities, what information and documentation is required at each step, and how long each step typically takes, depending on the type of acquisition. The Acquisition Division has offered sparsely attended training in the past. Future trainings would benefit from further exploration of the topic, timing, and delivery mode preferences. One PM noted that some of their team had attended the Digital IT Acquisition Professional Training General Services Administration (GSA) training around agile acquisitions<sup>2</sup> and suggested having more staff complete that training. To maximize the effective use and implementation of agile acquisition principles and techniques, another participant suggested identifying a subset of acquisitions staff with existing institutional knowledge and experience in IT acquisition to receive training and certification in agile acquisitions. Such certification programs are offered every year by the GSA. Additionally, beyond the general acquisition training, one PM mentioned a need to improve training on any new systems and processes (e.g., Mongoose, JAAMS) the acquisitions team implements.

#### **6.2.4 Providing Insight into the Status and Timeliness of Acquisitions**

As described in Section 4.2, the interviews and focus groups raised concerns about transparency and accountability in the acquisition planning process. Suggestions addressed various aspects of these challenges.

Several PMs suggested a dashboard or other system that allows staff to track the progress of an acquisition at each stage of the acquisition process. This resource would provide greater transparency into the acquisition process and offer stakeholders real-time updates on the current status of an acquisition, as well as identify bottlenecks slowing the process. As one PM noted, “I should be able to log in to my system and see it’s still in some other process step.” Another PM noted that a benefit of a dashboard may be to easily inform other acquisition team members about changes in staffing. Similarly, program offices requested more transparency around the financial management system, which allows staff to pull down the acquisition contract status report. Program offices would like to have view rights to the system in real time to track the contract status throughout the fiscal year.

Some PMs also suggested tracking the timeliness at each step, including how long an acquisition package takes to get from conception of the need to submission of an actionable plan. This would help track future bottlenecks in the acquisition process and provide the SBA with greater understanding of how long an acquisition takes to reach completion. A member of the Acquisition Division noted that tracking the time from when the concept first originated would require timely and accurate information about the program office’s planned acquisitions.

---

<sup>2</sup> Agile acquisition is defined as an acquisition developed using agile principles to prioritize upfront value delivery, flexibility, and hypothesizing and testing products before making a major investment. This typically involves using a Statement of Objectives and evaluation criteria that emphasize testing a concept or product with a small investment of funds before investing substantial funding in an unproven concept or product.



### 6.2.5 Planning for Acquisitions Earlier in the Process

As discussed in Section 1.2, starting acquisition planning earlier has been and remains a goal for the Acquisition Division. While the SBA has already made some progress in this area, further progress would include planning up to an additional year in advance rather than just for the upcoming fiscal year. This would provide leadership and the acquisition office an idea of what is to come. It would also assist in connecting offices that may have the same list of acquisition needs for the following year to work together on an acquisition. However, as noted in the challenges in Section 4.2, some offices do not see planning as possible for them due to the nature of the budget and of their offices' mission.

Another suggestion was scheduling non-IT reviews earlier in the year rather than having them stacked in August and September. This change would allow for more time for the reviews and possible changes to the acquisition before the end of the fiscal year. Finally, some participants emphasized the need for pre-positioning contracts to exercise when time is of the essence, such as during a disaster declaration.

### 6.2.6 Conducting Robust Market Research

Two participants identified market research as a pain point—in particular, determining the right amount of industry engagement to undertake as part of market research activities. Discussions with acquisition staff from DOC also identified market research and industry engagement as ongoing pain points for the agency. Specifically, finding the right balance between surveying the market to understand the availability of qualified vendors while not overburdening the marketplace in a way that results in vendors inadvertently defining government requirements. Interviews with the SBA's Acquisition Division found support for more robust engagement with industry during the market research phase, particularly for complex requirements, provided that COs are involved in the process.

There was also a suggestion that any acquisition above \$3 million should begin with sources sought to provide many different suggestions on how the program office might be able to tackle the acquisition. The threshold of \$3 million was noted as being used in a specific program office and may not work for all program offices.

### 6.2.7 Assessing Workload and Staffing for Acquisition Tasks

With respect to staffing, one CO suggested conducting a workload assessment to determine if the acquisitions office is right-sized. The same CO also suggested exploring the potential to use the agency's existing acquisition support contract to help with some of the lower skill document preparation tasks, which would then free up SBA acquisitions officers to focus on the more complicated parts of the planning process, including acquisition strategy and review.

---

## 6.3 FINDINGS ON PERSPECTIVES FROM BENCHMARKING OTHER AGENCIES

The Summit Team conducted a benchmarking review based on interviews with DOC and DHS acquisition officials and a review of publicly available information for these agencies. The Summit Team also conducted a targeted review of acquisition-related documents for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) based on information that was readily available to the team. The purpose of the benchmarking review was to identify best practices used by other federal agencies that may be helpful for improving the SBA's acquisition process.



While the dollar size of the DOC and DHS acquisition portfolios is significantly larger than the SBA's, similar to the SBA, the majority of each agency's acquisition portfolio is for services, of which the greatest share is IT-related. Both agencies have taken steps to strengthen their acquisition planning processes and to address similar issues to those faced by the SBA.

Our review first focused on acquisition management documents available on each agency's website, including their acquisition manuals. Our review of relevant documents for DHS also included resources available through the DHS Procurement Innovation Lab's (PIL) Innovation Resource Library. PIL is a small team of procurement specialists that DHS staff can turn to for acquisition assistance and to experiment with innovative acquisition techniques. PIL aims to provide a safe place through which DHS staff can test new ideas, share lessons learned, and promote best practices. We also conducted targeted interviews with representatives of each agency's procurement office and the PIL to supplement information developed from our review of publicly available documents.

The document review and interviews with DOC and DHS aimed to address the following research questions to identify best practices:

- How far in advance are acquisitions planned? What criteria are used to determine the level of planning required for different types of acquisitions?
- At what point in the acquisition planning process do program and acquisitions staff first interact?
- What review processes have been established specific to IT acquisitions?
- What are best practices for market research and industry engagement?
- Are there any metrics that federal agencies are using to track the status or progress of the acquisition planning process?
- What best practices, templates, or other guidance have been developed to assist staff at each step of the acquisitions planning process?

### 6.3.1 Acquisition Planning: Timing and Level of Detail

Acquisition planning is a critical and required step of the acquisition process, intended to ensure federal agencies meet their needs in the most effective, economical, and timely manner possible. While FAR Part 7.104(a) requires that acquisition planning start "well in advance of the beginning of the fiscal year," federal agencies exercise flexibility in the exact timing and level of acquisition planning applied to balance resources and manage workload. Best practices distilled from our review include:

1. **Create a tiered structure for advance planning that requires an earlier start date for larger and more complex acquisitions.** Consistent with FAR Part 7.104(a), and similar to the SBA's standard operating procedures for acquisitions, the acquisition manuals for both agencies state that acquisition planning should begin as soon as the acquisition need is identified. DOC's acquisition manual adds that planning "shall begin well in advance of the beginning of the fiscal year." In practice, DOC clarified that start dates are largely driven by the requirement need date and the size of the acquisition. Acquisition divisions with large, formal acquisition plans—which apply to all acquisitions in which the anticipated total life cycle costs are \$10 million or above, or meet certain criteria—typically start 12 to 18 months before a new contract needs to be in place.

At DHS, the general expectation is that agencies define needs at least 2 years in advance. DHS also requires agencies to conduct an annual review for existing and recurring acquisitions and relies on a "planning, programming, budgeting, and execution" process that results in developing 5-year funding plans for DHS' "major" acquisition programs. Major acquisition programs are defined by



total life cycle cost. DHS defines a major acquisition program as one where total expenditures are anticipated to exceed \$100 million.

Overall, the general approach followed by DOC and DHS to begin acquisition planning 1 to 2 years in advance is consistent with the goals established by SBA's Acquisition Division as well as improvements suggested by participants in the focus groups and interviews.

- 2. Create standard acquisition planning levels based on factors such as dollar amount, contract type, level of competition, and whether the acquisition includes IT components.** Both agencies differentiate the level of acquisition planning required based primarily on specific dollar thresholds, but they also provide flexibility for staff to consider other criteria where appropriate, such as mission criticality, risk level, visibility, and project complexity. For example, DOC identifies three acquisition planning levels: (1) formal acquisition plans, (2) milestone acquisition plans, and (3) advance acquisition planning forecasts. Milestone acquisition plans are more of an outline with defined milestones. Forecasts represent the minimum level of planning with the required data elements defined in DOC's acquisition manual.

DHS follows a similar approach but relies on specific dollar thresholds in combination with contract type, the latter criterion serving as a proxy for risk. For example, written acquisition plans are required only for firm fixed price contracts greater than \$50 million and for all other type of contacts greater than the Simplified Acquisition Threshold (SAT). Where a written acquisition plan is not required, acquisition planning is still required, but the form and level of detail is left to staff's discretion.

For this research question, we expanded our review to include the USDA. USDA has requirements plans and formal plans. Similar to DOC, the requirements plans are streamlined outlines or checklists containing less information than a formal acquisition plan. However, USDA has different versions for IT acquisitions versus non-IT acquisitions. The type of plan required for a given acquisition is driven by (1) dollar value, (2) whether the acquisition is for a "major" program, (3) whether the acquisition includes IT, (4) contract type, and (5) competition level. IT acquisitions greater than \$50 million are required to have a formal acquisition plan.

SBA could adopt a similar risk-based approach to acquisition planning, tailored to SBA's portfolio of acquisitions. In doing so, the agency could balance the requirement for all acquisitions to undergo some level of planning while focusing staff resources on the subset of acquisitions that pose the greatest risk to the agency.

- 3. Develop user-friendly templates and checklists to assist staff in developing acquisition plans and establish consistency in format and content across acquisitions.** Similar to the SBA, all three agencies use templates to aid staff throughout the acquisition planning process, including acquisition plan templates. Although DOC's template for formal acquisition plans largely follows FAR Part 7, DHS noted that its template is a streamlined version of FAR Part 7 tailored to include information specific to DHS acquisitions. Both agencies also provide templates to track key acquisition planning milestones. USDA is in the process of developing an Excel-based IT project checklist that identifies key tasks at each life cycle stage: (1) pre-award, (2) award, and (3) post-



award. The checklist is intended to help program offices understand the process for completing an IT acquisition and includes columns to track the status of each step.

### 6.3.2 Program Staff Engagement with Acquisitions Staff

Consistent with the discussion in Section 4.2 on the communication challenges raised by both program and contracting staff, we asked DHS and DOC to share lessons learned, best practices and strategies that each agency uses to create an environment that fosters and encourages program staff and contracting staff to work collaboratively in acquisition planning. In some cases, this involves establishing an Integrated Procurement Team (IPT) with representatives from the program office, procurement office, IT, and other stakeholders. Collaboration during the planning phase can streamline and improve the acquisition process. Best practices include:

- 1. Use IPTs for large or complex acquisitions.** Identified as a best practice by DHS PIL, IPTs are a tool commonly used at both DHS and DOC, typically for large or complex acquisitions. Both agencies were consistent in the types of people typically included in an IPT: a PM, a budget specialist, a contracts specialist, a representative from the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization, and sometimes a representative from the Office of General Counsel. Even though the COR is not formally named until contract award, DHS also recommended including the likely COR in pre-award planning, which in turn can lead to improved post-award processes and outcomes. To ensure active participation in planning by all parties, DOC identifies all IPT members in the acquisition plan itself and requires all IPT members to attend presentations to the Acquisition Review Board.
- 2. Increase consistency in COs assigned to work with program offices.** Similar to the SBA, the process by which contract staff are assigned to program offices and individual acquisitions varies within each agency. Similar to the SBA's creation of a team of acquisitions staff dedicated to OCIO, dedicated acquisitions staff exist only for larger bureaus and departments or specialized types of acquisition—for example, IT, or at DHS, airplanes and ships. For all other program offices, contracts staff typically work with multiple program offices. Similar to the SBA, co-location of contracts staff with program staff is atypical and exists only for specific bureaus or departments.

While workload management is a driving factor in the organizational structure between program and acquisitions staff, DHS' PIL identifies both co-location and dedicating acquisitions staff to program offices as best practices. Based on their experience, when customers have a consistent set of acquisitions staff for their acquisitions, the relationships between the two offices is stronger, visibility of upcoming requirements is greater, and integrated and collaborative teams come to the table earlier. Where COs are assigned based on workload rather than customer, the PIL finds less of a relationship. This gap translates to a level of engagement between the two offices that is generally later and overall less effective in achieving high quality acquisition outcomes.

- 3. Facilitate early engagement—prior to developing the acquisition plan—between acquisition teams and senior procurement staff for larger and more complex acquisitions.** During discussions with DHS, the Office of the Chief Procurement Officer (OCPO) described its recent approach to increase collaboration through a new initiative known as the Procurement Strategy Roadmap (the Roadmap). The Roadmap requires contracting activities, along with their procurement teams, to present and discuss the acquisition strategy with the chief procurement officer, OCPO members, and other stakeholders as needed, prior to drafting an acquisition plan or other decision documents. The objective is to ensure staff have access to, and meet with, OCPO officials prior to the service



contract requirement being finalized, to discuss how services and products will be purchased and ensure that all parties agree on the proposed approach. Key elements discussed as part of the Roadmap include competition, the availability of strategic sourcing or small business options, and contract type.

### 6.3.3 IT Acquisitions

Federal acquisitions of IT products and services represent an area of unique scrutiny due to both the large dollar amounts committed to IT acquisitions and the complexity of procuring and managing IT products and services. As a result, a number of federal statutes (including the FITARA) and policies focus on IT acquisitions. Similar to the SBA, DOC and DHS have a separate review framework for IT acquisitions, and dollar thresholds are the primary criteria used to guide the review of IT acquisitions.

**Harmonize the IT Review Process with the IT Acquisition Life Cycle.** As is common across the federal agencies that we looked at, multiple review points exist within the life cycle of an IT project or investment. When considering the acquisition planning process, we discussed with DOC two key review milestones: (1) IT Investment Authority (ITIA) review, which focuses on the technical review of a proposed IT investment (similar to the SBA's ARB review); and (2) the OCIO's review of the acquisition (similar to the SBA's ITART review). The challenges described by DOC about the IT reviews echoed pain points expressed during SBA interviews and focus groups. In particular, DOC described the challenge of designing and implementing a process for IT reviews that ensures the right type of review and input at the right time within the life cycle of an IT acquisition. Until recently, the two reviews occurred concurrently, resulting either in delays to redo work completed on a proposed acquisition strategy or moving forward with an acquisition without incorporating or responding to ITIA review feedback. DOC recently changed its standard operating procedures to shift the timing of the ITIA review to occur prior to the OCIO's review of the acquisition and 18 to 24 months in advance of the target acquisition date. DOC is hopeful that recent changes to ensure that these reviews occur sequentially and are spaced appropriately will improve the efficiency of the acquisition planning process and improve acquisition outcomes.

### 6.3.4 Market Research and Industry Engagement

Market research plays an integral role in acquisition planning—ensuring federal agencies clearly understand the marketplace and award a contract for an effective solution at a reasonable price. Similar to the SBA, both DHS and DOC have developed documents to help guide staff in conducting market research. In December 2014, DHS developed a Market Research Guide that was most recently updated in December 2019 and draws from several internal and external resources, including several Myth-Busting Memos on industry engagement released by the U.S. OMB Office of Federal Procurement Policy.

- 1. Require CO input into market research activities.** As previously described in Objective 2, multiple SBA participants identified market research as a pain point in the agency's acquisition planning process. One of the challenges identified from the interviews and focus groups was an increase in the use of informal market research approaches, which coincides with comments raised by multiple COs about a lack of engagement by program staff with acquisitions staff during market research activities. DHS' *Market Research Guide* stipulates that program offices should seek advice from a CO, a small business specialist, and as appropriate, the Strategic Sourcing Program Office early in the process to ensure that potential sources of information are explored to the fullest extent practicable, including existing contract vehicles, small businesses, and new entrants to government contracting. The Strategic Sourcing Program Office collaborates with DHS acquisition stakeholders to



develop, deploy, and maintain strategic sourcing strategies, and helps acquisition teams verify whether there are any requirements to use DHS strategic sourcing contract vehicles. Prior to initiating market research, the guide directs acquisition teams to seek CO advice because the CO will ultimately determine how much market research is needed and the level of documentation required. In addition, COs can help set information-gathering parameters that balance market research needs and compliance with FAR 10.001(b), which discourages agencies from requesting more than the minimum information necessary from potential sources when conducting market research.

- 2. Develop templates and checklists to create consistency in market research content, and structure them across acquisitions; tailor the amount of detail based on acquisition type.** While DOC has not developed an agency-level market research template, some bureaus have developed templates and checklists. For example, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) developed a two-page market research report template for acquisitions at or below the SAT and a seven-page template for acquisitions above the SAT. Both templates outline the key elements of a market research report, including acquisition background, potential sources and vendors, and research methods. The template for acquisitions above the SAT is slightly more elaborate and covers additional elements, such as a summary of the firms found.
- 3. Provide guidance to increase balanced levels of industry engagement in market research activities.** Industry engagement is a critical but challenging element of market research. As discussed in Section 6.3, multiple interview participants highlighted the difficulty of determining a balanced approach to engaging industry. In the experience of DHS' PIL, exemplary program models are those offices that feel comfortable engaging industry earlier, inviting vendors to show products before acquisition, and engaging with end customers to clearly understand customer needs. Both agencies have developed guidance on the topic of industry engagement. DOC's recently updated Vendor Communication Plan (March 2020) aims to provide clear, consistent direction on how to engage with industry. While it does not provide specific guidance on how much engagement is appropriate, the plan emphasizes that early, frequent, and constructive engagement with industry is especially important for complex, high-risk acquisitions, including, but not limited to, large IT projects.

To safeguard against inappropriate communications with vendors, DHS' *Market Research Guide* (Attachment B) outlines a set of rules, or sound business practices, to guide exchanges with industry representatives. For example, all exchanges with industry and potential vendors are required to (a) obtain permission from, and include the presence of, the CO; (b) ensure the information provided is the same to all vendors; (c) ensure the information provided could be published on the DHS public website; and (d) document the results of meetings with industry.

- 4. Implement a strategy of continuous industry engagement to increase competition and bid quality.** Conversations with DHS, as well as DHS' *Market Research Guide*, describe an objective to foster long-range relationships through which the agency shares general pain points that departments are facing so that industry can see and understand the agency's needs. DHS' industry engagement strategy extends beyond advance planning for a specific acquisition and instead views industry engagement as a continuous interaction that is essential to build trust with industry and foster a competitive market for its solicitations. Objectives of DHS' industry engagement strategy include continuously attracting new entrants, conducting research on what will bring in new companies to compete, understanding how to retain good companies as reliable bidders, and making sure DHS is viewed by industry as a preferred business partner. DHS regularly convenes "reverse industry days" to learn about the issues that are most important to industry when doing business with the



department. While DHS recognizes that this type of strategy is a major undertaking, the agency believes a continuous market research process leads to better competition and more high quality bids.

### **6.3.5 Acquisition Planning Metrics**

Acquisition action lead time metrics are the primary metrics used by the SBA, DHS and DOC to track the effectiveness of acquisition processes. While not a direct measure of acquisition planning, both DOC and DHS PIL noted that, all else equal, acquisitions that meet or surpass acquisition action lead time targets are indicative of well-planned acquisition processes.

We asked each agency for its opinion on the feasibility and value of developing metrics for the acquisition planning process. While both agencies saw potential value of such metrics, they noted the need for careful thought in selecting which milestones to track and ensuring that milestone definitions are feasible for staff to follow consistently. For example, both agencies identified challenges in creating a clear and consistent definition to capture the origin date of a concept or the date at which an acquisition package is actionable. Both agencies recommended selecting milestones based on clearly defined actions.

---

## **6.4 CONCLUSIONS**

The SBA has already taken steps to improve its acquisition planning process in line with the recommendations in the Cornerstone Assessments. The interviews and focus groups identified a number of additional suggestions to address the challenges that the SBA still faces in strengthening its acquisition process. These suggestions include: improving communications, automating parts of the acquisition planning process, improving training, providing insight into the status and timeliness of acquisitions, planning acquisitions earlier in the process, conducting robust market research, and assessing workload and staffing for acquisition tasks. The benchmarking review with DOC and DHS identified good practices that these other federal agencies have taken to address acquisition challenges similar to the ones faced by the SBA. Overall, the findings in this section outline potential approaches and basis for recommendations that the SBA can implement to improve the acquisition planning process.



## 7 OVERALL EVALUATION CONCLUSIONS

In a quest for continuous improvement, the SBA contracted the Summit Team to conduct an evaluation of the current SBA acquisition planning process to identify pain points, potential inefficiencies, and structural factors that may present challenges to improving the process.

Complex systems require frequent and consistent communication, and communication gaps are commonly identified as the root cause of process efficiency and effectiveness barriers. A central challenge either directly shared or alluded to by many participants was the role the ARB, BTIC, and ITART IT reviews played in the acquisition planning process. Knowing when these reviews were required, the process for completing them, and how long they would take was a source of confusion and friction between program offices and OCIO.

Overall, while progress continues to be made as the SBA implements recommendations from the 2018 and 2019 Cornerstone Assessments, there is still room for improvement, particularly in terms of the Acquisition Division and program office proactively engaging each other earlier in the acquisition planning process as a result of improving acquisition-related communication across the two groups. The new SOP has the appropriate goals to address the SBA's priorities for acquisition planning and ensure the SBA can meet the requirements of FAR Part 7.1, but full implementation of the SOP will require a new way of doing business.

Although change management and a culture slow to adopt changes were identified as current challenges by some respondents, most respondents reported satisfaction with the Acquisition Division and their program office's interactions with them. Overall, approximately 60 percent of the respondents (11 out of 18) thought that the Acquisition Division was very effective or somewhat effective in helping them to identify and plan for their office's future acquisition needs. Moreover, at least 72 percent of respondents thought that their Acquisition Division contacts:

- Were knowledgeable about the acquisition process
- Were honest with them
- Understood their needs
- Looked out for their best interest
- Communicated information clearly

The overarching sentiment from respondents is positive, and the experience shared by some individuals and offices within the SBA suggest it is possible to successfully address the acquisition challenges that the SBA is facing. Moreover, the Summit Team identified practices and lessons learned from benchmarking the SBA's acquisition planning process against those functions at the DOC and DHS.

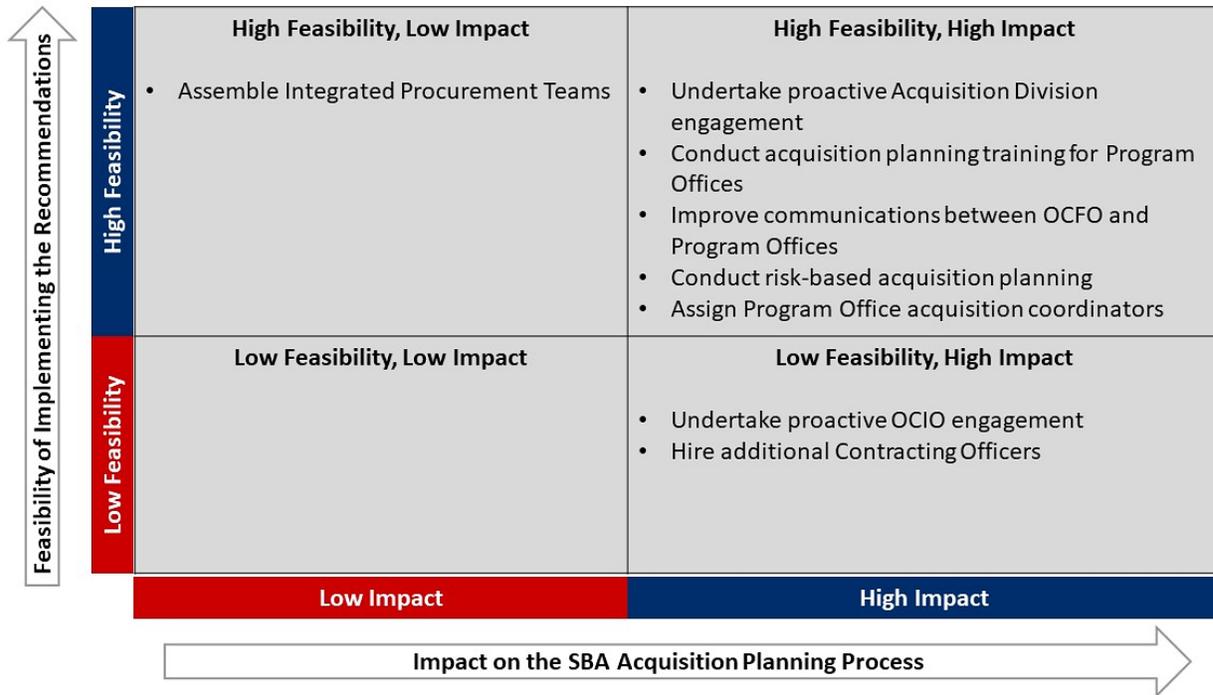
The next steps for this initiative to continuously improve acquisition planning for the SBA is to critically assess the findings and determine potential industry and Federal agency best practices that the Acquisition Division could adopt, adapt, and implement. Section 8 presents a discussion of recommendations to continue to improve acquisition planning at the SBA.



## 8 RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN ACQUISITION PLANNING AT THE SBA

To conclude the evaluation, based on the evaluation findings and coupled with our subject matter expertise the Summit Team offers eight recommendations to strengthen acquisition planning at the SBA. Summit has ordered the recommendations from highest feasibility to lowest feasibility. **Figure 8-1** provides a matrix of the recommendations outlining the degree of feasibility of implementation (i.e., cost to SBA) and impact (i.e., degree to which they will improve SBA’s acquisition planning process).

**Figure 8-1: Feasibility and Impact of Recommendations to Strengthen Acquisition Planning at the SBA**



We also propose a revised acquisition planning process, building from the current process depicted in the as-is VSMs, and outlining a suggested to-be, or future state, VSM, **Figure 8-2**. The to-be VSM depicts where recommendations for changes to the acquisition planning process would be implemented. These recommendations are consistent with the steps the SBA could take to comply with FAR Part 7.1.

### 8.1 UNDERTAKE PROACTIVE ACQUISITION DIVISION ENGAGEMENT

Assign COs to acquisitions as early in the acquisition planning process as possible, preferably immediately following Step 1 Define Need, as depicted in **Figure 8-2**. This recommendation would help address communication challenges stemming from program offices often not interacting with COs until the acquisition package is in the system with completed solicitation documents (Section 4.2). COs should try to meet with the acquisition owner—the person responsible for leading the acquisition planning process and ensuring the solicitation is successful—prior to market research to discuss the acquisition planning strategy and provide advice and guidance, as suggested in the interviews and focus groups (Section 6). They should continue to serve as a resource and source of guidance throughout each phase of the acquisition planning process.



We applied this recommendation in the to-be VSM at Step 1, defining the acquisition needs of the program office. Specifically, we recommend the following:

- The Acquisition Division will assign a CO to work with a program office once they identify the need for an acquisition.
- The CO will coordinate with the program office to schedule an acquisition kickoff meeting to discuss the objectives of the acquisition, timeline, and strategy.
- Depending on the timeline and complexity of the acquisition, the CO will make themselves available for informal check-ins or formal meetings (potentially as part of an integrated procurement team) to ensure the program office receives regular guidance and advice throughout the acquisition planning process.
- At the very least, the CO will consult with the program office prior to the conduct of market research and prior to development of the acquisition strategy and finalization of the acquisition plan.

**Feasibility:** High feasibility for process change but no additional expenditures on resources.

**Impact:** High impact resulting from improved communication and less rework.

---

## 8.2 CONDUCT ACQUISITION PLANNING TRAINING FOR PROGRAM OFFICES

The OCFO should develop roles-based training for program offices to improve understanding of the SBA's acquisition planning process and enhance acquisition planning proficiency among leadership, PMs, acquisition owners, and CORs. The training should include basic education in the FAR, market research techniques, acquisition strategy development, solicitation document development, and acquisition planning best practices. The OCFO should also develop annual refresher training for program office stakeholders to ensure that best practices are disseminated as they evolve.

This recommendation would address confusion about the acquisition process and roles (Section 4.2) and build on suggestions made during the interviews and focus groups on the need for more training (Section 6). Roles-based training would have the following benefits:

- Increased consistency across SBA program offices in acquisition quality because of increased baseline knowledge of acquisition planning best practices.
- Alignment of training curriculum with specific roles within each program office to ensure that training recipients spend training time focused only on obtaining the most relevant and applicable information.
- Increased openness to innovation and best practices through regular dissemination of acquisition planning techniques and improved baseline levels of knowledge among program office staff involved in acquisition planning activities.
- Reduced confusion and nonconformance with established policies and practices through better understanding of what is required and by whom.

**Feasibility:** High feasibility for developing materials to improve acquisition planning using existing resources.

**Impact:** High impact resulting from more efficient and effectively trained staff across the agency.



---

### 8.3 IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN THE OCFO AND PROGRAM OFFICES

To address major pain points and suggestions identified in this study around communication, the OCFO should improve acquisition-related communication to program offices, including:

- Maintain an up-to-date SharePoint site with only current templates and tools.
- Effectively communicate changes to acquisition policy, processes, and tools to program offices. Sections 4.2.5 and 4.2.6 outline the challenges program offices face learning about new policies, processes, and tools. Enhanced training, directed communication of new policy documents and templates to program offices, removing outdated documents from SBA websites and databases, and establishing dissemination plans would all contribute to improved understanding of the acquisition planning process and program office responsibilities.
- Adopt organizational change management techniques to prepare program offices for change (e.g., communicate and train), execute the change (e.g., roll out new policy, process, or tool), and reinforce the change (e.g., provide coaching, refresher trainings, and collect continuous feedback and satisfaction data from customers).
- Ensure alignment and coordination with the OCIO on policies, processes, or tools related to IT acquisitions so that all stakeholders understand and can comply with requirements.
- Adopt a customer experience focus so that interactions and engagement with program offices remains focused on the SBA's mission, and so that program execution and acquisition policies, processes, and tools are designed to improve the program offices' experience first and foremost.

**Feasibility:** High feasibility for improving communication practices using existing tools and resources.

**Impact:** High impact resulting from improved communication, reduced confusion, and more effective adoption of changes.

---

### 8.4 CONDUCT RISK-BASED ACQUISITION PLANNING

Because of budget uncertainty and frequently delayed appropriations (Section 4.2), the OCFO should develop a risk-based acquisition planning tool to assist program offices with evaluating risks associated with delaying or proceeding with acquisition planning for acquisitions without confirmed funding. The tool should walk program offices through several factors that will help them determine whether an acquisition should be delayed until funding is secured or whether the risk should be accepted and acquisition planning should proceed in the absence of secured funding. Program offices should also implement training in how to effectively use this tool. As shown in the to-be VSM, we recommend that the IPT conducts the risk review once acquisition needs have been defined in the first step. Creating acquisition planning levels based on factors such as funding amount and risk is broadly consistent with best practices followed by DOC, DHS, and USDA. The tool can help SBA program offices increase the number of acquisitions planned in advance of the fiscal year in which they are awarded, while preventing time wasted on acquisitions that are unlikely to obtain funding.

**Feasibility:** High feasibility for developing a tool to guide staff decision-making around acquisition planning using existing resources.

**Impact:** High impact resulting from increased long-term acquisition planning and reduced wasted effort on unfunded acquisitions.



---

## 8.5 ASSIGN PROGRAM OFFICE ACQUISITION COORDINATORS

Assign responsibility to one resource within each program office—the program office acquisition coordinator—for monitoring acquisition planning timelines and needs and coordinating with PMs and acquisition owners to ensure that planning starts at the appropriate time (6, 12, 18, or 24 months prior to award). This resource would maintain an acquisition dashboard and seek regular updates on the status of each acquisition planning effort from Define Need through award phases. This would help improve communication and transparency (Section 4.2) and also provide timely insight into the status of acquisition planning (suggested in Section 6). There are several IT tools that could assist with this task for program offices with many acquisitions. This resource could also serve as a liaison with the acquisition office, although they would not replace direct contact between COs/CSs and acquisition owners.

**Feasibility:** High feasibility for assigning additional responsibilities to an existing resource in each program office.

**Impact:** High impact resulting from improved planning, coordination, and information sharing within program offices.

---

## 8.6 ASSEMBLE INTEGRATED PROCUREMENT TEAMS

Assemble IPTs for large or complex acquisitions to ensure that key stakeholders (e.g., CO, Office of General Counsel, OCIO, and other stakeholders) are consulted at key points in the acquisition planning process so that critical stakeholder perspectives and requirements are integrated into the solicitation documents and strategy.

This recommendation would help to address the communication challenges raised in Section 4.2, and it is well-aligned with the best practices applied by DOC and DHS. The IPTs would meet periodically to review progress and provide feedback before major decisions. The OCFO should set an acquisition dollar amount standard and recommended complexity factor for use of IPTs. As shown in the to-be VSM, we recommend the IPT be constituted in Step 2, prior to gathering acquisition basic requirements and conducting market research. The IPT forms the leadership team driving the acquisition package when defining the acquisition strategy and drafting the acquisition documents. IPTs can serve the following functions:

- Ensuring critical stakeholders are aware of the acquisition and informed of its progress and objectives.
- Creating a framework for acquisition owners to collect feedback from SBA stakeholders prior to making major decisions during the acquisition planning process (i.e., market research strategy, acquisition strategy, requirements development).
- Ensuring that acquisition owners can learn from the experience and knowledge of agency stakeholders when addressing similar acquisition needs.
- Streamlining approvals once the acquisition package is finalized because the reviewing offices were engaged during its creation.

**Feasibility:** High feasibility for using existing resources for IPTs for high dollar, complex acquisitions.

**Impact:** Low impact resulting from relatively few high dollar acquisitions at SBA.



---

## 8.7 CONDUCT PROACTIVE OCIO ENGAGEMENT

The OCIO should assign liaisons for each program office to assist with developing acquisition packages, serve on IPTs, and provide guidance on IT acquisition requirements. The OCIO should also develop clear communication for when each type of review is required, and which acquisitions are subject to what review. The liaisons should be knowledgeable in best practices for IT acquisitions and be able to coordinate effectively with the Acquisition Division and the OCIO. Liaisons can be assigned to multiple program offices depending on resource constraints and IT acquisition volume.

**Feasibility:** Low feasibility for creating new liaison positions within OCIO assigned to each program office.

**Impact:** High impact resulting from improved planning, coordination, and information sharing between the OCIO and program offices.

---

## 8.8 HIRE ADDITIONAL CONTRACTING OFFICERS

The OCFO should consider hiring additional COs to reduce the number of different COs that interact with specific program offices. As stated in Section 4.2, assigning the same COs to work with the same program offices creates benefits for both the Acquisition Division and the program office: increased trust, increased understanding of the subject matter, and improved ability to work together and understand preferences for acquisition planning and solicitation content. SBA should assess how often COs are assigned to the same program offices and consider hiring additional COs if program offices experience too many revolving CO assignments. Improved consistency may enhance the ability of program offices and COs to work together and produce acquisitions of higher quality and more effective planning.

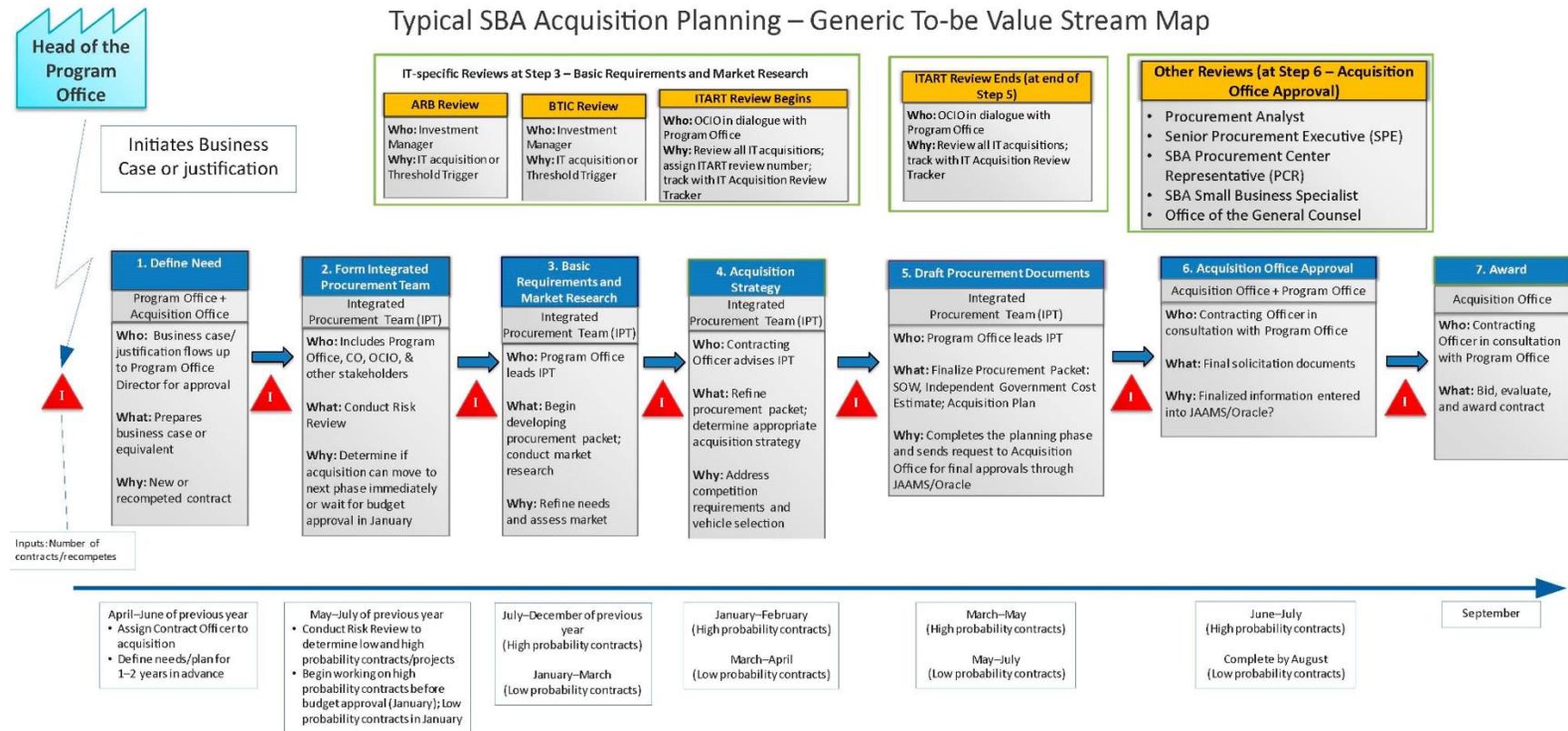
**Feasibility:** Low feasibility for hiring additional COs.

**Impact:** High impact resulting from increased time and attention available for program offices and reduced burden on Acquisition Division staff.

**Figure 8-2** presents the to-be VSM, depicting some of the recommendations within the acquisition process.



Figure 8-2: To-Be Value Stream Map of Proposed Future State of the Acquisition Planning Process





## APPENDIX A INTERVIEW INSTRUMENTS

---

### INTERVIEW GUIDE: ACQUISITION LEADERSHIP—SENIOR PROCUREMENT EXECUTIVE, SUPERVISORY CONTRACTING OFFICER, AND ACTING OR DEPUTY ACTING CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

#### Background

*[To be filled in by the interviewer/notetaker prior to the discussion]*

Respondent's Name and Title:

Date of Interview:

Name of Interviewer:

Name of Notetaker:

#### Opening Script

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. My name is [INTERVIEWER], and I am a [TITLE] with Summit/IEc. I am joined by my colleague [NOTETAKER], who will be taking notes during today's discussion. Summit and IEc, under contract to the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), are conducting research on the agency's behalf to elicit feedback on how the agency might improve its acquisition planning process.

As you know, this study aims to identify factors that impede the SBA's ability to improve its acquisition strategy and identify how SBA can improve the acquisition planning process. For the purposes of this study, we are defining the acquisition planning process as the process by which program offices identify and report their upcoming acquisition needs and anticipated timing to the Office of the Chief Financial Officer each fiscal year. We are soliciting input from Acquisition leadership, Associate Administrators, Deputy Associate Administrators, Contracting Officers, Acquisition Procurement Analysts, and Program Managers who participate in the acquisition planning process. Our interviews with Acquisition leadership are the first in our series of data collection tasks, which include interviews, focus groups, and an online survey.

During the next 60 minutes, we will ask about the current process for acquisition planning, recent efforts to improve the process, remaining bottlenecks or other concerns, and your thoughts on what further changes are needed. Additionally, we will develop a report with findings and recommendations for SBA in the fall of 2020.

With your permission, I would like to record today's discussion. This helps us ensure we don't miss anything important you say. Only Summit/IEc staff working on this project will have access to the recording. Do I have your permission to record our discussion today?

Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?



## General

1. Please briefly describe your role and responsibilities in the acquisition planning process as the [insert title: Senior Procurement Executive/Supervisory Contract Officer/Acting or Deputy Acting CFO].
  - a. How long have you been in this position?
2. [This question is only for the Senior Procurement Executive] Can you provide a brief overview of SBA's current acquisition planning process? Specifically, what are the roles and responsibilities of each of the following groups as it relates to acquisition planning?
  - a. Acquisition Procurement Analysts
  - b. Program Officers
  - c. Contracting Officers
3. What aspects of SBA's acquisition planning process work well?
4. Do you think that the acquisition planning process is supporting high-quality and timely procurements for the program offices? Why or why not?
5. What challenges does SBA face in improving acquisition planning?
6. What key information do you hope to gain from this evaluation to improve SBA's acquisition planning process?

## Previous Work

As part of this evaluation, the Summit/IEc team reviewed previous assessments of SBA's acquisition process, including the following documents:

- SBA OIG (2017): *Report on the Most Serious Management and Performance Challenges Facing the Small Business Administration in Fiscal Year 2018*
- SBA (2018): *2018 Cornerstone Assessment Narrative Summary, Recommendations, & Data Analysis*
- SBA (2019): *2019 Cornerstone Assessment Narrative Summary, Recommendations, & Data Analysis*

We would like to build on the findings of these documents and the subsequent actions SBA has taken to address and implement the recommendations in these documents:

1. In the literature review we summarized steps that SBA has taken to implement the recommendations. [Read list out loud as needed]
  - a. Are there any other actions that SBA has taken that are not on this list?<sup>1</sup>

---

1

1. Setting up and updating an Acquisition SharePoint, specifically:
  - a. Policy staff have been identified to manage and maintain the SharePoint site.
  - b. Best-in-Class contract vehicles identified by the Office of Management and Budget's Office of Federal Procurement Policy are available on the site for reference.
  - c. Active SBA BPAs and IDIQs are now listed on SharePoint for reference.
2. A cross-functional team was developed for SBA Acquisition and the Office of the Chief Information Officer to address the transition to Enterprise Infrastructure Solutions, the follow-on to Networx and WITs.
3. Contracting Officer's Representative Point-of-contact (POC) information, Acquisition staff information and purchase card information were updated and posted.
4. The Acquisition standard operating procedure (SOP) was rewritten and updated to provide for better collaboration and dialog at all phases of the acquisition process—especially during market research in the course of action



- b. Are there other actions planned but not yet implemented?
2. Are programs using Acquisition's SharePoint site for referencing acquisition resources? We understand that resources may include:
  - a. Best-in-Class contract vehicles
  - b. Active SBA BPAs and IDIQs
  - c. COR POC information
  - d. Acquisition staff Information
  - e. Purchase card information
3. What is the current status of the transition to Enterprise Infrastructure Solutions (EIS)?
  - a. What is the desired outcome of the EIS?
    - i. To what extent does the EIS support or have the potential to support acquisition planning?
    - b. Is this functioning as desired?
4. Are there any findings (and associated recommendations) emerging from these reports that you have not been able to implement or have chosen not to implement? Please explain.
5. Could you please describe the process for revising the Acquisition standard operating procedure (SOP 20 21 1, effective date: 11/23/2019)?
  - a. Who led the effort?
  - b. Did this involve participation from program offices?
  - c. What is the implementation status of the Acquisition SOP?
  - d. Have you received feedback on the newly revised Acquisition SOP?
6. Could you describe how SBA is addressing the following aspects of the revised Acquisition SOP?
  - a. Identifying agency needs: The trigger for development of an acquisition plan is "as soon as an agency need is identified." How are agency needs anticipated and identified?
  - b. General Services Administration forecasting tool: The SOPs reference this tool. How is SBA using the tool?
  - c. Templates and forms: What planning templates or forms does SBA use for its acquisition planning process?
  - d. Communication between Contracting Officers and program offices: The SOPs indicate that contracting personnel should regularly engage with their customers to develop acquisition packages. Could you describe the mechanisms in place that promote acquisition planning across program offices and contracting? To what extent do you think this communication is occurring?
  - e. Communication with industry: Does communication with industry occur (this is referenced in the SOPs)? If yes, how does this help identify or refine agency needs?
  - f. Timeliness: How far in advance are acquisition plans typically developed? Could you describe any processes in place to minimize late submissions of acquisition plans?
7. Who attends SBA Acquisitions monthly meetings? What are the discussion topics?
  - a. Are the meetings serving their intended purpose? If no, why not? If yes, what is accomplished in the meetings?

## Looking Forward

1. Where do you see the biggest potential for improvement in the acquisition planning process?

---

development and acquisition planning. Revising the SOPs is a joint function with the program office, with contracting in the lead.

5. SBA acquisitions updated the Acquisition Portal to provide timely information on actions throughout the fiscal year.
6. SBA acquisitions established monthly meetings conducted throughout the fiscal year.



2. Are there particular strategies or approaches that you believe would be helpful for making these improvements?
3. What parts of the process should be streamlined or automated?
4. Does SBA track any metrics on the acquisition planning process?
  - a. If yes, what do you track? How do you use the information?
  - b. If no, what do you think would be useful to track?

### **Final Thoughts**

1. Other than what we have already discussed, are there other changes to SBA's acquisition planning process that would be beneficial moving forward?
2. Are there any other thoughts or observations that you would like to share about SBA's acquisition planning process?

### **Closing**

Thank you so much for participating today. We appreciate hearing your perspectives on these topics.



---

## INTERVIEW GUIDE: SENIOR LEADERS—ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATORS, DEPUTY ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATORS, AND OTHER SENIOR LEADERS

### Background

*[To be filled in by the interviewer/notetaker prior to the discussion]*

Respondent's Name and Title:

Date of Interview:

Name of Interviewer:

Name of Notetaker:

### Opening Script

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. My name is [INTERVIEWER], and I am a [TITLE] with Summit/IEc. I am joined by my colleague [NOTETAKER], who will be taking notes during today's discussion. Summit and IEc, under contract to the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), are conducting research on the agency's behalf to elicit feedback on how the agency might improve the acquisition planning process.

This study aims to identify factors that impede the SBA's ability to improve its acquisition strategy and identify how SBA can improve the acquisition planning process. For the purposes of this study, we are defining the acquisition planning process as the process by which program offices identify and report their upcoming acquisition needs and anticipated timing to the Office of the Chief Financial Officer each fiscal year. We are soliciting input from Assistant and Associate Administrators (AAs), Deputy AAs, Acquisition leadership, Contracting Officers, Acquisition Procurement Analysts, and Program Managers who participate in the acquisition planning process.

During the next 45 to 60 minutes, we will ask about the current process for acquisition planning, recent efforts to improve the process, remaining bottlenecks or other concerns, and your thoughts on what further changes are needed. Additionally, we will develop a report with findings and recommendations for SBA in the fall of 2020.

With your permission, I would like to record today's discussion. This helps us ensure we don't miss anything important you say. Only Summit/IEc staff working on this project will have access to the recording. Do I have your permission to record our discussion today?

Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?



## General

1. How long have you been in your current role at SBA?
2. How far in advance does your office forecast its acquisition needs (e.g., 6 months out, 1 year, 2 years, 3 years)?
  - a. Who performs the acquisition forecasting and planning tasks?
  - b. How does your office identify its acquisition needs?
  - c. Do you think your office would benefit from planning acquisitions further in the future? Why or why not?
3. How does the acquisition planning process in your program office work, and how are requirements developed?
4. How does your office integrate customers' or stakeholders' views into acquisition planning?
5. Does your office communicate with industry as part of your acquisition planning process? If yes, how does this help identify or refine your acquisition requirements?
6. Are you familiar with SBA's updated standard operating procedure (SOP) for acquisition (SOP 20 21 1, effective date: 11/23/2019)? If yes:
  - a. To what extent has your program office implemented the SOP?
  - b. Who uses the SOP in your program office? How is it used?
  - c. Do you have any suggestions to strengthen the SOP or its implementation?
7. Does the acquisition planning process support high-quality and timely procurements for your program office? Why or why not?
8. Do you think that the acquisition planning process is consistently resulting in timely procurements? Why or why not?

## Strengths and Weaknesses

1. What aspects of the acquisition planning process are working well?
2. What aspects of the acquisition planning process should be streamlined or automated?
3. What challenges do you face in improving acquisition planning?

## Improvement Efforts

1. What steps has your program office taken to address the challenges?
  - a. What were the results?
  - b. Have you encountered any barriers to addressing the challenges? If yes, please explain.
2. Where do you see the biggest potential for improvement in the acquisition planning process?
3. Are there particular strategies or approaches that might be helpful for making these improvements?
4. Do you participate in the SBA Acquisitions monthly meetings? If yes, what are your impressions of the meetings? Do you find them useful? What, if anything, could make the meetings more helpful to you?
5. Do you track any metrics on the acquisition planning process?
  - a. If yes, what do you track? How do you use the information?
  - b. If no, what do you think would be useful to track?

## Final Thoughts

1. Other than what we have already discussed, are there other changes to SBA's acquisition planning process that would be beneficial moving forward?



2. Are there any thoughts or observations you would like to share about SBA's acquisition planning processes?

Thank you so much for participating today. We appreciate hearing your perspectives on these topics.



---

## INTERVIEW GUIDE: DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

### Background

*[To be filled in by the interviewer/notetaker prior to the discussion]*

Respondent's Name and Title:

Respondent's Federal Agency:

Date of Interview:

Name of Interviewer:

Name of Notetaker:

### Opening Script

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. My name is [INTERVIEWER], and I am a [TITLE] with Summit/IEc. I am joined by my colleague [NAME], who will be taking notes during today's discussion. Summit and IEc, under contract to the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), are conducting research on the agency's behalf to elicit feedback on how the agency might improve its acquisition strategy and identify how SBA can improve its acquisition planning process.

This interview is part of the study to help us understand what other federal agencies are doing as it relates to acquisition planning. For the purposes of this study, we are defining the acquisition planning process as the process by which program offices identify and report their upcoming acquisition needs and anticipated timing to the Office of the Chief Financial Officer each fiscal year. You were selected for this interview because of your position within the acquisition office at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). During the next approximately 60 minutes, we will ask about DHS's process for acquisition planning.

Additionally, we will develop a report with findings and recommendations for SBA in the fall of 2020. This interview will help us prepare a brief case study on how DHS's acquisition process may be applicable to SBA.

With your permission, I would like to record today's discussion. This helps us ensure we don't miss anything important you say. Only Summit/IEc staff working on this project will have access to the recording. Do I have your permission to record our discussion today?

Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?



## General

1. Please describe your current role and job responsibilities.
  - a. How long have you been in this position?
2. Do you have data on the proportion of acquisitions in DHS across acquisition types? For example, across information technology, professional services, and goods?
  - a. If yes, after the interview, would you be able to provide that data to us for the most recent fiscal year?
3. How much does DHS spend on acquisition planning? How many staff support acquisition planning?
4. How does your office integrate customers' or stakeholders' views into acquisition planning?

## Acquisition Process

1. Without going into too much detail, could you provide a brief overview of DHS's current acquisition process, specifically as it relates to acquisition planning?
  - a. What is the structure of the acquisition office in relation to other program offices?
  - b. How are requirements developed?
  - c. What systems do you use?
2. How far in advance does DHS identify acquisition needs?
  - a. How does DHS identify its acquisition needs?
  - b. Is this consistent across DHS?
3. Does DHS use metrics to track the efficiency, effectiveness, or implementation of the acquisition process? We are specifically looking for metrics that may be used to measure acquisition planning.
  - a. If yes, what types of metrics?
  - b. How long have you been tracking these metrics?
  - c. Can you share how these metrics are defined and calculated?
  - d. Can you share the metric results for the last few years?
4. The 2019 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report *Outcomes Have Improved but Actions Needed to Enhance Oversight of Schedule Goals* included three general categories of metrics as it relates to the implementation outcomes of acquisitions: cost, schedule, and performance. Outside of GAO reports, does DHS use these metrics for assessing the impact of the acquisition program?<sup>2</sup>

---

2

- Cost Goals
  - Total life-cycle acquisition costs: Can be breached due to cost growth, an underestimation of level of effort needed to complete development, or an increase in maintenance costs related to sustaining technologies longer than initially planned. A program's total life-cycle cost threshold can be decreased by reducing labor or personnel costs, or incorporating changes in technology, for example.
- Schedule Goals
  - Full operational capability date or Acquisition Decision Event date: Can be breached when these dates are delayed or when there are delays in awarding contracts due to the government shutdown, for example.
- Performance Goals
  - Performance parameters in the APB are the key performance parameters traceable to the acquisition decision authority–approved operational requirements document. Key performance parameters are highlighted in the operational requirements document and are tracked in the APB.



5. How does DHS determine what aspects of the acquisition planning process should be streamlined or automated?
6. What actions has DHS taken to date to improve its acquisition planning process?
  - a. What have the results been?
  - b. What do you think made these actions effective or ineffective at improving the acquisition planning process?
  - c. Are there ideas or steps you tried but had to stop or shift the approach?

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

1. What aspects of the acquisition planning process are working well?
2. Where do you encounter pain points or bottlenecks in the process? What causes them?
  - a. How is DHS addressing these challenges?

### **Final Thoughts**

1. Are there any other thoughts or observations that you would like to share about your acquisition processes that may be applicable to SBA?

### **Closing**

Thank you so much for participating today. We appreciate hearing your perspectives on these topics.



---

## INTERVIEW GUIDE: DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### Background

*[To be filled in by the interviewer/notetaker prior to the discussion]*

Respondent's Name and Title:

Respondent's Federal Agency:

Date of Interview:

Name of Interviewer:

Name of Notetaker:

### Opening Script

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. My name is [INTERVIEWER], and I am a [TITLE] with Summit/IEc. I am joined by my colleague [NAME], who will be taking notes during today's discussion. Summit and IEc, under contract to the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), are conducting research on the agency's behalf to elicit feedback on how the agency might improve its acquisition strategy and identify how SBA can improve the acquisition planning process.

This interview is part of the study to help us understand what other federal agencies are doing as it relates to acquisition planning. For the purposes of this study, we are defining the acquisition planning process as the process by which program offices identify and report their upcoming acquisition needs and anticipated timing to the Office of the Chief Financial Officer each fiscal year. You were selected for this interview because of your position within the acquisition office at the Department of Commerce (DOC). During the next approximately 60 minutes, we will ask about DOC's process for acquisition planning.

Additionally, we will develop a report with findings and recommendations for SBA in the fall of 2020. This interview will help us prepare a brief case study on how DOC's acquisition process may be applicable to SBA.

With your permission, I would like to record today's discussion. This helps us ensure we don't miss anything important you say. Only Summit/IEc staff working on this project will have access to the recording. Do I have your permission to record our discussion today?

Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?



## General

1. Please describe your current role and job responsibilities.
  - a. How long have you been in this position?
2. Do you have data on the proportion of acquisitions in your agency across acquisition types? For example, across information technology, professional services, and goods?
  - a. If yes, after the interview, would you be able to provide the data to us for the most recent fiscal year?
3. How much does DOC spend on acquisition planning? How many staff support acquisition planning?
4. How does your office integrate customers' or stakeholders' views into acquisition planning?

## Acquisition Process

1. Without going into too much detail, could you provide a brief overview of DOC's current acquisition process, specifically as it relates to acquisition planning?
  - a. What is the structure of the Office of Acquisition Management in relation to other program offices?
  - b. How are requirements developed?
  - c. What systems do you use?
2. How far in advance does your agency identify acquisition needs?
  - a. How does DOC identify its acquisition needs?
  - b. Is this consistent across the agency?
3. The Office of Acquisition Management website lists goals related to customer service, resource management, business processes, learning and growth, policy, and oversight. Does your agency have metrics associated with these goals to track the efficiency, effectiveness, or implementation of the acquisition process? We are specifically looking for metrics that may be used to measure acquisition planning.<sup>3</sup>
  - a. If yes, what types of metrics?
  - b. How long have you been tracking these metrics?
  - c. Can you share information on how these metrics are defined and calculated?
  - d. Can you share the metric results for the last few years?
4. How does DOC determine what aspects of the acquisition planning process should be streamlined or automated?
5. What actions has DOC taken to date to improve the acquisition planning process?
  - a. What have the results been?
  - b. What do you think made these actions effective or ineffective at improving the acquisition planning process?
  - c. Are there ideas or steps you tried but had to stop or shift the approach?

## Strengths and Weaknesses

1. What aspects of the acquisition planning process are working well?
2. Where do you encounter pain points or bottlenecks in the process? What causes them?

---

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce. n.d. "Acquisition Management." Office of Acquisition Management. Last updated September 14, 2011. [http://www.osec.doc.gov/oam/acquistion\\_management/default.htm](http://www.osec.doc.gov/oam/acquistion_management/default.htm).



- a. How is your agency addressing these challenges?

### **Final Thoughts**

1. Are there any other thoughts or observations that you would like to share about your acquisition processes that may be applicable to SBA?

### **Closing**

Thank you so much for participating today. We appreciate hearing your perspectives on these topics.



---

## FOCUS GROUP GUIDE: PROGRAM MANAGERS

### Background information

*[To be filled in by the facilitator/notetaker prior to the discussion]*

Names and Titles of Invited Participants:

Date of Focus Group:

Location of Focus Group:

Name of Facilitator:

Name of Notetaker:

### Opening Script

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. My name is [FACILITATOR], and I am a [TITLE] with Summit/IEc. I am joined by my colleague [NOTETAKER], who will be taking notes during today's discussion. Summit and IEc, under contract to the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), are conducting research on the agency's behalf to elicit feedback on how the agency might improve the acquisition planning process. This study is being conducted at the request of the Acquisition Division.

This focus group is an important part of the study. During the next 90 minutes, we will ask about the current process for acquisition planning in your program office, what is working well, and what can be improved. For the purposes of this study, we are defining the acquisition planning process as the process by which program offices identify and report their upcoming acquisition needs and anticipated timing to the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) each fiscal year. ***[If the focus group coincides with the satisfaction survey, add: "You recently received a customer satisfaction survey, which is another important part of this study. We encourage you to take the survey in addition to participating in this focus group."]*** We selected you for this focus group because SBA identified you as a Program Manager who participates in the acquisition planning process in your program office.

We will develop a report with findings and recommendations for SBA in the fall of 2020. The report will refer to the focus group findings in aggregate and will not attribute comments to specific individuals. We will keep individual responses confidential to the extent permitted by law, and no personally identifiable information will be shared in any publication.

Today's discussion will start with a few questions about your role in acquisition planning in your office. Next, we will discuss your office's process for acquisition planning, the parts of the process that are working well, the parts of the process that can be improved, and any barriers to improving the process. To help guide the discussion, we will ask you to comment on a process map that we developed with the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO), Office of Capital Access (OCA), Office of Disaster Assistance (ODA), Office of Entrepreneurial Development (OED), and OCFO for information technology (IT) acquisitions. Specifically, we want to understand similarities and differences between the process map and the process your office follows for other types of acquisitions. And we will ask for your recommendations to improve the process.

With your permission, I would like to record today's discussion. This helps us ensure we don't miss anything important you say. Only Summit/IEc staff working on this project will have access to the recording. Do I have your permission to record our discussion today?



## Conversation Guidelines

Before we get started, I would like to present some guidelines for this conversation.

- There are no right answers—everyone’s opinion is important.
  - We understand that different parts of SBA have different ways of doing things and that some offices have a more formal acquisition planning process than others. We want to hear how the acquisition planning process works in your office and what you think can be done better.
- I will moderate our conversation by asking some questions and also ensuring we hear from everyone.
  - I would like to hear from everyone equally. If I don’t hear from you at all, I may ask you a specific question.
  - If there are certain questions you don’t want to answer, or have no opinion on, that’s perfectly fine.
- We are scheduled to talk for up to 90 minutes today.
  - Feel free to leave this discussion at any point, if needed, and rejoin the conversation when you return.
- And finally, everyone, please silence your cell phones.

Are there any questions before we start?

## Participant Introductions

1. As we go around the room, please state how long you have been with your program office and describe your role in the acquisition planning process.
2. Approximately how much time do you spend on acquisition planning relative to your total time spent at work?

## Current Process

1. The attached diagram shows the current process for planning future IT acquisition needs. We developed this process diagram with OCIO, OCA, ODA, and OCFO. ***[Attach “as-is” process map for IT acquisitions, which will be developed during the Value Stream Mapping session]*** We understand that every program office has its own process. However, we are trying to capture the key elements of the process across program offices.
  - a. To what extent does your office’s acquisition planning process (other than large IT acquisitions) follow the process shown in the diagram?
  - b. In what important ways does your office’s acquisition planning process differ from the process shown in the diagram? For example:
    - i) Are we missing any important steps?
    - ii) Does your program office do any steps in a different order than shown in the process map?
  - c. Who is responsible for each step of the process?
  - d. At what points in the process does your office interact with other parts of SBA, such as the Budget Office and the Acquisition Division?
  - e. What is the role of the program office versus the Acquisition Division in the acquisition planning process?



- f. Does the process generally proceed in a standard way, or does it vary depending on the specific acquisition need?
  - g. Do you use established templates or forms for your acquisition planning? How much variation occurs across acquisition packages?
  - h. Does your office communicate with industry as part of your acquisition planning process? If yes, how does this help identify or refine your acquisition requirements?
  - i. At what points in the process do things tend to get stuck or significantly delayed?
  - j. Do you have other comments on the process map as it relates to your program office?
2. How far in advance does your office forecast its acquisition needs (e.g., 6 months out, 1 year, 2 years, 3 years)?
  - a. How are acquisition needs identified?
3. Do you think your office would benefit from more acquisition planning? Why or why not?
4. How far in advance of needing a contracted resource do you submit your acquisition needs to the Budget Office and/or Acquisition Division?
5. How does funding allocation impact your acquisition planning?
6. How does SBA's Small Business Goal factor into the acquisition planning process?
7. Do you think the acquisition planning process in your program office contributes to high-quality procurements? Why or why not?
8. Do you think that the acquisition planning process is consistently contributing to timely procurements? Why or why not?
9. Are you familiar with SBA's updated standard operating procedure (SOP) for Acquisition (SOP 20 21 1, effective date: 11/23/2019)? If yes:
  - a. To what extent has your program office implemented the SOP?
  - b. Do you have any suggestions to strengthen the SOP or its implementation?

### Strengths and Weaknesses

1. What aspects of the acquisition planning process in your office are working well?
2. Where do you encounter challenges in the process? What causes them?

### Improving the Process

1. What steps has your program office taken to address the challenges?
  - a. What were the results?
  - b. Have you encountered any barriers to addressing the challenges? If yes, please explain.
2. Where do you see the biggest potential for improvement in the acquisition planning process?
3. Do you participate in integrated project teams? If yes, do you find them effective for improving the acquisition planning process?
4. The federal acquisition literature identifies other strategies, including:
  - a. Designating different acquisition planning levels each requiring a different degree of planning contingent on a variety of factors such as dollar value, risk level, visibility and project complexity;
  - b. Developing and implementing in-depth acquisition plan review processes; and
  - c. Developing templates and checklists for the multiple steps in the acquisition planning process.
  - d. If no, do you think these strategies would work for your office? Why or why not?
5. Has your office implemented any of these strategies? If yes, what were the results?
6. Do you track any metrics on the acquisition planning process?



- a. If yes, what do you track? How do you use the information?
- b. If no, what do you think would be useful to track?

### **Final Thoughts**

1. If you could change one thing about the acquisition planning process, what would it be, and why?
2. Do you have any other suggestions to improve the acquisition planning process?

### **Closing**

Thank you so much for participating today. We appreciate hearing your perspectives on these topics.



---

## FOCUS GROUP GUIDE: ACQUISITION PROCUREMENT ANALYSTS

### Background Information

*[To be filled in by the facilitator/notetaker prior to the discussion]*

Names and Titles of Invited Participants:

Date of Focus Group:

Location of Focus Group:

Name of Facilitator:

Name of Notetaker:

### Opening Script

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. My name is [FACILITATOR], and I am a [TITLE] with Summit/IEc. I am joined by my colleague [NOTETAKER], who will be taking notes during today's discussion. Summit and IEc, under contract to the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), are conducting research on the agency's behalf to elicit feedback on how the agency might improve its acquisition planning process. This study is being conducted at the request of the Acquisition Division.

This focus group is an important part of the study. You were selected for this focus group because of your position as an Acquisition Procurement Analyst at SBA. During the next 90 minutes, we will ask about the current process for acquisition planning from your perspective as an Acquisition Procurement Analyst. For the purposes of this study, we are defining the acquisition planning process as the process by which program offices identify and report their upcoming acquisition needs and anticipated timing to the Office of the Chief Information Officer each fiscal year.

We will develop a report with findings and recommendations for SBA in the fall of 2020. The report will refer to the focus group findings in aggregate and will not attribute comments to specific individuals. We will keep individual responses confidential to the extent permitted by law, and no personally identifiable information will be shared in any publication.

Today's discussion will start with a few questions about your role in acquisition planning. Next, we will talk about the current process for acquisition planning, the parts of the process that are working well, the parts of the process that can be improved, and any barriers to improving the process. We will also ask for recommendations to improve the process.

With your permission, I would like to record today's discussion. This helps us ensure we don't miss anything important you say. Only Summit/IEc staff working on this project will have access to the recording. Do I have your permission to record our discussion today?



## Conversation Guidelines

Before we get started, I would like to present some guidelines for this conversation.

- There are no right answers—everyone’s opinion is important.
- I will moderate our conversation by asking some questions and also ensuring we hear from everyone.
  - I would like to hear from everyone equally. If I don’t hear from you at all, I may ask you a specific question.
  - If there are certain questions you don’t want to answer, or have no opinion on, that’s perfectly fine.
- We are scheduled to talk for up to 90 minutes today.
  - Feel free to leave this discussion at any point, if needed, and rejoin the conversation when you return.
- And finally, everyone, please silence your cell phones.

Are there any questions before we start?

## Participant Introductions

1. As we go around the room, please state how long you have been an Acquisition Procurement Analyst at SBA and what program office(s) you typically work with.
2. What are your main responsibilities as an Acquisition Procurement Analyst?

## Current Process

1. What role do you play in the acquisition planning process?
2. What are the roles of the Contracting Officer’s Representative (COR), the Program Manager (if different from the COR), and the Contracting Officer in acquisition planning?
3. In your opinion, how knowledgeable are SBA CORs and Program Managers about acquisition planning and contract management?
4. How well is the process working in terms of program offices giving the Acquisition team information in a timely manner?
  - a. Is it high-quality information?
5. Are there established templates or forms to use when preparing acquisition packages?
  - a. Are acquisition packages consistently submitted using these established templates or forms?
  - b. How much variation occurs across acquisition packages?
6. Do you think SBA consistently produces high-quality solicitations?
7. Is SBA consistently issuing solicitations in a timely manner?
8. Are you familiar with SBA’s updated standard operating procedure (SOP) for Acquisition (SOP 20 21 1, effective date: 11/23/2019)? If yes:
  - a. To what extent has your program office implemented the SOP?
  - b. Do you have any suggestions to strengthen the SOP or its implementation?
9. How does SBA’s Small Business Goal factor into the acquisition planning process?

## Strengths and Weaknesses

1. What aspects of the acquisition planning process are working well? Why?



2. Where do you encounter challenges in the process? What causes them?

### Improving the Process

1. To your knowledge, what steps has SBA taken to address the challenges?
  - a. What were the results?
  - b. Do you see any barriers to addressing the challenges? If yes, please explain.
2. Where do you see the biggest potential for improvement in the acquisition planning process?
3. Do you participate in integrated project teams? If yes, do you find them effective for improving the acquisition planning process?
4. The federal acquisition literature identifies strategies including:
  - a. Designating different acquisition planning levels, with each requiring a different degree of planning contingent on a variety of factors, such as dollar value, risk level, visibility, and project complexity
  - b. Developing and implementing an in-depth acquisition plan review processes
  - c. Developing templates and checklists for the multiple steps in the acquisition planning process
5. What strategies do you think could work for SBA?
6. Does SBA track any metrics on the acquisition planning process?
  - a. If yes, what do you track? How do you use the information?
  - b. If no, what do you think would be useful to track?

### Final Thoughts

1. If you could change one thing about the acquisition planning process, what would it be, and why?
2. Do you have any other suggestions to improve the acquisition planning process?

### Closing

Thank you so much for participating today. We appreciate hearing your perspectives on these topics.



---

## FOCUS GROUP GUIDE: CONTRACTING OFFICERS

### Background Information

*[To be filled in by the facilitator/notetaker prior to the discussion]*

Names and Titles of Invited Participants:

Date of Focus Group:

Location of Focus Group:

Name of Facilitator:

Name of Notetaker:

### Opening Script

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. My name is [FACILITATOR], and I am a [TITLE] with Summit/IEc. I am joined by my colleague [NOTETAKER], who will be taking notes during today's discussion. Summit and IEc, under contract to the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), are conducting research on the agency's behalf to elicit feedback on how the agency might improve its acquisition planning process. This study is being conducted at the request of the Acquisition Division.

This focus group is an important part of the study. You were selected for this focus group because of your position as a Contracting Officer at SBA. During the next 90 minutes, we will ask about the current process for acquisition planning from your perspective as a Contracting Officer. For the purposes of this study, we are defining the acquisition planning process as the process by which program offices identify and report their upcoming acquisition needs and anticipated timing to the Office of the Chief Financial Officer each fiscal year.

We will develop a report with findings and recommendations for SBA in the fall of 2020. The report will refer to the focus group findings in aggregate and will not attribute comments to specific individuals. We will keep individual responses confidential to the extent permitted by law, and no personally identifiable information will be shared in any publication.

Today's discussion will start with a few questions about your role in acquisition planning. Next, we will talk about the current process for acquisition planning, the parts of the process that are working well, the parts of the process that can be improved, and any barriers to improving the process. We will also ask for recommendations to improve the process.

With your permission, I would like to record today's discussion. This helps us ensure we don't miss anything important you say. Only Summit/IEc staff working on this project will have access to the recording. Do I have your permission to record our discussion today?



## Conversation Guidelines

Before we get started, I would like to present some guidelines for this conversation.

- There are no right answers—everyone’s opinion is important.
- I will moderate our conversation by asking some questions and also ensuring we hear from everyone.
  - I would like to hear from everyone equally. If I don’t hear from you at all, I may ask you a specific question.
  - If there are certain questions you don’t want to answer, or have no opinion on, that’s perfectly fine.
- We are scheduled to talk for up to 90 minutes today.
  - Feel free to leave this discussion at any point, if needed, and rejoin the conversation when you return.
- And finally, everyone, please silence your cell phones.

Are there any questions before we start?

## Participant Introductions

1. As we go around the room, please state how long you have been a Contracting Officer at SBA.

## Current Process

1. What role do Contracting Officers play in the acquisition planning process at SBA?
2. What are the roles of the Contracting Officer’s Representative (COR), the Program Manager (if different from the COR), and the Contracting Officer in acquisition planning?
3. How well is the process working in terms of program offices giving the Acquisition team information in a timely manner?
  - a. Is it high-quality information?
4. Are there established templates or forms to use when preparing acquisition packages?
  - a. Do the acquisition requests, pertaining to the package, you receive from the program offices consistently use established templates or forms?
  - b. How much variation occurs across acquisition packages?
5. How much lead time do you desire to review and execute acquisitions? Why?
6. Do you have adequate lead time to review and execute the acquisitions? How does this affect the acquisition?
7. How much back-and-forth do you typically have with the program offices during the pre-award phase? What types of issues cause the back-and-forth?
8. Do you think that SBA consistently issues timely solicitations?
9. Do you think SBA consistently produces high-quality solicitations?
10. Do vendors typically submit many questions because solicitation requirements are unclear?

## Strengths and Weaknesses

1. What aspects of the acquisition planning process are working well?
2. Where do you encounter challenges in the process? What causes them?



## Improving the Process

1. What steps has the Acquisition Division already taken to address the challenges?
  - a. From your perspective, have these changes improved the process?
  - b. Do you see any barriers to addressing the challenges? If yes, please explain.
2. Where do you see the biggest potential for improvement in the acquisition planning process?
3. Do you participate in integrated project teams? If yes, do you find them effective for improving the acquisition planning process?
4. The federal acquisition literature identifies strategies including:
  - a. Designating different acquisition planning levels, with each requiring a different degree of planning contingent on a variety of factors, such as dollar value, risk level, visibility and project complexity
  - b. Developing and implementing an in-depth acquisition plan review processes
  - c. Developing templates and checklists for the multiple steps in the acquisition planning process
5. What strategies do you think could work for SBA?

## Workload Management

1. At what point do you get assigned to an acquisition? Do you typically stay assigned to a contract throughout the acquisition life cycle?
2. How many acquisitions do you work on at one time? Do you feel you have reasonable workloads?

## Final Thoughts

1. If you could change one thing about the acquisition planning process, what would it be, and why?
2. Do you have any other suggestions to improve the acquisition planning process?

## Closing

Thank you so much for participating today. We appreciate hearing your perspectives on these topics.



---

## PHASE 2 INTERVIEW GUIDE: DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

### GENERAL

1. Please describe your current role and job responsibilities.
  - a. How long have you been in this position?

### DHS' Acquisition Portfolio

2. What is the approximate dollar amount DHS had for acquisitions in the most recent fiscal year?
  - a. What is the distribution of DHS acquisitions between goods and services each year?
  - b. Do you have data that you could share with us on the proportion of acquisitions in your agency across acquisition types? For example, information technology (IT) goods vs. IT services vs. other professional services?
  - c. Do you have data that you could share with us on the proportion of acquisitions that are new acquisitions versus exercising options or extensions on existing contracts?

### Acquisition Planning

We reviewed DHS' Acquisition Manual (HSAM), and we have a few questions about the agency's acquisition planning process.

3. According to the HSAM, acquisition planning should begin as soon as an agency need is identified.
  - a. What does implementation of this guidance look like on the ground in DHS offices?
    - i. What is the typical time when planning starts for an identified need or known acquisition – e.g., 6 months, 1 year, 1.5 years, or 2 years in advance of the target acquisition date?
  - b. What are the biggest challenges that DHS staff face in starting acquisition planning 'earlier'?
  - c. Has DHS implemented any strategies or best practices to help staff begin acquisition planning prior to the fiscal year in which an acquisition is targeted?
  - d. Does your office track any metrics to track how far in advance planning starts for DHS acquisitions?
4. While acquisition planning is required for all acquisitions, our understanding is that written acquisition plans (APs) are only required for: (a) FFP contracts greater than \$50 million and (b) all the contract types greater than the SAT (or \$250K).
  - a. Is that interpretation of the HSAM requirements accurate?
  - b. When was this approach first put into effect at DHS?
    - i. In a prior version of the HSAM – we noticed the use of streamlined and formal acquisition plans; for example, only a streamlined AP was required for FFP contracts  $\geq$  \$10M for non-major system acquisitions. This approach, however, doesn't appear in the most recent 2020 version of HSAM – are you familiar with this prior approach? If yes, do you know why DHS decided to modify this approach?



- c. How did DHS determine these two dollar amount thresholds by contract type?
    - i. Have these amounts changed since this approach was first put into place?
  - d. What is the rough distribution of acquisitions which require a written acquisition plan each year?
  - e. How long does it typically take to develop a written acquisition plan?
  - f. Would it be possible to share a copy of the Acquisition Plan (AP) template contained in Appendix Z of the HSAM?
  - g. Overall, how well is this approach for acquisition planning working for DHS?
    - i. What benefits have resulted from this approach to planning?
    - ii. What aspects of this approach have been most challenging for the agency to implement?
    - iii. What steps have you taken (or are planning to take) to improve implementation?
    - iv. Are there any lessons learned from this approach that we can share with SBA?
5. SBA is considering some metrics to track the acquisition planning process. Based on your experience, what do you think about the feasibility and/or value of the following metrics:
- Track the time from concept to actionable package
  - Track the time between when the procurement package is submitted to the procurement office and when it needs to be issued
  - Track the time between when the procurement package is submitted to the procurement office and when it is actionable

### Acquisition Planning Forecast System

6. Per the HSAM, our understanding is that all planned acquisitions for the following fiscal year must be entered into the Acquisition Planning Forecast System (or APFS) by August 31.
- a. Is our understanding of DHS' policy accurate?
  - b. Why was this date chosen as the cutoff date?
  - c. Is this target generally met by DHS staff?
  - d. Are there any internal processes or other tools that DHS uses to ensure this target is met (e.g., annual data call, annual guidance, etc.)?
7. We understand that APFS is a database that DHS uses to track and manage its acquisition forecast.
- a. When did DHS first start using the APFS?
    - i. Is this database off-the-shelf, or did DHS design the program in-house to fit the agency's needs? [*Internal Note: DOC's system is off-the-shelf.*]
    - ii. Did DHS use a different system prior to APFS?
  - b. Does this database help DHS staff to start planning earlier?
    - i. Do staff update data on individual acquisitions as more information becomes available about an acquisition?
  - c. Does this database meet the agency's acquisition forecast needs?



- i. Have there been any changes to the program over time to improve its implementation?
    - ii. What aspects (if any) of this program have not been working well, and why?
  - d. Beyond APFS, does DHS use any other IT tools to facilitate early acquisition planning?

### **Collaboration between Contracts and Program Offices**

8. How are contracts staff assigned to acquisitions?
  - a. Are contracts staff assigned to specific offices or are they assigned by acquisition?
  - b. Are contracts staff co-located with program offices?
9. We noticed a lot of emphasis in the HSAM on the use of integrated acquisition planning teams.
  - a. Do you know approximately when this type of integrated acquisition planning team was first added to the HSAM?
  - b. At what point/milestone in the acquisition process is the acquisition planning team (or integrated project/product team) created?
  - c. How widely used is this approach?
    - i. Are ITPs created for all acquisitions, or a subset of acquisitions that meet certain criteria?
    - ii. How are different staff assigned to an IPT?
  - d. What are some of the benefits of an APT-based approach? Do you think the benefits justify the additional coordination effort required?
  - e. What were some of the challenges to institutionalizing this collaborative approach within DHS?
  - f. Are there any best practices or other lessons that DHS has learned in achieving greater collaboration between contracts and program staff?

### **Market Research**

10. At what point in the acquisition planning process is market research typically conducted?
  - a. Would it be possible to share a copy of the DHS' Market Research Guide with us for our study for SBA? Are there any guides that DHS has developed on how to conduct market research for different types of acquisitions?
  - b. How much guidance do contracts staff provide to program staff on market research?
  - c. How often are contract staff involved in market research activities?
11. We assume the level of industry engagement conducted as part of market research and/or acquisition planning is pretty variable – is that fair?
  - a. Has DHS developed any written guidance, trainings or templates for staff about whether and/or what level of industry engagement is appropriate/recommended by acquisition type?



- b. Are you aware of any such guidance available from other agencies, associations or groups?
12. In reviewing the HSAM, we noticed that Chapter 3010 defines market research as a continuous process (from pre-award through post-award) – we haven't seen market research defined in this way in acquisition manuals we have reviewed from other agencies.
- a. Do you know approximately when DHS defined market research in this way in the HSAM?
  - b. What benefits have resulted from this perspective on market research?
13. Are there any best practices or other lessons that DHS has learned to help improve market research efforts for acquisitions that we can share with SBA?

### IT Acquisition Review (ITAR)

14. Provide a brief description of the key review processes that IT acquisitions are subject, including approximately when each review process takes place and how long each review process takes.
- Internal Interview Notes:
- For example, At DOC – there are many review/approval processes for IT projects. The key steps noted by DOC include: (a) conceptual review of a proposed IT investment (which occurs first - ITIA); (b) review and approval of the IT acquisition plan; and (c) review/approval of the IT acquisition package.
  - At part (b) above – the HSAM appears to identify two levels of CIO review for IT acquisition plans: Component-level ITAR is required for IT acquisitions less than \$50 million and for IT acquisitions greater than this amount, there is an added DHS Headquarter-level ITAR. We should confirm this interpretation is accurate.
15. Does DHS use an agile approach to managing IT acquisitions?
- a. If yes, when did DHS starting using this approach? How well is it working? What positive changes have you seen in acquisition outcomes from this approach?
  - b. If no, why not?
16. What aspects of the ITAR are (or have been) particularly challenging for DHS?
17. Does DHS have any trainings, templates, or other guidance to assist staff with the ITAR process?
18. Are there any best practices, strategies or other lessons that DHS has learned that we can share with SBA?



**[Skip if not enough time]**

### **Proposal Evaluation**

In reviewing the HSAM and some of the documents available from DHS' PIL, we noted a few mechanisms that we wanted to explore further.

19. Down-select process or phased evaluation is used for competitive acquisitions where DHS expects a large number of responses. In a down-select, many quotes are evaluated in the first phase under some of the evaluation factors and fewer quotes are considered in subsequent phases on the remaining evaluation factors:
  - a. Do you have a sense of how often this approach applied each year, and what types of acquisitions it is typically applied to?
  - b. When did DHS first start using this approach?
  - c. What type of factors are typically considered in Phase 1 of this approach?
  - d. What benefits has DHS seen for acquisitions that use this approach?
  
20. In reviewing some of the documents available on DHS' PIL website – we noted some strategies identified as possible approaches to improving the acquisition process, including on-the-spot consensus, confidence ratings, video proposals, and prototyping.
  - a. What is your experience with these approaches?
  - b. Of these approaches, which have been the most helpful in improving acquisitions outcomes? Why?

### **Final Thoughts**

21. Do you have any final thoughts to share with us about how to facilitate earlier and/or more effective planning for acquisitions or any of the other topics we covered today?



---

## PHASE 2 INTERVIEW GUIDE: DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### DOC's Acquisition Portfolio

2. From an infographic posted on DOC's website, we understand that DOC's acquisition portfolio totaled \$5.4 billion in FY2019, of which the vast majority (85%) are purchases of services.
  - a. Does that sound accurate? Is this spending level generally representative of DOC's annual portfolio and/or is the amount of DOC's portfolio steadily growing each year?
  - b. Do you have data that you could share with us on the proportion of acquisitions that are new acquisitions versus exercising options or extensions on existing contracts?

### Acquisition Planning

We talked about acquisition planning during our first interview and since then we also reviewed the Commerce Acquisition Manual (CAM) in more detail. We have a few additional follow-up questions about the agency's acquisition planning process.

3. According to the CAM, forecasting should commence as soon as need for an acquisition plan is identified and well in advance of the beginning of the fiscal year.
  - a. What does implementation of this guidance look like on the ground in DOC bureaus and offices?
    - i. Does planning for most acquisitions begin well in advance of the beginning of the fiscal year as required by the CAM?
      1. If yes, how far in advance does planning for most acquisitions start? Do you have a sense of roughly what proportion of acquisitions hit this target?
      2. If no, approximately when does planning for most acquisitions begin?
  - b. What are the biggest challenges that DOC staff face in starting acquisition planning earlier?
  - c. Are there any strategies or best practices that DOC has implemented to help staff meet this requirement and start planning acquisitions earlier?
4. The CAM identifies three planning levels: advanced acquisition planning forecasts (> Simplified Acquisition Threshold (SAT) of \$250k), milestone acquisition plans (between SAT and \$10M) and formal acquisition plans (>\$10M).
  - a. Do you know about when this approach was first put into effect at DOC?
    - i. If yes, what approach did DOC have previously? What benefits resulted from shifting to the approach currently in use?
  - b. How did DOC determine \$10 million as a key dollar amount threshold?
    - i. Has this amount changed since this approach was first put in place?
  - c. The manual indicates that the right planning level is based on a variety of factors, including the dollar value of the action, mission criticality, risk level, visibility and project complexity. With the exception of dollar value, we didn't see specific definitions of how to determine if an acquisition might be high-risk, complex or highly visible. Our assumption is that application of these factors is left to the discretion of bureaus,



- offices, and DOC program and contracts staff who then draw from their own experiences – is that interpretation accurate?
- i. Do you have any sense how often the non-dollar criteria result in changing the type of acquisition plan used for a particular acquisition – for example, shifting an acquisition from a milestone plan to a formal plan?
  - ii. In such instances, is there a single person with the responsibility to make that decision or is it typically a joint decision by the IPT?
- d. What is the rough distribution of planning levels seen across acquisitions each year? For example, how many (or what percent of) acquisitions per year fall into the formal acquisition plan category?
- e. How long does it typically take to develop Milestone Acquisition Plans and Formal Acquisition Plans?
- f. Based on the CAM, formal acquisition plans are subject to a fairly rigorous review process, what about milestone acquisition plans?
- g. Overall, how well is this approach with the three levels of acquisition planning working for DOC?
- i. What benefits have resulted from this three-level planning approach?
  - ii. What aspects of this approach have been most challenging to implement, and why?
  - iii. What steps have you taken to improve implementation?
  - iv. Are there any lessons learned from this approach that we can share with SBA?
5. During our prior call, you mentioned briefly a scalable acquisition framework that was introduced in 2015. Per the CAM, it looks like this framework is intended for ‘high-profile’ acquisitions associated with major systems/programs. Would it be accurate to characterize this framework as a fourth approach to acquisition planning – alongside forecasting, milestone plans and formal plans?
6. Per the CAM, we understand that the agency issues an annual data call for planned acquisitions on or before March 1 of each year and then Program Officials are required to enter all planned acquisitions into FAAPS by May 31.
- a. Is our understanding of DOC’s policy accurate?
  - b. When did this practice [annual data call] first start, and why?
  - c. Has this helped DOC staff to start planning acquisitions earlier?
  - d. What other benefits have resulted from this practice [annual data call]? For example, increased reporting of planned acquisition by May 31, higher quality acquisitions packages, less rushed acquisitions, etc.
  - e. What aspects of this practice have been most challenging to implement, and why?
  - f. Have you made any substantive changes to this data call to improve its usefulness to the agency?
  - g. Would you be comfortable sharing a copy of the instructions that are sent to Program Officials for this annual data call?



7. We understand that Senior Bureau Procurement Officials issue guidance to their Operating Units each year regarding acquisition forecast submissions – would it be possible to see an example of this guidance?
8. Per the CAM, we understand that DOC uses FAAPS (Forecasting and Advance Acquisition Planning System) as a tool to manage its acquisition forecast.
  - a. When did DOC first start using FAAPS?
    - i. Is this program off-the-shelf, or did DOC design the program to fit the agency's needs?
    - ii. Did DOC use a different system prior to FAAPS?
  - b. Does this program meet the agency's acquisition forecast needs? Have there been any changes to the program over time to improve its implementation?
  - c. What aspects (if any) of this program have been most challenging to implement, and why?

### **Collaboration between Contracts and Program Offices**

9. How are contracts staff assigned to acquisitions?
  - a. Are contracts staff assigned to specific bureaus and offices or are they assigned by acquisition?
  - b. Are contracts staff co-located with program offices?
10. Is there a specific point/milestone within the acquisitions process when program staff engage contracts staff on an upcoming acquisition?
11. To what extent do COs operate as an integrated team with the Program Official for acquisition planning purposes?
12. Once contracts staff are assigned to an acquisition, do you have a sense of how often contracts staff engage with program staff (e.g., weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc.)?
13. Are there any best practices or other lessons that DOC has learned to help improve collaboration between contracts and program staff?

### **Market Research**

During our last interview, you mentioned that market research is one of the pain points for DOC – it is challenging to figure out how much industry engagement is needed to inform acquisition strategy. We want to ask a few follow-up about DOC's experience to date with market research activities as part of acquisition planning.

14. At what point in within the acquisition planning process is market research typically conducted?



15. What level of involvement is typical for contracts staff in guiding or assisting with market research effort for a planned acquisition?
16. We assume the level of industry engagement conducted as part of market research and/or acquisition planning is pretty variable – is that fair?
  - a. Has DOC developed any written guidance, trainings or templates for staff about whether and/or what level of industry engagement is appropriate/recommended by acquisition type?
  - b. Are you aware of any such guidance available from other agencies, associations or groups?
17. Are there any best practices or other lessons that DOC has learned to help improve market research efforts for acquisitions that we can share with SBA?

### IT Acquisitions

18. Based on our prior conversation and review of the CAM, we understand OCIO review applies to all acquisitions greater than \$10 million, regardless of what amount of the acquisition is IT-related – is that interpretation accurate?
  - a. And from our prior call, we understand that the agency is considering opportunities to streamline this process.
  - b. We did want to clarify one thing – is there any type of OCIO review required for acquisitions that fall below the \$10 million dollar threshold? What about acquisition <\$10 million that includes an IT component?
19. Can you provide a brief description of OCIO’s engagement in the acquisition planning process for IT acquisitions? If needed, procedural details of interest include:
  - a. Who has primary responsibility for engaging someone from the OCIO?
  - b. At what point is the OCIO typically engaged – after the program office defines its need, before/after market research is complete, as the acquisition strategy is developed, once a draft procurement package is complete, etc.?
  - c. How often does an acquisition team engage with the OCIO on an IT-related acquisition?
  - d. When does the OCIO conduct its official review of an acquisition and how long does that take?
20. How often does the OCIO’s review result in substantive changes to an acquisition?
  - a. What are common issues that require substantive changes to an acquisition?
21. What aspects of IT acquisitions are (or have been) particularly challenging for DOC?
22. Does DOC use an agile approach to managing its IT acquisitions?



- a. If yes, when did DOC starting using this approach? How well is it working? What positive changes have you seen in acquisition outcomes from this approach?
- b. If no, why not?

23. Are there any best practices, strategies or other lessons that DOC has learned on the IT acquisition review process that we can share with SBA?

*[Skip if not enough time to cover]*

**VSM Steps 4-6: Acquisition Strategy, Drafting Procurement Documents, Award and Post-Award**

24. Are there particular aspects within these steps that present particular challenges or pain points:
- a. For contracts staff?
  - b. For program staff?

25. Are there any best practices, strategies or other lessons that DOC has learned that we can share with SBA? For example, templates, trainings, templates, or other guidance?

**Other Questions**

26. SBA is considering some metrics to track the acquisition planning process. Based on your experience, what do you think about the feasibility and/or value of the following metrics:
- a. Track the time from concept to actionable package
  - b. Track the time between when the procurement package is submitted to the procurement office and when it needs to be issued
  - c. Track the time between when the procurement package is submitted to the procurement office and when it is actionable

Do you have any final thoughts to share with us about how to facilitate earlier and/or more effective planning for acquisitions or any of the other topics we covered today?



---

## PHASE 2 INTERVIEW GUIDE: CONTRACTING OFFICERS

### Background

*[To be filled in by the interviewer/notetaker prior to the discussion]*

Respondent's Name and Title:

Date of Interview:

Name of Interviewer:

Name of Notetaker:

### Opening Script

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. My name is [INTERVIEWER], and I am a [TITLE] with Summit/IEc. I am joined by my colleague [NOTETAKER], who will be taking notes during today's discussion. Summit and IEc, under contract to the U.S. Small Business Administration, are conducting research on the agency's behalf to elicit feedback on how the agency might improve the acquisition planning process.

This study aims to identify factors that impede the SBA's ability to improve its acquisition planning process. In Phase 1 of this project we conducted interviews, focus groups, and value stream mapping (VSM) exercises with a variety of SBA stakeholders. During the next 60 minutes, we will ask you to help us confirm or refine our preliminary findings from Phase 1—this will include feedback on our visual representation of the current process and potential modifications and “pain points” in the acquisition planning process. Additionally, we will share our preliminary ideas to enhance SBA's acquisition planning process and ask for your reactions. We will develop a report with findings and recommendations for SBA in the Fall of 2020.

With your permission, I would like to record today's discussion. This helps us ensure we don't miss anything important you say. Only Summit/IEc staff working on this project will have access to the recording. Do I have your permission to record our discussion today?

Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

### Current Process

10. To prepare for today's discussion, we asked you to think of two specific examples from your experience over the past two years with the acquisition process in your office: one example where the process worked well, and one where the process did not work well.

#### **Example 1 – process worked well**

- a. Briefly, please describe your example where the process worked well.
- b. Is this example typical or atypical of your general experience with the acquisition process over the past two years?

#### **Example 2 – process did not work well**

- c. Briefly, please describe your example where the process did not work well.



- d. Is this example typical or atypical of your general experience with the acquisition process over the past two years?

The attached diagram shows the current (“as-is”) acquisition planning process for program offices. This diagram reflects input and feedback from the VSM sessions and focus groups. We understand that every program office has its own process, and that variations can occur even within the same office. However, we are trying to capture the main elements of the process across all program offices.

**Please answer the questions below with your examples in mind:**

11. To what extent did each of your examples follow the process shown in the diagram?
  - a. Are there any important ways in which your examples differed from the process shown in the diagram? If yes, please explain for each example.
12. Let us walk through your first example (process that worked well), using the Value Stream Map processes or milestones shown.
  - a. At what step of the process were you assigned to this procurement? Is this typical?
    - i) When in the process (time of year) were you engaged? In your experience, is this the right time to start, too early, or too late?
    - ii) To what extent are you consistently assigned procurements for the same program office?
    - iii) Do program offices ever engage you before you are officially assigned?
  - b. Did the timing of your engagement affect the acquisition process? If yes, how?
  - c. Once you were assigned to a procurement, how often did you engage with the program offices (once a month, weekly, once every two weeks, etc.)?
    - i) In your experience, is this frequency of interaction about right, too much, or too little? Why?
    - ii) Were there any tools or formal processes you used to track action items and deliverables as you engaged the program office?
  - d. How long does each step of the process take (months, weeks, days)? Let’s start from the first step.
    - i) How much of this time involved you actively working on the process (e.g., preparing documentation, responding to comments from the CO, etc.)?
    - ii) How much of this time was waiting time (e.g., waiting to hear back from the program office, others)?
  - e. Are there steps in the process that result in an acquisition package being rejected or requiring rework? *If yes:*
    - i) What causes an acquisition package to be rejected or require rework?
    - ii) How much time does this add to the process?



iii) Where in the process does this happen?

*INTERVIEWER: Walk through the second example (didn't work well) at a high level, asking for key differences compared to the first example.*

13. The focus group discussions and Phase 1 interviews identified the following pain points in the current process. To what extent are the following pain points an issue for the acquisitions that you work on?
  - a. COs tend to be assigned after the program office has already conducted market research and drafted procurement documents. This may lead to rework if wrong forms are used or inaccurately completed, market research is not deemed sufficient by the CO, or a suboptimal acquisition strategy was used.
    - i) Do you track or can you estimate how much time this adds to the process?
  - b. SharePoint does not have the most updated documents/forms.
    - i) Why or what is preventing the availability of current documents on SharePoint?
  - c. A lot of new processes in the last year or two have been introduced. Many program offices are uninformed about new requirements. The requirements may not be consistently communicated.
  - d. Other pain points (please explain)

### Modifications to the Process

1. The Summit Team is proposing some potential modifications to the “as-is” Value Stream Map and process that we just discussed. We would like to hear your thoughts on these modifications, especially as relates to the two experiences with acquisition planning processes you shared with us.

For each of the following suggestions, how (a) *desirable* and (b) *feasible* would the change be for your office? Please explain.

- a. Start acquisition planning as early as April in the previous fiscal year (currently listed as April of the previous fiscal year by some POs but most POs acknowledge the start is with the approved budget in January in the current fiscal year).
- b. Each program office would conduct a risk assessment in the third quarter of the previous fiscal year (April-June) to determine the contract actions that they know have a high probability of being funded in their budget for the following fiscal year and may be complex. Acquisition planning for these contracts/programs could start as early as June or July of the previous fiscal year.
- c. A CO would be assigned to program offices as early as the previous planning year so that everyone is informed and available at Step 1 – Define Need. The CO would remain assigned to the program office or acquisition plan item.
  - i) Similarly, to foster long-term relationships between COs and program offices, assign one or more dedicated COs to each program office.



- d. An Integrated Project Team (IPT) including program office, CO, OCIO, and other stakeholders would be formed early in the process (before the Market Research phase) and would remain involved throughout the process.
  - e. Are there other suggestions that are highly desirable? Other desirable suggestions that may not be feasible?
2. Would additional training be helpful for improving the acquisition planning process in your office?
    - a. If yes, what type of training? For whom? What topics?
  3. Do you think your office would benefit from an agile approach to acquisition management?
    - a. If yes, what would this look like for your office? What support would you need, if any, to implement an agile approach?
  4. Thinking about all the suggestions to improve the process that we've just talked about, what barriers, if any, would need to be addressed to implement these suggestions?

### **Other Potential Improvements [ONLY IF TIME AVAILABLE]**

*If time is available, these questions should be asked only if they did not come up in earlier discussions. Map to the pain points discussion.*

1. Here are some additional suggestions that emerged during our discussions with SBA stakeholders. To what extent would each of the following suggestions be helpful for improving the acquisition planning process in your office?
  - a. Give program offices more visibility into the process – provide a dashboard where they can track the status of their acquisition package once it has been submitted to the CO.
  - b. Improvements to Market Research
    - i. Clarify requirements for market research.
    - ii. Increase the level of engagement with industry to inform acquisition planning
  - c. Improvements to Forms and Documents
    - i. Post current versions of all forms in a central location, such as SharePoint, that is clearly communicated to COs and program offices.
    - ii. Give COs access to edit/update forms or upload new forms on SharePoint.
    - iii. Provide a “menu of service” to the program offices – the menu would show that type of acquisition strategy is appropriate given the office’s acquisition needs.
    - iv. Provide a library of examples of different types of contract vehicles, Performance Work Statements, Statements of Work, and templates that have been successful.
  - d. Improve monthly and quarterly meetings between the acquisition team and program offices by spending more time discussing strategic issues and less time on data reconciliation (reconcile data between the acquisition team and program office ahead of time).
  - e. Improvements to IT systems and Data Entry
    - i. Automate the acquisition planning process to require less data entry by program offices.



- ii. Conduct additional testing and user training prior to rolling out changes to IT systems.
- iii. Upgrade current IT systems to improve the user experience (if selected, please explain what upgrades you would like)

### **Final Thoughts**

1. Do you have any final thoughts that you would like to share about the topics we have been discussing?

Thank you for your time and insights. We appreciate your participation!



---

## PHASE 2 INTERVIEW GUIDE: DEPUTY CIO AND IT

### Background

*[To be filled in by the interviewer/notetaker prior to the discussion]*

Respondent's Name, Title, and Program Office:

Date of Interview:

Name of Interviewer:

Name of Notetaker:

### Opening Script

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. My name is [INTERVIEWER], and I am a [TITLE] with Summit/IEc. I am joined by my colleague [NOTETAKER], who will be taking notes during today's discussion. Summit and IEc, under contract to the U.S. Small Business Administration, are conducting research on the agency's behalf to elicit feedback on how the agency might improve the acquisition planning process.

This study aims to identify factors that impede the SBA's ability to improve its acquisition planning process. In Phase 1 of this project we conducted interviews, focus groups, and value stream mapping (VSM) exercises with a variety of SBA stakeholders. During the next 60 minutes, we will ask you to help us confirm or refine our preliminary findings from Phase 1—this will include feedback on our visual representation of the current process and potential modifications and “pain points” in the acquisition planning process. Additionally, we will share our preliminary ideas to enhance SBA's acquisition planning process and ask for your reactions. We will develop a report with findings and recommendations for SBA in the Fall of 2020.

With your permission, I would like to record today's discussion. This helps us ensure we don't miss anything important you say. Only Summit/IEc staff working on this project will have access to the recording. Do I have your permission to record our discussion today?

Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

### Current Process

14. To prepare for today's discussion, we asked you to think of two specific examples from your experience over the past two years with the acquisition process in your office: one example where the process worked well, and one where the process did not work well.

#### **Example 1 – process worked well**

- a. Briefly, please describe your example where the process worked well.
- b. Is this example typical or atypical of your general experience with the acquisition process over the past two years?

#### **Example 2 – process did not work well**

- c. Briefly, please describe your example where the process did not work well.



- d. Is this example typical or atypical of your general experience with the acquisition process over the past two years?

The attached diagram shows the current (“as-is”) acquisition planning process for program offices. This diagram reflects input and feedback from the VSM sessions and focus groups. We understand that every program office has its own process, and that variations can occur even within the same office. However, we are trying to capture the main elements of the process across all program offices.

**Please answer the questions below with your examples in mind:**

15. To what extent did each of your examples follow the process shown in the diagram?
  - a. Are there any important ways in which your examples differed from the process shown in the diagram? If yes, please explain for each example.
16. Let us walk through your first example (process that worked well), using the Value Stream Map processes or milestones shown.
  - a. What time of year did the acquisition process start or engage your office? In your experience, was this the right time to start, too early, or too late?
  - b. Please identify the steps in the process that OCIO is involved. Describe the engagements.
  - c. How long does each step of the process take (months, weeks, days)? Let’s start from the first step.
    - i) How much of this time involved you actively working on the process (e.g., preparing documentation, responding to comments from the Program Office, CO, etc.)?
    - ii) How much of this time was waiting time (e.g., waiting to hear back from the Program Office, CO etc.)?

*INTERVIEWER: Walk through the second example (didn’t work well) at a high level, asking for key differences compared to the first example.*

**FOR THIS NEXT PART OF THE INTERVIEW, REFER TO THE SPECIFIC EXAMPLES AS NEEDED TO ESTABLISH TIMELINES, WAITING TIME, AND WHO IS ENGAGED.**

17. Please tell us more about what the Architecture Review Board (ARB), Business Technology Investment Council (BTIC), and IT Acquisition Review Tracker (ITART) processes entail.
  - a. What are the dollar thresholds (or other triggers) that trigger each of these reviews?
  - b. Thinking about the two examples we walked through, at what steps of the acquisition process did each of these reviews occur?
    - i) Please describe when the reviews occurred. **ASK ABOUT ARB, BTIC, IT, and ITART**
    - ii) How long did each review take?
    - iii) What effect do these reviews have on the acquisition planning process?



- iv) Was the information provided by the program offices sufficiently complete to conduct the necessary reviews? Overall, are there certain types of information that are typically missing at these steps?
- c. Is there dialogue between the OCIO and program office during the review process?
- d. How long after a program office submits their package for review does the program office receive a decision?
  - i) Does OCIO use tools or trackers to communicate the decision-making process and issues with the program office?
- e. How often do these reviews result in the need for a program office to modify a procurement packet (e.g., rarely, sometimes, often, nearly all the time)?
  - i) If modifications are often needed, are there any consistent patterns in the type of modifications needed?
  - ii) If modifications are needed, do the program offices need to resubmit their packages for review?
  - iii) How much time do these modifications typically add to the process?

### Modifications to the Process

- 5. The Summit Team is proposing some potential modifications to the “as-is” Value Stream Map and process that we just discussed. We would like to hear your thoughts on these modifications, especially as relates to the two experiences with acquisition planning processes you shared with us.

For each of the following suggestions, how (a) *desirable* and (b) *feasible* would the change be for your office? Please explain.

- a. Start acquisition planning as early as April in the previous fiscal year (currently listed as April of the previous fiscal year by POs but most POs acknowledge the start is with the approved budget in January in the current fiscal year).
- b. Each program office would conduct a risk assessment in the third quarter of the previous fiscal year (April-June) to determine the contract actions that they know have a high probability of being funded in their budget for the following fiscal year and may be complex. Acquisition planning for these contracts/programs could start as early as June or July of the previous fiscal year.
- c. A CO would be assigned to program offices as early as the previous planning year so that everyone is informed and available at Step 1 – Define Need. The CO would remain assigned to the program office or acquisition plan item.
- d. An Integrated Project Team (IPT) including program office, CO, OCIO, and other stakeholders would be formed early in the process (before the Market Research phase) and would remain involved throughout the process.
- e. Are there other suggestions that are highly desirable? Other desirable suggestions that may not be feasible?



6. Would additional training be helpful for improving the acquisition planning process in your office?
  - a. If yes, what type of training? For whom? What topics?
7. Do you think your office would benefit from an agile approach to acquisition management?
  - a. If yes, what would this look like for your office? What support would you need, if any, to implement an agile approach?
8. Thinking about all the suggestions to improve the process that we've just talked about, what barriers, if any, would need to be addressed to implement these suggestions?

### **Final Thoughts**

2. Do you have any final thoughts that you would like to share about the topics we have been discussing?

Thank you for your time and insights. We appreciate your participation!



---

## PHASE 2 INTERVIEW GUIDE: PROGRAM MANAGERS

### Background

*[To be filled in by the interviewer/notetaker prior to the discussion]*

Respondent's Name, Title, and Program Office:

Date of Interview:

Name of Interviewer:

Name of Notetaker:

### Opening Script

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. My name is [INTERVIEWER], and I am a [TITLE] with Summit/IEc. I am joined by my colleague [NOTETAKER], who will be taking notes during today's discussion. Summit and IEc, under contract to the U.S. Small Business Administration, are conducting research on the agency's behalf to elicit feedback on how the agency might improve the acquisition planning process.

This study aims to identify factors that impede the SBA's ability to improve its acquisition planning process. In Phase 1 of this project we conducted interviews, focus groups, and value stream mapping (VSM) exercises with a variety of SBA stakeholders. During the next 60 minutes, we will ask you to help us confirm or refine our preliminary findings from Phase 1—this will include feedback on our visual representation of the current process and potential modifications and “pain points” in the acquisition planning process. Additionally, we will share our preliminary ideas to enhance SBA's acquisition planning process and ask for your reactions. We will develop a report with findings and recommendations for SBA in the Fall of 2020.

With your permission, I would like to record today's discussion. This helps us ensure we don't miss anything important you say. Only Summit/IEc staff working on this project will have access to the recording. Do I have your permission to record our discussion today?

Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

### Current Process

18. To prepare for today's discussion, we asked you to think of two specific examples from your experience over the past two years with the acquisition process in your office: one example where the process worked well, and one where the process did not work well.

#### **Example 1 – process worked well**

- a. Briefly, please describe your example where the process worked well.
- b. Is this example typical or atypical of your general experience with the acquisition process over the past two years?

#### **Example 2 – process did not work well**

- c. Briefly, please describe your example where the process did not work well.



- d. Is this example typical or atypical of your general experience with the acquisition process over the past two years?

The attached diagram shows the current (“as-is”) acquisition planning process for program offices. This diagram reflects input and feedback from the VSM sessions and focus groups. We understand that every program office has its own process, and that variations can occur even within the same office. However, we are trying to capture the main elements of the process across all program offices.

**Please answer the questions below with your examples in mind:**

19. To what extent did each of your examples follow the process shown in the diagram?
  - a. Are there any important ways in which your examples differed from the process shown in the diagram? If yes, please explain for each example.
20. Let us walk through your first example (process that worked well), using the Value Stream Map processes or milestones shown.
  - a. What time of year did the acquisition process start in your office? In your experience, was this the right time to start, too early, or too late?
  - b. How long does each step of the process take (months, weeks, days)? Let’s start from the first step.
    - iii) How much of this time involved you actively working on the process (e.g., preparing documentation, responding to comments from the CO, etc.)?
    - iv) How much of this time was waiting time (e.g., waiting to hear back from the CO)?
  - c. Are there steps in the process that result in an acquisition package being rejected or requiring rework? *If yes:*
    - i) What causes an acquisition package to be rejected or require rework?
    - ii) How much time does this add to the process?
    - iii) Where in the process does this happen?

*INTERVIEWER: Walk through the second example (didn’t work well) at a high level, asking for key differences compared to the first example.*

21. The focus group discussions and Phase 1 interviews identified the following pain points in the current process. For each, please tell us the extent to which the pain points are an issue for your office:
  - a. COs tend to be assigned after the program office has already conducted market research and drafted procurement documents. This may lead to rework if wrong forms are used or inaccurately completed, market research is not deemed sufficient by the CO, or a suboptimal acquisition strategy was used.
  - b. SharePoint does not have the most updated documents/forms.



- c. A lot of new processes in the last year or two have been introduced. Many program offices are uninformed about new requirements. The requirements may not be consistently communicated.
- d. The Program Office does not have insight or the ability to track parts of the procurement packet once they are submitted for reviews. Expectations for when responses to submitted documents will be received are not clear.
- e. Are there other pain points? Please explain.

### Modifications to the Process

9. The Summit Team is proposing some potential modifications to the “as-is” Value Stream Map and process that we just discussed. We would like to hear your thoughts on these modifications, especially as relates to the two experiences with acquisition planning processes you shared with us.

For each of the following suggestions, how (a) *desirable* and (b) *feasible* would the change be for your office? Please explain.

- a. Start acquisition planning as early as April in the previous fiscal year (currently listed as April of the previous fiscal year by some POs but most POs acknowledge the start is with the approved budget in January in the current fiscal year).
  - b. Each program office would conduct a risk assessment in the third quarter of the previous fiscal year (April-June) to determine the contract actions that they know have a high probability of being funded in their budget for the following fiscal year and may be complex. Acquisition planning for these contracts/programs could start as early as June or July of the previous fiscal year.
  - c. A CO would be assigned to program offices as early as the previous planning year so that everyone is informed and available at Step 1 – Define Need. The CO would remain assigned to the program office or acquisition plan item.
  - d. An Integrated Project Team (IPT) including program office, CO, OCIO, and other stakeholders would be formed early in the process (before the Market Research phase) and would remain involved throughout the process.
  - e. Are there other suggestions that are highly desirable? Other desirable suggestions that may not be feasible?
10. Would additional training be helpful for improving the acquisition planning process in your office?
    - a. If yes, what type of training? For whom? What topics?
  11. Do you think your office would benefit from an agile approach to acquisition management?
    - a. If yes, what would this look like for your office? What support would you need, if any, to implement an agile approach?



12. Thinking about all the suggestions to improve the process that we've just talked about, what barriers, if any, would need to be addressed to implement these suggestions?

### **Other Potential Improvements [ONLY IF TIME AVAILABLE]**

*If time is available, these questions should be asked only if they did not come up in earlier discussions. Map to the pain points discussion.*

2. Here are some additional suggestions that emerged during our discussions with SBA stakeholders. To what extent would each of the following suggestions be helpful for improving the acquisition planning process in your office?
  - f. Give program offices more visibility into the process – provide a dashboard where they can track the status of their acquisition package once it has been submitted to the CO.
  - g. Improvements to Market Research
    - i. Clarify requirements for market research.
    - ii. Increase the level of engagement with industry to inform acquisition planning
  - h. Improvements to Forms and Documents
    - i. Post current versions of all forms in a central location, such as SharePoint, that is clearly communicated to COs and program offices.
    - ii. Give COs access to edit/update forms or upload new forms on SharePoint.
    - iii. Provide a “menu of service” to the program offices – the menu would show that type of acquisition strategy is appropriate given the office’s acquisition needs.
    - iv. Provide a library of examples of different types of contract vehicles, Performance Work Statements, Statements of Work, and templates that have been successful.
  - i. Improve monthly and quarterly meetings between the acquisition team and program offices by spending more time discussing strategic issues and less time on data reconciliation (reconcile data between the acquisition team and program office ahead of time).
  - j. Improvements to IT systems and Data Entry
    - i. Automate the acquisition planning process to require less data entry by program offices.
    - ii. Conduct additional testing and user training prior to rolling out changes to IT systems.
    - iii. Upgrade current IT systems to improve the user experience (if selected, please explain what upgrades you would like)

### **Final Thoughts**

3. Do you have any final thoughts that you would like to share about the topics we have been discussing?

Thank you for your time and insights. We appreciate your participation!



---

## PHASE 2 INTERVIEW GUIDE: SUPERVISORY CONTRACTING OFFICER

### Background

*[To be filled in by the interviewer/notetaker prior to the discussion]*

Respondent's Name and Title:

Date of Interview:

Name of Interviewer:

Name of Notetaker:

### Opening Script

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. My name is [INTERVIEWER], and I am a [TITLE] with Summit/IEc. I am joined by my colleague [NOTETAKER], who will be taking notes during today's discussion. Summit and IEc, under contract to the U.S. Small Business Administration, are conducting research on the agency's behalf to elicit feedback on how the agency might improve the acquisition planning process.

This study aims to identify factors that impede the SBA's ability to improve its acquisition planning process. In Phase 1 of this project we conducted interviews, focus groups, and value stream mapping (VSM) exercises with a variety of SBA stakeholders. During the next 60 minutes, we will ask you to help us confirm or refine our preliminary findings from Phase 1—this will include feedback on our visual representation of the current process and potential modifications and “pain points” in the acquisition planning process. Additionally, we will share our preliminary ideas to enhance SBA's acquisition planning process and ask for your reactions. We will develop a report with findings and recommendations for SBA in the Fall of 2020.

With your permission, I would like to record today's discussion. This helps us ensure we don't miss anything important you say. Only Summit/IEc staff working on this project will have access to the recording. Do I have your permission to record our discussion today?

Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

### Current Process

22. To prepare for today's discussion, we asked you to think of two specific examples from your experience over the past two years with the acquisition process in your office: one example where the process worked well, and one where the process did not work well.

#### **Example 1 – process worked well**

- a. Briefly, please describe your example where the process worked well.
- b. Is this example typical or atypical of your general experience with the acquisition process over the past two years?

#### **Example 2 – process did not work well**

- c. Briefly, please describe your example where the process did not work well.



- d. Is this example typical or atypical of your general experience with the acquisition process over the past two years?

The attached diagram, also emailed to you in advance, shows the current (“as-is”) acquisition planning process for program offices. This diagram reflects input and feedback from the VSM sessions and focus groups. We understand that every program office has its own process, and that variations can occur even within the same office. However, we are trying to capture the main elements of the process across all program offices.

**Thinking broadly about the acquisition processes across SBA:**

[INTERVIEWER TO REMIND RESPONDENT THAT WE WILL HAVE TIME TO DISCUSS DETAILS WHEN WE DIG INTO THE EXAMPLES]

23. Were there any inaccuracies in the “as-is” VSM that you would like to point out?
24. Are there any missing steps?

**Please answer the questions below with your examples in mind:**

25. To what extent did each of your examples follow the process shown in the diagram?
  - a. Are there any important ways in which your examples differed from the process shown in the diagram? If yes, please explain for each example.
26. Let us walk through your first example (process that worked well), using the Value Stream Map processes or milestones shown.
  - f. At what step of the process were COs assigned to this procurement? Is this typical?
    - iv) When in the process (time of year) were they engaged? In your experience, is this the right time to start, too early, or too late?
    - v) How are COs assigned to program offices to assist with acquisitions and procurements? To what extent are you consistently assigning COs to manage procurements for the same program office?
    - vi) Do program offices ever engage you before COs are assigned?
    - vii) Are program offices expected to or allowed to engage COs before they are officially assigned? If yes, who does this, and for what types of procurements?
  - g. In your example, once COs were assigned to the program office, how often were they expected to engage (once a month, weekly, once every two weeks, etc.)?
    - iii) In your experience, is this frequency of interaction about right, too much, or too little? Why?
    - iv) Are there any tools or formal processes you used to track action items and deliverables as COs engage the program office?
  - h. How long does each step of the process take (months, weeks, days)? Let’s start from the first step.
    - iii) How much of this time involved you actively working on the process (e.g., preparing documentation, responding to comments from the CO, etc.)?



- iv) How much of this time was waiting time (e.g., waiting to hear back from the program office, others)?
- i. Are there steps in the process that result in an acquisition package being rejected or requiring rework? *If yes:*
  - iv) What causes an acquisition package to be rejected or require rework?
  - v) How much time does this add to the process?
  - vi) Where in the process does this happen?

*INTERVIEWER: Walk through the second example (didn't work well) at a high level, asking for key differences compared to the first example.*

27. The focus group discussions and Phase 1 interviews identified the following pain points in the current process. To what extent are the following pain points an issue for the acquisitions that you work on?
- a. COs tend to be assigned after the program office has already conducted market research and drafted procurement documents. This may lead to rework if wrong forms are used or inaccurately completed, market research is not deemed sufficient by the CO, or a suboptimal acquisition strategy was used.
    - i) Do you track or can you estimate how much time this adds to the acquisition planning process?
    - ii) What system or tool, if any, do you use to track processing time and progress? Are metrics shared or available to POs?
  - b. SharePoint does not have the most updated documents/forms.
    - i) Why or what is preventing the availability of current documents on SharePoint?
  - c. A lot of new processes in the last year or two have been introduced. Many program offices are uninformed about new requirements. The requirements may not be consistently communicated.
  - d. Other pain points (please explain)

### **Modifications to the Process**

13. The Summit Team is proposing some potential modifications to the “as-is” Value Stream Map and process that we just discussed. We would like to hear your thoughts on these modifications, especially as relates to the two experiences with acquisition planning processes you shared with us.

For each of the following suggestions, how (a) *desirable* and (b) *feasible* would the change be for your office? Please explain.

- a. Start acquisition planning as early as April in the previous fiscal year (currently listed as April of the previous fiscal year by some POs but most acknowledge the start is with the approved budget in January in the current fiscal year).



- b. Each program office would conduct a risk assessment in the year third quarter of the previous fiscal year (April-June) to determine the contract actions that they know have a high probability of being funded in their budget for the following fiscal year and may be complex. Acquisition planning for these contracts/programs could start as early as June or July of the previous fiscal year.
  - c. A CO would be assigned to program offices as early as the previous planning year so that everyone is informed and available at Step 1 – Define Need. The CO would remain assigned to the program office or acquisition plan item.
  - d. An Integrated Project Team (IPT) including program office, CO, OCIO, and other stakeholders would be formed early in the process (before the Market Research phase) and would remain involved throughout the process.
  - e. Are there other suggestions that are highly desirable? Other desirable suggestions that may not be feasible?
14. **[INTERVIEWER TO PROVIDE WORKING DEFINITION OF AGILE APPROACH]**
- Do you think your office would benefit from an agile approach to acquisition management?
- a. If yes, what would this look like for your office? What support would you need, if any, to implement an agile approach?
15. Thinking about all the suggestions to improve the process that we’ve just talked about, what barriers, if any, would need to be addressed to implement these suggestions?

### Other Follow-up Questions

1. How many business cases or recompetes does each program office usually handle or prepare during each acquisition planning cycle?
2. Do you want to encourage greater stakeholder engagement with industry by the program offices? If yes, what would that look like? When do you think this type of engagement would be most effective? Do you have any suggestions for how program offices can successfully approach for doing this?
3. Three suggestions for potential metrics to track the acquisition planning process emerged from Phase 1. To what extent would each of the following metrics be feasible and desirable to track?
  - a. Track the time from concept to actionable package
  - b. Track the time between when the procurement package is submitted to the procurement office and when it needs to be issued
  - c. Track the time between when the procurement package is submitted to the procurement office and when it is actionable
4. The Contracting Officers focus group mentioned a document that describes the approval process. Can we get a copy?
5. During our initial call, the Senior Procurement Executive referred in passing to a “career management plan,” which is “still a work in progress.”
  - a. What is in the career management plan? Is it specific to acquisition professionals?



- b. What is the status of the plan?
- c. The Senior Procurement Executive mentioned that the Acquisition Division is considering launching their own COR training class that would be specific to SBA.
  - i. What is the current status of this effort?
  - ii. What will the training look like? Who will take the training? How often?
- 6. During our initial scoping call, you sent us a Customer Service Plan that you had recently developed. Has the plan been rolled out?
  - a. If yes, how has it been received?

### **Other Potential Improvements [ONLY IF TIME AVAILABLE]**

*If time is available, these questions should be asked only if they did not come up in earlier discussions. Map to the pain points discussion.*

- 3. Here are some additional suggestions that emerged during our discussions with SBA stakeholders. To what extent would each of the following suggestions be helpful for improving the acquisition planning process in your office?
  - k. Give program offices more visibility into the process – provide a dashboard where they can track the status of their acquisition package once it has been submitted to the CO.
  - l. Improvements to Market Research
    - i. Clarify requirements for market research.
    - ii. Increase the level of engagement with industry to inform acquisition planning
  - m. Improvements to Forms and Documents
    - i. Post current versions of all forms in a central location, such as SharePoint, that is clearly communicated to COs and program offices.
    - ii. Give COs access to edit/update forms or upload new forms on SharePoint.
    - iii. Provide a “menu of service” to the program offices – the menu would show that type of acquisition strategy is appropriate given the office’s acquisition needs.
    - iv. Provide a library of examples of different types of contract vehicles, Performance Work Statements, Statements of Work, and templates that have been successful.
  - n. Improve monthly and quarterly meetings between the acquisition team and program offices by spending more time discussing strategic issues and less time on data reconciliation (reconcile data between the acquisition team and program office ahead of time).
  - o. Improvements to IT systems and Data Entry
    - i. Automate the acquisition planning process to require less data entry by program offices.
    - ii. Conduct additional testing and user training prior to rolling out changes to IT systems.
    - iii. Upgrade current IT systems to improve the user experience (if selected, please explain what upgrades you would like)



### Final Thoughts

4. Do you have any final thoughts that you would like to share about the topics we have been discussing?

Thank you for your time and insights. We appreciate your participation!



## APPENDIX B CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY INSTRUMENT

### Customer Service Survey for SBA Acquisition Division

#### Introduction

Thank you for participating in this brief online survey. Your responses will provide valuable input for the ongoing U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) evaluation of the agency's acquisition strategy and acquisition planning process. The goal of this survey is to learn how SBA can improve both the accuracy of its long-term acquisition forecasts and the effectiveness and efficiency of its acquisition planning.

There are no right or wrong answers to the survey questions, and your candor ensures results are accurate and helpful. You should answer the questions based on your best knowledge and experience. Researching any answer to the questions is not necessary.

SBA has hired independent contractors to manage the survey, ensuring your responses remain **strictly confidential**. Findings will not be attributed to individuals nor will the names of respondents be shared.

The survey should take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. We encourage you to complete the survey in one sitting, so please be sure you have enough time to complete the survey before you begin.

If you have any questions about the purpose of the study or why you were chosen, please contact:

*Shay Meinzer, SBA Contracting Officer's Representative (COR)*

202-539-1429

[shay.meinzer@sba.gov](mailto:shay.meinzer@sba.gov)

or

*Kassim Mbwana, Project Director*

202-744-5603

[kassim.mbwana@summitllc.us](mailto:kassim.mbwana@summitllc.us)

To begin the survey, click "Next."



Customer Service Survey for SBA Acquisition Division

\* 1. Which of the following activities do you perform at SBA with respect to the acquisition process? (Select all that apply.)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Develop business cases for new program needs        | <input type="checkbox"/> Other role in acquisition planning/forecasting   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Track contract spending and periods of performance  | <input type="checkbox"/> Manage ongoing program and/or acquisition needs  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Identify new program needs and/or acquisition needs | <input type="checkbox"/> Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Approve budgetary and/or acquisition needs          |   |



Customer Service Survey for SBA Acquisition Division

Individual Roles and Responsibilities

\* 2. Are acquisition-related functions, including acquisition planning, part of your primary duties?

Yes

No

\* 3. Are you currently a Contracting Officer's Representative (COR)?

Yes

No

\* 4. What office do you work in?



Customer Service Survey for SBA Acquisition Division

Familiarity with the Acquisition Planning Process

\* 5. How familiar are you with the acquisition planning process (e.g., data needs, tasks, timeline)?

- Very familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Somewhat unfamiliar
- Very unfamiliar

\* 6. How clear are the individual roles and responsibilities for all people involved in acquisition planning in your office?

- Very clear
- Somewhat clear
- Somewhat unclear
- Very unclear



Customer Service Survey for SBA Acquisition Division

Outcomes

\* 7. In your opinion, how important are the following outcomes of the acquisition planning process?

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important
Improve understanding within SBA about the agency's acquisition process.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improve small businesses' understanding of SBA's acquisition needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Better forecast the resources needed to meet program needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facilitate early communications between program and acquisition staff.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improve coordination and communication between program and acquisition staff.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ensure adequate time is available to conduct market research.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ensure adequate time is available to develop solicitation language that will result in the best value to the government.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reduce the potential for problems at the time of award and during contract performance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improve the efficiency of the acquisition process (less back-and-forth and quicker approval).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improve bid quality by providing advanced notice to potentially interested vendors.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Comply with agency requirements.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Customer Service Survey for SBA Acquisition Division

Timing of Acquisition Planning

\* 8. On average, how long before a new contract award do you begin identifying your acquisition needs?

- Less than 3 months
- 3 months to less than 6 months
- 6 months to less than 9 months
- 9 months to less than 1 year
- 1 year to less than 2 years
- 2 years to less than 3 years
- 3 or more years

\* 9. On average, how long before a re-compete contract award do you begin identifying your acquisition needs?

- Less than 3 months
- 3 months to less than 6 months
- 6 months to less than 9 months
- 9 months to less than 1 year
- 1 year to less than 2 years
- 2 years to less than 3 years
- 3 or more years
- I don't use re-compete contracts and I am not familiar with re-compete contracts



## Customer Service Survey for SBA Acquisition Division

### Backward or Reverse Acquisition Planning

\* 10. "Backward" or "reverse acquisition planning" starts by defining the desired outcome from the acquisition (e.g., achieving the program's mission) and then working backward to define the acquisition requirements that will lead to the desired goal.

How often do you use "backward" or "reverse acquisition planning"?

- Always
- Frequently
- Occasionally
- Rarely
- Never
- I am not familiar with backward or reverse acquisition planning



Customer Service Survey for SBA Acquisition Division

Coordination with Others

\* 11. Who do you coordinate with to identify and plan acquisition needs? (Select all that apply.)

- Other Program Managers in my office
- Senior program staff in my office
- Budget staff in my office
- Staff in the OCFO's Budget Office
- Contracting Officers
- Acquisition Procurement Analysts
- Other (please specify)



Customer Service Survey for SBA Acquisition Division

Coordination with Others

\* 12. How often do you coordinate with each staff to identify and plan for future acquisition needs?

	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Other Program Managers in my office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Senior program staff in my office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Budget staff in my office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Staff in the OCFO's Budget Office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Contracting Officers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Acquisition Procurement Analysts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
[Insert text from Other]	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\* 13. How helpful is each staff in acquisition planning?

	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not very helpful	Not at all helpful	Not applicable
Other Program Managers in my office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Senior program staff in my office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Budget staff in my office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Staff in the OCFO's Budget Office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Contracting Officers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Acquisition Procurement Analysts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
[Insert text from Other]	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Customer Service Survey for SBA Acquisition Division

Challenges

\* 14. Which obstacles prevent you from defining acquisition needs 2 to 3 years in advance of contract award?  
(Select all that apply.)

- Changing program direction and priorities
- Insufficient staff resources
- Budget uncertainties
- Confusion about information needed for acquisition planning
- Lack of communication from the Acquisition Division
- Inefficiencies in communicating with others in my office about acquisition planning
- None of the above (I already define acquisition needs 2-3 years in advance)
- Other (please specify)



\* 15. How challenging do you find the following parts of the acquisition planning process?

	Very challenging	Somewhat challenging	Not very challenging	Not at all challenging	This is not part of my role
Describing and defining the programmatic need	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Basic requirements gathering	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conducting market research	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Determining the appropriate acquisition strategy (e.g., modification, task order/delivery order, option, new contract award)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Competition justification	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Determining the appropriate contract vehicle	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Architecture Review Board (ARB) and Business Technology Investment Council (BTIC) review process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Obtaining Independent Government Cost Estimate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
IT Acquisition Review Tracker (ITART) process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Projecting the timing of acquisition need(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing required acquisition documentation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (Please Specify Below)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please specify "Other".



Customer Service Survey for SBA Acquisition Division

Acquisition Planning for Your Office

For the following questions, please think about how your office plans for acquisitions.

\* 16. On average, how efficient is your office at identifying future acquisition needs?

- Very efficient
- Somewhat efficient
- Somewhat inefficient
- Very inefficient

\* 17. How often do you think that your office's acquisition planning process consistently contributes to...

	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
High-Quality Procurements	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Timely Procurements	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\* 18. If you could change or streamline anything in your office to make future acquisition planning easier, what would it be?



## Customer Service Survey for SBA Acquisition Division

### Interactions with the Acquisition Division

For the last set of questions, please think about your interactions with the SBA Acquisition Division with respect to acquisition planning. If you worked with more than one person, please think of the person you worked with the most. For the questions below, we refer to this person as your "Acquisition Division contact."

\* 19. Overall, how would you rate your Acquisition Division contact?

- Very favorable
- Somewhat favorable
- Neither favorable or unfavorable
- Somewhat unfavorable
- Very unfavorable

\* 20. How often do you interact with your Acquisition Division contact on acquisition planning activities?

- Once a year
- Twice a year
- Once a quarter
- Continuously throughout the year
- More frequently
- I do not directly interact with the acquisition division

\* 21. On average, how effective do you feel the Acquisition Division is in helping to identify and plan for your office's future acquisition needs?

- Very effective
- Somewhat effective
- Somewhat ineffective
- Very ineffective
- No opinion



\* 22. How often do you agree with the following statements?

My Acquisition Division contact (Contracting Officer, Procurement Analyst):

	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Was honest with me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understood my needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Anticipated my needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Looked out for my best interests	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Was knowledgeable about the acquisition planning process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communicated information clearly to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Makes me look forward to working with them in the future	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\* 23. If you could change or streamline any part of the acquisition planning process as a whole, what would it be?

24. Is there anything else that you think the acquisition division should know about the acquisition planning process?



---

## CUSTOMER SERVICE SURVEY FOR SBA ACQUISITION DIVISION

(this is a script of the original survey provided for accessibility purposes)

### Introduction

Thank you for participating in this brief online survey. Your responses will provide valuable input for the ongoing U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) evaluation of the agency's acquisition strategy and acquisition planning process. The goal of this survey is to learn how SBA can improve both the accuracy of its long-term acquisition forecasts and the effectiveness and efficiency of its acquisition planning.

There are no right or wrong answers to the survey questions, and your candor ensures results are accurate and helpful. You should answer the questions based on your best knowledge and experience. Researching any answer to the questions is not necessary.

SBA has hired independent contractors to manage the survey, ensuring your responses remain strictly confidential. Findings will not be attributed to individuals nor will the names of respondents be shared.

The survey should take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. We encourage you to complete the survey in one sitting, so please be sure you have enough time to complete the survey before you begin.

If you have any questions about the purpose of the study or why you were chosen, please contact

*Shay Meinzer, SBA Contracting Officer's Representative (COR)*

202-539-1429

shay.meinzer@sba.gov

or

*Kassim Mbwana, Protect Director*

202-744-5603

kassim.mbwana@summitllc.us

To begin the survey, click "Next."



1. Which of the following activities do you perform at SBA with respect to the acquisition process? (Select all that apply.)

- Develop business cases for new program needs
- Track contract spending and periods of performance
- Identify new program needs and/or acquisition needs
- Approve budgetary and/or acquisition needs
- Other role in acquisition planning/forecasting
- Manage ongoing program and/or acquisition needs
- Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting

### Individual Roles and Responsibilities

2. Are acquisition-related functions, including acquisition planning, part of your primary duties?

- Yes
- No

3. Are you currently a Contracting Officer's Representative (COR)?

- Yes
- No

4. What office do you work in?

### Familiarity with the Acquisition Planning Process

5. How familiar are you with the acquisition planning process (e.g., data needs, tasks, timeline)?

- Very familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Somewhat unfamiliar
- Very unfamiliar



6. How clear are the individual roles and responsibilities for all people involved in acquisition planning in your office?

- Very clear
- Somewhat clear
- Somewhat unclear
- Very unclear

**Outcomes**

7. In your opinion, how important are the following outcomes of the acquisition planning process?

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important
Improve understanding within SBA about the agency's acquisition process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improve small businesses' understanding of SBA's acquisition needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Better forecast the resources needed to meet program needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facilitate early communications between program and acquisition staff.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improve coordination and communication between program and acquisition staff.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ensure adequate time is available to conduct market research.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ensure adequate time is available to develop solicitation language that will result in the best value to the government.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reduce the potential for problems at the time of award and during contract performance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improve the efficiency of the acquisition process (less back-and-forth and quicker approval).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improve bid quality by providing advanced notice to potentially interested vendors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Comply with agency requirements	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Timing of Acquisition Planning**

8. On average, how long before a new contract award do you begin identifying your acquisition needs?

- Less than 3 months



- 3 months to less than 6 months
- 6 months to less than 9 months
- 9 months to less than 1 year
- 1 year to less than 2 years
- 2 years to less than 3 years
- 3 or more years

9. On average, how long before a re-compete contract award do you begin identifying your acquisition

- Less than 3 months
- 3 months to less than 6 months
- 6 months to less than 9 months
- 9 months to less than 1 year
- 1 year to less than 2 years
- 2 years to less than 3 years
- 3 or more years
- I don't use re-compete contracts and I am not familiar with re-compete contracts

#### Backward or Reverse Acquisition Planning

10. "Backward" or "reverse acquisition planning" starts by defining the desired outcome from the acquisition (e.g., achieving the program's mission) and then working backward to define the acquisition requirements that will lead to the desired goal.

How often do you use "backward" or "reverse acquisition planning"?

- Always
- Frequently
- Occasionally
- Rarely
- Never



I am not familiar with backward or reverse acquisition planning

**Coordination with Others**

11. Who do you coordinate with to identify and plan acquisition needs? (Select all that apply.)

- Other Program Managers in my office
- Senior program staff in my office
- Budget staff in my office
- Staff in the OCFO's Budget Office
- Contracting Officers
- Acquisition Procurement Analysts
- Other (please specify)

12. How often do you coordinate with each staff to identify and plan for future acquisition needs?

	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Other Program Managers in my office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Senior program staff in my office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Budget staff in my office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Staff in the OCFOs Budget Office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Contracting Officers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Acquisition Procurement Analysts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
[Insert text from Other]	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. How helpful is each staff in acquisition planning?

	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not very helpful	Not at all helpful	Not applicable
Other Program Managers in my office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Senior program staff in my office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not very helpful	Not at all helpful	Not applicable
Budget staff in my office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Staff in the OCFOs Budget Office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Contracting Officers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Acquisition Procurement Analysts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
[Insert text from Other]	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. Which obstacles prevent you from defining acquisition needs 2 to 3 years in advance of contract award? (Select all that apply.)

- Changing program direction and priorities
- Insufficient staff resources
- Budget uncertainties
- Confusion about information needed for acquisition planning
- Lack of communication from the Acquisition Division
- Inefficiencies in communicating with others in my office about acquisition planning
- None of the above (I already define acquisition needs 2-3 years in advance)
- Other (please specify)

15. How challenging do you find the following parts of the acquisition planning process?

	Very challenging	Somewhat challenging	Not very challenging	Not at all challenging	This is not part of my role
Describing and defining the programmatic need	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Basic requirements gathering	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conducting market research	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Determining the appropriate acquisition strategy (e.g. modification, task order/delivery order, option, new contract award)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Competition justification	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Determining the appropriate contract vehicle	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Very challenging	Somewhat challenging	Not very challenging	Not at all challenging	This is not part of my role
Architecture Review Board (ARB) and Business Technology Investment Council (BTIC) review process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Obtaining Independent Government Cost Estimate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
IT Acquisition Review Tracker (ITART) process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Projecting the timing of acquisition need(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing required acquisition documentation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (Please Specify Below)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please specify "Other"

### Acquisition Planning for Your Office

For the following questions, please think about how your office plans for acquisitions.

16. On average, how efficient is your office at identifying future acquisition needs?

- Very efficient
- Somewhat efficient
- Somewhat inefficient
- Very inefficient

17. How often do you think that your office's acquisition planning process consistently contributes to...

	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
High-Quality Procurements	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Timely Procurements	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. If you could change or streamline anything in your office to make future acquisition planning easier, what would it be?



### Interactions with the Acquisition Division

For the last set of questions, please think about your interactions with the SBA Acquisition Division with respect to acquisition planning. If you worked with more than one person, please think of the person you worked with the most. For the questions below, we refer to this person as your “Acquisition Division contact.”

**19.** Overall, how would you rate your Acquisition Division contact?

- Very favorable
- Somewhat favorable
- Neither favorable or unfavorable
- Somewhat unfavorable
- Very unfavorable

**20.** How often do you interact with your Acquisition Division contact on acquisition planning activities?

- Once a year
- Twice a year
- Once a quarter
- Continuously throughout the year
- More frequently
- I do not directly interact with the acquisition division

**21.** On average, how effective do you feel the Acquisition Division is in helping to identify and plan for your office's future acquisition needs?

- Very effective
- Somewhat effective
- Somewhat ineffective
- Very ineffective
- No opinion

**22.** How often do you agree with the following statements?

My Acquisition Division contact (Contracting Officer. Procurement Analyst):



	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Was honest with me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understood my needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Anticipated my needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Looked out for my best interests	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Was knowledgeable about the acquisition planning process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communicated information clearly to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Makes me look forward to working with them in the future	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**23.** If you could change or streamline any part of the acquisition planning process as a whole, what would it be?

**24.** Is there anything else that you think the acquisition division should know about the acquisition planning process?



## APPENDIX C SURVEY SUMMARY STATISTICS

**Table C-1: Question 1 – Which of the Following Activities Do You Perform at SBA with Respect to the Acquisitions Process? (Select all that apply.)**

Option	Count
Develop business cases for new program needs	11
Track contract spending and periods of performance	12
Identify new program needs and/or acquisition needs	16
Approved budgetary and/or acquisition needs	9
Other Role in acquisition planning/forecasting	6
Manage ongoing program and/or acquisition needs	15
Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting	2
<b>Total Number of Respondents</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Missing</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Reason for Missing</b>	<b>N/A</b>

**Table C-2: Question 2 – Are Acquisition-Related Functions, including Acquisition Planning, Part of Your Primary Duties?**

Option	Count
Yes	13
No	6
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Missing</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Reason for Missing</b>	<i>Automatic disqualification from completing the survey (“Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting”)</i>

**Table C-3: Question 3 – Are You Currently a Contracting Officer’s Representative (COR)?**

Option	Count
Yes	10
No	9
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Missing</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Reason for Missing</b>	<i>Automatic disqualification from completing the survey (“Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting”)</i>



**Table C.-4: Question 4 – What Office Do You Work In?**

Option	Count
Office of Investment and Innovation	1
Office of Disaster Assistance	4
Office of Government Contracting and Business Development	2
Office of Entrepreneurial Development	1
Office of International Trade	1
Office of Veterans Business Development	1
Office of Capital Access	2
Office of Performance Management and the Chief Financial Officer	6
Office of Communications and Public Liaison	1
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Missing</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Reason for Missing</b>	<i>Automatic disqualification from completing the survey (“Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting”)</i>

**Table C-5: Question 5 – How Familiar Are You with the Acquisition Planning Process (e.g., data needs, tasks, timelines)?**

Option	Count
Very familiar	9
Somewhat familiar	7
Somewhat unfamiliar	3
Very unfamiliar	0
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Missing</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Reason for Missing</b>	<i>Automatic disqualification from completing the survey (“Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting”)</i>

**Table C-6: Question 6 – How Clear Are the Individual Roles and Responsibilities for All People Involved in Acquisition Planning in Your Office?**

Option	Count
Very clear	10
Somewhat clear	6
Somewhat unclear	3
Very unclear	0
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Missing</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Reason for Missing</b>	<i>Automatic disqualification from completing the survey (“Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting”)</i>



**Table C-7: Question 7 – In Your Opinion, How Important Are the Following Outcomes of the Acquisition Planning Process?**

Outcome	Very important Count	Somewhat important Count	Not very important Count	Not at all important Count
Improve understanding within SBA about the agency's acquisition process.	11	8	0	0
Improve understanding within SBA about the agency's acquisition process.	8	6	5	0
Better forecast the resources needed to meet program needs.	13	6	0	0
Facilitate early communications between program and acquisition staff.	15	4	0	0
Improve coordination and communication between program and acquisition staff.	16	3	0	0
Ensure adequate time is available to conduct market research.	7	11	1	0
Ensure adequate time is available to develop solicitation language that will result in the best value to the government.	14	4	1	0
Reduce the potential for problems at the time of award and during contract performance.	12	6	1	0
Improve the efficiency of the acquisition process (less back-and-forth and quicker approval).	11	7	1	0
Improve bid quality by providing advance notice to potentially interested vendors.	8	7	4	0
Comply with agency requirements.	11	8	0	0
<b>Total Number of Respondents</b>	19			
<b>Missing</b>	2			
<b>Reason for Missing</b>	<i>Automatic disqualification from completing the survey ("Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting")</i>			



**Table C-8: Question 8 – On Average, How Long Before a New Contract Award Do You Begin to Identify Your Acquisition Needs?**

Option	Count
< 3 months	1
3–6 months	5
6–9 months	6
9–12 months	4
1–2 years	3
2–3 years	0
3+ years	0
<b>Total Count</b>	19
<b>Missing</b>	2
<b>Reason for Missing</b>	<i>Automatic disqualification from completing the survey (“Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting”)</i>

**Table C-9: Question 9 – On Average, How Long Before a Recompete Contract Award Do You Begin to Identify Your Acquisition Needs?**

Option	Count
< 3 months	1
3–6 months	2
6–9 months	3
9–12 months	6
1–2 years	5
2–3 years	0
3+ years	0
I don’t use recompetete contracts	2
<b>Total Count</b>	19
<b>Missing</b>	2
<b>Reason for Missing</b>	<i>Automatic disqualification from completing the survey (“Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting”)</i>

**Table C-10: Question 10 – How Often Do You Use Backward<sup>1</sup> or Reverse Acquisition Planning?**

Option	Count
Always	3
Frequently	5
Occasionally	1
Rarely	3
Never	4
I’m not familiar with reverse acquisition planning	3
<b>Total Count</b>	19
<b>Missing</b>	2
<b>Reason for Missing</b>	<i>Automatic disqualification from completing the survey (“Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting”)</i>

<sup>1</sup> “Backward” or “reverse acquisition planning” starts by defining the desired outcome from the acquisition (e.g., achieving the program’s mission) and then working backward to define the acquisition requirements that will lead to the desired goal.



**Table C-11: Question 11 – Who Do You Coordinate with to Identify and Plan Acquisition Needs?**  
(Select all that apply.)

Option	Count
Other PMs in my office	11
Senior program staff in my office	15
Budget staff in my office	11
Staff in the OCFO's budget office	7
Contracting officers	11
Acquisition procurement analysts	2
Other	0
<b>Total Number of Respondents</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Missing</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Reason for Missing</b>	<i>Automatic disqualification from completing the survey ("Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting")</i>

**Table C-12: Question 12 – How Often Do You Coordinate with Each Staff to Identify and Plan for Future Acquisition Needs?**

Staff	Always Count	Frequently Count	Occasionally Count	Rarely Count	Never Count
Other PMs in my office	6	2	3	0	0
Senior program staff in my office	8	4	3	0	0
Budget staff in my office	9	0	2	0	0
Staff in the OCFO's budget office	2	3	2	0	0
Contracting officers	5	3	3	0	0
Acquisition procurement analysts	1	1	0	0	0
Other ( <i>Leadership in OCFO</i> )	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Total Number of Respondents</b>	<b>19</b>				
<b>Missing</b>	<b>2</b>				
<b>Reason for Missing</b>	<i>Automatic disqualification from completing the survey ("Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting")</i>				

Note: Respondents were only shown the staff options that they selected in Question 11 (Table ). The counts will not always add up to 19 for each staff option.


**Table C-13: Question 13 – How Helpful Is Each Staff in Acquisition Planning?**

Staff	Very helpful Count	Somewhat helpful Count	Not very helpful Count	Not at all helpful Count	Not applicable Count
Other PMs in my office	6	5	0	0	8
Senior program staff in my office	9	6	0	0	4
Budget staff in my office	7	4	0	0	8
Staff in the OCFO's budget office	5	2	0	0	12
Contracting officers	9	2	0	0	8
Acquisition procurement analysts	1	1	0	0	17
Other	0	0	0	0	19
<b>Total Number of Respondents</b>	19				
<b>Missing</b>	2				
<b>Reason for Missing</b>	2 automatic disqualifications from completing the survey ("Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting")				

Note: Respondents were only shown the staff options that they selected in Question 11 (Table ). The counts will not always add up to 19 for each staff option.



**Table C-14: Question 14 – Which Obstacles Prevent You from Defining Acquisition Needs 2–3 Years in Advance of Contract Award? (Select all that apply.)**

Option	Count
Changing program direction and priorities	12
Insufficient staff resources	5
Budget uncertainties	14
Confusion about information needed for acquisition planning	5
Lack of communication from the Acquisition Division	3
Inefficiencies in communicating with others in my office about acquisition planning	0
None of the above (I already define acquisition needs 2–3 years in advance)	0
Other	0
<b>Total Number of Respondents</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Missing</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Reason for Missing</b>	<i>2 automatic disqualifications from completing the survey (“Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting”); 2 incomplete survey responses</i>

**Table C-15: Question 15 – How Challenging Do You Find the Following Parts of the Acquisition Planning Process?**

Option	Very challenging Count	Somewhat challenging Count	Not very challenging Count	Not at all challenging Count	This is not part of my role
Describing and defining the programmatic need	1	4	8	5	0
Basic requirements gathering	0	6	9	3	0
Conducting market research	2	5	6	4	1
Determining the appropriate acquisition strategy	2	6	7	2	1
Competition justification	0	5	8	3	2
Determining the appropriate contract vehicle	0	9	4	2	3
Architecture Review Board (ARB) and Business Technology Investment Council (BTIC) review process	1	5	3	1	8
Obtaining independent government cost estimate	1	5	6	3	3
IT Acquisition Review Tracker (ITART) process	3	2	3	1	9
Projecting the timing of acquisition need(s)	2	6	4	5	1



Option	Very challenging Count	Somewhat challenging Count	Not very challenging Count	Not at all challenging Count	This is not part of my role
Developing required acquisition documentation	1	7	7	2	1
Other	1	1	3	3	10
<b>Total Number of Respondents</b>	18				
<b>Missing</b>	3				
<b>Reason for Missing</b>	2 automatic disqualifications from completing the survey ("Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting"); 1 incomplete survey response				

**Table C-16: Question 16 – On Average, How Efficient Is Your Office at Identifying Future Acquisition Needs?**

Option	Count
Very efficient	4
Somewhat efficient	11
Somewhat inefficient	3
Very inefficient	0
<b>Total Count</b>	18
<b>Missing</b>	3
<b>Reason for Missing</b>	2 automatic disqualifications from completing the survey ("Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting"); 1 incomplete survey response



**Table C-17: Question 17 – How Often Do You Think That Your Office’s Acquisition Planning Process Consistently Contributes to...**

Option	Always Count	Frequently Count	Occasionally Count	Rarely Count	Never Count
High quality procurements	2	11	4	1	0
Timely procurements	2	10	4	2	0
<b>Total Number of Respondents</b>	18				
<b>Missing</b>	3				
<b>Reason for Missing</b>	2 automatic disqualifications from completing the survey (“Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting”); 1 incomplete survey response				

**Table C-18: Question 18 – Overall, How Would You Rate Your Acquisition Division Contact?**

Option	Count
Very favorable	8
Somewhat favorable	7
Neither favorable or unfavorable	1
Somewhat unfavorable	2
Very unfavorable	0
<b>Total Count</b>	18
<b>Missing</b>	3
<b>Reason for Missing</b>	2 automatic disqualifications from completing the survey (“Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting”); 1 incomplete survey response



**Table C-19: Question 19 – How Often Do You Interact with Your Acquisition Division Contact on Acquisition Planning Activities?**

Option	Count
Once a year	1
Twice a year	0
Once a quarter	2
Continuously throughout the year	7
More frequently	4
I do not directly interact with the Acquisition Division	4
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Missing</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Reason for Missing</b>	<i>2 automatic disqualifications from completing the survey (“Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting”); 1 incomplete survey response</i>

**Table C-20: Question 20 – On Average, How Effective Do You Feel the Acquisition Division Is in Helping to Identify and Plan for Your Office’s Future Acquisition Needs?**

Option	Count
Very effective	5
Somewhat effective	6
Somewhat ineffective	4
Very ineffective	1
No opinion	2
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Missing</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Reason for Missing</b>	<i>2 automatic disqualifications from completing the survey (“Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting”); 1 incomplete survey response</i>



**Table C-21: Question 21 – How Often Do You Agree with the Following Statements? My Acquisition Division Contact (contracting officer, procurement analyst):**

Staff	Always Count	Frequently Count	Occasionally Count	Rarely Count	Never Count
Was honest with me	6	9	2	0	1
Understood my needs	4	9	4	0	1
Anticipated my needs	1	9	7	0	1
Looked out for my best interests	7	6	4	0	1
Was knowledgeable about the acquisition planning process	6	10	1	0	1
Communicated information clearly to me	5	9	3	0	1
Makes me look forward to working with them in the future	4	9	4	0	1
<b>Total Number of Respondents</b>	18				
<b>Missing</b>	3				
<b>Reason for Missing</b>	2 automatic disqualifications from completing the survey (“Have no role in acquisition planning/forecasting”); 1 incomplete survey response				



## APPENDIX D DETAILED EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Section 3 describes the team’s methodology for evaluating the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA’s) acquisition planning process. This appendix includes a more detailed description of the methodology; description of data sources and methods, and how they were used to address each objective; and limitations of the methodology and mitigation strategies.

### OVERVIEW OF EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The SBA has three core evaluation objectives: (1) identify factors that impede the SBA’s ability to improve its acquisition planning process; (2) assess how satisfied customers (PMs performing acquisition planning) are with the acquisition support they receive from all parts of the acquisition team—policy, operations, and leadership; and (3) identify how the SBA can improve its acquisition planning process. The Summit Team designed the evaluation methodology to address these objectives.

Key data sources for conducting this evaluation include a literature review, program documentation and acquisition data, interviews with PMs and staff in program offices and the Acquisition Division, focus groups with stakeholders who participate in acquisition planning, VSM, and a customer satisfaction survey of PMs who perform acquisition planning. Key evaluation methods include: a summary of literature review findings, descriptive statistics on SBA acquisition data, survey analysis, issue reporting of key themes raised in the interviews and focus groups, creation of as-is and to-be VSMS, and a best practices review.

Table D-1 maps the evaluation objectives to the data sources and methods used in the evaluation. Sections 3.2 and 3.3 provide additional information about each data source and method.

**Table D-1: Evaluation Objectives Mapped to Data Sources and Methods**

Evaluation Objective	Data Sources	Methods
1. Identify factors that impede the SBA’s ability to improve its acquisition planning process	Documents and program data, interviews, focus groups,	Descriptive statistics, issue reporting, as-is VSM
2. Assess program manager satisfaction with the acquisition planning process	Customer satisfaction survey	Survey analysis, to-be VSM
3. Identify how the SBA can improve its acquisition planning process	Literature review findings, interviews, focus groups, customer satisfaction survey	Literature review, issue reporting, as-is and to-be VSMS, best practices review, descriptive statistics, survey analysis

### DATA SOURCES

This section describes the data sources for the evaluation: (1) literature, (2) program data and documentation, (3 &4) interviews and focus groups, and (4) customer satisfaction survey.



## Literature

The Summit Team reviewed a variety of literature on this topic: FAR legislation; the SBA's Cornerstone OMB A-123 Assessments of the Acquisition Division and OIG report on acquisition services; the SOP for the SBA's Acquisition Process and the SOP for Managing SBA IT Investments; the FITARA Implementation Plan; and the SBA's Acquisition Review Form (Version 4) and Acquisition Review Process (Version 3). To provide context for the evaluation and inform the best practices review, the team also reviewed reports from the U.S. GAO related to acquisition processes of other federal agencies; the DOC Acquisition Manual; and the DHS Acquisition Manual, Acquisition Planning Guide, and Market Research Guide.

The literature review outlined findings on the following issues:

1. A brief discussion of federal guidelines on implementing acquisition planning processes
2. An overview of frameworks and guidelines for acquisition planning
3. A review of challenges associated with acquisition planning, focusing on federal agencies
4. An overview of acquisition planning at other federal agencies to identify best practices
5. A review of the SBA's experience with acquisition planning based on findings from the OIG and Cornerstone OMB A-123 Assessments

We reviewed the updated SBA Acquisitions SOP that informs the SBA's implementation of FAR and compared the SBA's process to those described in DOC and DHS Acquisition Manuals and key staff informant interviews to identify and develop best practices. Findings on acquisition planning pain points and on processes working well were assessed through the study's other activities, including key informant interviews, focus groups, VSM, and a targeted SBA staff survey.

## Program Data and Documentation

As noted above, the team reviewed SBA documentation including the Cornerstone Assessments for 2018 and the SBA's updated SOP for acquisition. The Cornerstone Assessments provide important background for the current evaluation by describing findings and recommendations from previous reviews of the SBA's acquisition process (Section 1.2). The SOP provided important information about how the SBA's acquisition process is supposed to function; the interviews and focus groups explored the extent to which the SOP has been operationalized and ways to strengthen SOP implementation.

Other important contextual information includes a spend analysis of the types of services and products that the SBA is purchasing, the types of contracts and task orders used, and small business status. The SBA provided this information for FY 2009 through FY 2019. The SBA also provided data from the monthly Acquisition Division Dashboard Reports (awards through September 2019) and information on late acquisition packages in FY 2019, as well as information on SBA Funds Availability (FY19 Final) that compares each office's budget to the amount of budget used in FY 2019. These data are summarized and presented in Section 2.1 above.

In addition to the contracting data summarized above, the Summit Team and the SBA explored the availability of data to support acquisition forecasting metrics, which were ultimately not available. For example, information about the quality of program office submittals and the amount of back-and-forth between the procurement office and program offices is not systematically tracked in a central location. Instead, the team inquired about these topics during the interviews, focus groups, and customer satisfaction survey.



The team reviewed, organized, and integrated data provided by the SBA on its acquisitions outcomes and acquisition process. This provided some quantitative information to inform our evaluation. Our analysis included 10-year acquisition data, the late acquisition package data for FY 2019, and the Acquisition Division Dashboard Report for FY 2019.

## Interviews and Focus Groups

**Interviews.** The team conducted a total of 18 interviews with a variety of stakeholders who participate in the SBA's acquisition planning process. The interviews helped identify factors that impede the SBA's ability to improve its acquisition planning process and ways that the SBA can improve the process.

We conducted the interviews in two phases to ensure that they both informed and built upon the other evaluation methods. We conducted the Phase 1 interviews early in the evaluation process to develop a strong understanding of barriers to improving the SBA's acquisition planning process and to begin to identify what an enhanced process might look like. The insights gleaned from the initial interviews helped inform the VSM and focus group discussions. Following the focus groups, we conducted Phase 2 of the interviews. Phase 2 addressed targeted questions stemming from the other data collection methods; confirmed or elaborated on information collected from the VSM, focus groups, and other methods; and sought recommendations for possible improvements to the acquisition planning process. The team conducted 10 interviews in Phase 1, and eight interviews in Phase 2.

Given the diversity of stakeholders and interview topics covered (see below), we used a purposive sampling approach to identify interview candidates. Specifically, we worked with the SBA to identify interview candidates who could provide diverse perspectives from across the agency, including the Acquisition Division and multiple program offices, to maximize insights and learning relevant to the core evaluation objectives.

Nearly all the interviews addressed timeliness, quality, and roles and responsibilities. Other topics were relevant for a subset of interviews; not every interview participant was asked to comment on every topic. The interviews collectively addressed the following topics:

- Roles and responsibilities in the acquisition planning process
- Timeliness (lead time) of program office submissions to the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and Acquisition Division (forecasts and specific acquisition needs)
- Quality and completeness of acquisition packages
- Volume and cause of "back-and-forth" engagements among the Acquisition Division, OCIO, and the program offices
- Use of standardized processes and tools for preparing acquisition packages
- Use of integrated project teams or cross-functional teams
- Workload management and priorities
- Observed pain points
- Previous attempts to improve the process, and the status of those efforts
- Ideas to improve the process

The interview guides are provided in [Appendix A](#).

The team drafted an advance letter for the SBA to send to potential interviewees before we initiated contact. Once interviewees were recruited, the Summit Team scheduled and conducted the interviews. To provide participants with an opportunity to prepare for the interview, we sent a copy of



the interview guide to participants before each phone call. The Summit Team sent a reminder email in advance of each call. One to two senior interviewers from the Summit Team led the interview, and an analyst took notes.

Each interview was approximately 60 minutes in length. Interviewees were assured of confidentiality to encourage candor in their responses. We informed respondents that their comments would be reported in aggregate and would not be attributed to specific organizations or individuals. The interviews followed a semi-structured format to ensure consistency in the topics addressed in each interview while still allowing sufficient flexibility for in-depth discussion. We recorded the interview sessions (with each participant's permission) and took notes during the interviews to ensure accuracy.

The interview data was recorded, summarized, and coded for analysis. We followed a systematic procedure to code data according to predetermined themes while still allowing room for exploration and discovery. We analyzed interview data using sequential processes. First, we reviewed the interview notes for clarity and identified themes that might be included in the coding structure. Second, we coded the interview findings using qualitative research software (NVivo). Third, we created summaries of the interview findings.

**Focus Group Discussions.** The focus groups accommodated more participants than we could interview individually, and the participants were able to build on each other's comments, so that we developed a better understanding of similarities and differences in the acquisition planning process across offices. Also, learning about the challenges faced by both sides of the acquisition process (program offices and contracting officers [COs]) provided a holistic understanding of the SBA acquisition planning process as we identified pain points and developed recommendations for improvement.

The Summit Team conducted three focus groups with PMs performing acquisition planning, COs, and acquisition analysts. Each of these groups plays a unique but complementary role in the acquisition process:

- **Program managers:** Identify program office business needs that then become acquisition requirements. They are responsible for developing the business case for new work, getting approval to secure contracted resources, and working with the budget officers to secure funding. PMs were our primary focus group target.
- **Contracting officers:** Oversee the acquisition planning process to ensure it proceeds according to the FAR; provide recommendations on, and make final determinations on, acquisition strategies; and sign off on all final acquisition documents (e.g., RFIs, RFPs) and handle vendor communication. COs do not typically play a role in acquisition forecasting other than to align PMs' needs with the contracting office resources available to meet those needs. If PMs do an inadequate job planning the acquisition forecast, the COs will have more difficulty managing their workload.
- **Acquisition procurement analysts:** Work with and ensure that PMs, COs, and other stakeholders in the SBA's acquisition process follow policy and submit high quality acquisition requests that will not require onerous back-and-forth with the COs. They may also assist COs by conducting market research, reviewing acquisition packages, and advising on possible contract vehicles.



We conducted the focus groups after the first round of interviews and following the VSM exercise. We used the focus groups to obtain additional perspectives on the Phase 1 interview topics, validate or refine the VSM, and probe barriers and potential solutions that may not have been previously identified.

All three focus groups addressed topics similar to those of the Phase 1 interviews (see above); discussed the extent to which the as-is process map reflects the processes used to procure other products and services; and discussed how and to what extent potential solutions to address IT-related acquisition issues applicable to other offices and product/service categories. In addition, we asked questions specific to each group's role in the acquisition process.

We worked with the SBA to identify representatives from each stakeholder group to participate in the focus groups. We drafted an advance letter for the SBA to send to potential focus group participants before the Summit Team initiated contact. Focus group moderators from the Summit Team led the focus groups according to the focus group guides, and an analyst took notes. We had planned to conduct the focus groups in person at SBA headquarters in Washington, DC, with the COs who are based in Denver joining by webinar. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we conducted all focus groups by webinar.

Each focus group was 60 minutes in length. To encourage candor in responses, we ensured participants of confidentiality. We also informed participants that we would report their comments in aggregate and not attribute to any specific individuals.

The team coded and analyzed the focus group responses, organizing responses to each major topic/question and coding the key themes in NVivo along with the interview notes. This allowed us to identify areas of consistency or divergence, and to group consistent findings in our summary of findings.

**Issue Reporting (Interviews and Focus Groups).** The interviews and focus groups addressed barriers in the current acquisition planning process and suggestions to improve the process. We coded themes in the interviews and focus groups and created a summary of findings. We looked for areas of convergence or divergence between the interviews and focus groups, for example, between PMs and COs and across different program offices. The analysis helped to identify findings and recommendations that may be broadly applicable across acquisition projects at the SBA.

### Customer Satisfaction Survey

We conducted a satisfaction survey of the Acquisition Division's internal customers (PMs performing acquisition planning). The survey focused on the PMs' experience with the SBA's acquisition planning process. In addition to assessing customer satisfaction, the survey helped inform the to-be VSM.

Survey topics included:

- How early program acquisition needs can be identified
- Whether PMs "backward plan"<sup>1</sup> when they start the acquisition process
- Who PMs consult throughout the acquisition process
- PMs' understanding of the acquisition planning process

---

<sup>1</sup> "Backward" or "reverse acquisition planning" starts by defining the desired outcome from the acquisition (e.g., achieving the program's mission) and then working backward to define the acquisition requirements that will lead to the desired goal.



- Clarity about roles and responsibilities for acquisition planning
- Frequency and nature of interactions with the Acquisition Division staff (COs and PAs) and other stakeholders throughout the acquisition planning process
- Strengths of the acquisition planning process
- Shortcomings of the acquisition planning process
- Suggestions to improve the acquisition planning process

The survey questionnaire is included in [Appendix C](#).

The team aimed to survey all PMs who perform acquisition planning using SurveyMonkey. We received 18 viable responses (21 total: one incomplete, two from respondents that had no role in acquisition planning) out of 54 potential respondents.

The team downloaded and cleaned the survey responses and validated their quality. For the questions that used a discrete-choice option, the team calculated the percentage (or count) of respondents in each choice category and generated descriptive statistics.

---

## **ANALYTIC APPROACHES**

The team used a combination of sources and methods to address the evaluation objectives. Our main methods included creation of as-is and to-be VSMs and a best practices review. We also describe the approach to synthesizing the data and findings to address each of the research objectives.

### **Value Stream Mapping**

In order to identify pain points and improvement opportunities for key SBA acquisition planning functions, the Summit Team developed VSMs to identify the as-is or current process for the offices heavily involved in technology-related acquisitions, which typically take longer, are complex, and have lifecycle cost implications. We focused on technology-related acquisitions because they have the most developed acquisition process, and we were able to define the process in sufficient detail to develop the VSM. We developed the VSM with the four offices that are most involved in technology-related acquisitions: OCIO, OCA, ODA, and the OCFO. Although acquisition needs and processes differ across product and service categories and across program offices, certain elements of the process, and associated pain points, are relevant across multiple product or service categories and SBA offices.

The visual presentation of the acquisition process enabled managers and staff to clearly see and identify pain points, define problems (the gap between the way things are now and the way they want them to be), and begin the discussion of potential remedies. Once the as-is VSM was complete, the team assessed these pain points, used input from in-depth interviews to define the to-be or desired state, and crafted the recommendations in this report for the SBA to consider.

During the VSM exercise, we drew the current state to learn about the system from end to end; learned about the system from the customer's perspective (PMs who perform acquisition planning); developed an understanding of the process from the perspective of others in the system; and highlighted the pain points in the current process. The appendix provides the focus group guides.

We conducted the VSM exercise with OCIO, OCA, ODA, and OCFO using a two-phase approach consisting of: (1) a top-level review with office leadership, and (2) review with second-line staff. Prior to



the first VSM session, we conducted a 1-hour video webinar to orient participants to VSM. During the VSM sessions, the team moderated the discussion and provided tools to help the staff visualize the process on whiteboards sheets. The team collected all visual material (whiteboard sheets, post-it notes) to prepare a digital representation of the VSM. The team analyzed the VSM to document the impact of various steps in the process—identifying and quantifying pain points and what is working well.

In our subsequent interviews and focus groups with PMs from across SBA program offices, we presented key findings from the VSM exercise and probed to what extent other program offices and product and service categories have similar acquisition processes and/or challenges. This coordination step helped to validate and refine our VSM findings and recommendations to be more broadly applicable across the SBA.

We developed as-is and to-be VSMs based on the value stream mapping exercise and the focus groups and follow-up interviews. As noted above, the customer satisfaction survey also contributed to the to-be VSM. The as-is VSM identifies barriers in the current process, while the to-be VSM identifies solutions. We validated and refined our findings and recommendations through the focus groups, survey, and follow-up interviews.

### **Best Practices Review**

The best practices analysis addresses how the SBA can improve its acquisition planning process. We conducted the best practices review based on interviews with DOC and DHS acquisition officials and a review of publicly available information for these agencies. Specifically, we reviewed the following documents:

#### **Department of Commerce**

Department of Commerce. 2020. Commerce Acquisition Manual (CAM): 1307.1 Acquisition Planning. April. Available online at:

[https://www.osec.doc.gov/oam/acquistion\\_management/policy/commerce\\_acquisition\\_manual\\_cam/documents/CAM%201307%201%20-%20Acq%20Planning%20\(April2020\).pdf](https://www.osec.doc.gov/oam/acquistion_management/policy/commerce_acquisition_manual_cam/documents/CAM%201307%201%20-%20Acq%20Planning%20(April2020).pdf)

Department of Commerce. 2020. Vendor Communication Plan. Revised March. Available online at:

[https://osec.doc.gov/oam/documents/doc%20vendor%20comm%20plan%20\(mar%202020\).pdf](https://osec.doc.gov/oam/documents/doc%20vendor%20comm%20plan%20(mar%202020).pdf)

Department of Commerce. FY2019 Contracting infographic. Accessed May 27, 2020 online at:

[https://www.osec.doc.gov/oam/source\\_documents/FY2019%20Contracting%20Infographic%20Final.pdf](https://www.osec.doc.gov/oam/source_documents/FY2019%20Contracting%20Infographic%20Final.pdf).

Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP). 2011. Myth-Busting: Addressing Misconceptions to Improve Communication with Industry during the Acquisition Process. February 2. Available online at:

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/procurement/memo/Myth-Busting.pdf>

Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP). 2019. Myth-Busting #4: Strengthening Engagement with Industry Partners through Innovative Business Practices. April 30. Available online at:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/SIGNED-Myth-Busting-4-Strenthening-Engagement-with-Industry-Partners-through-Innovative-Business-Practices.pdf>

NOAA Acquisition and Grants Office. 2018. Market Research Report: Acquisitions Above the Simplified Acquisition Threshold (SAT). February 20.



NOAA Acquisition and Grants Office. Undated. Market Research Report: Acquisitions At or Below the Simplified Acquisition Threshold.

### **Department of Homeland Security**

Department of Homeland Security Office of the Chief Procurement Officer (OCPO). 2016. Acquisition Planning Guide, Version 9.0. May. Available online at: [https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1534347779785-  
ea4ca2bdd06af0af0581f24272419a95/DHS\\_Acquisition\\_Planning\\_Guide\\_Version\\_9May2016\\_508Reviewed\\_080318.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1534347779785-<br/>ea4ca2bdd06af0af0581f24272419a95/DHS_Acquisition_Planning_Guide_Version_9May2016_508Reviewed_080318.pdf)

Department of Homeland Security. 2020. Homeland Security Acquisition Manual (HSAM). June 30. Available online at: [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/hsam\\_conformed\\_thru\\_notice\\_2020-09.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/hsam_conformed_thru_notice_2020-09.pdf)

Department of Homeland Security. 2014. Market Research Guide, Version 4.0. December.

Government Accountability Office. 2017. Homeland Security Acquisitions: Earlier Requirements Definition and Clear Documentation of Key Decisions Could Facilitate Ongoing Progress. GAO-17-346SP. April 6. Available online at: <https://www.gao.gov/assets/690/683977.pdf>

Office of Management and Budget. 2016. Memorandum: Acquisition Innovation Labs & Pilot for Digital Acquisition Innovation Lab. March 9. Available online at: <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/March%202016%20Memo.pdf>

Department of Homeland Security Procurement Innovation Lab (PIL). 2018. Annual Report FY2017. June 26. Available online at: <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/PIL-ANNUAL-REPORT-FY2017-For-Digital-Viewing.pdf>

Department of Homeland Security PIL. 2019. Boot Camp Workbook, v. 2.7.2. October. Available online at: [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pil\\_boot\\_camp\\_workbook\\_oct\\_2019.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pil_boot_camp_workbook_oct_2019.pdf)

Department of Homeland Security PIL. 2019. PIL Flyer. August 7. Available online at: [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/dhs\\_pil\\_flyer.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/dhs_pil_flyer.pdf)

Department of Homeland Security PIL. 2018. FY2018 Yearbook. July 19. Available online at: [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pil\\_yearbook\\_fy2018\\_for\\_digital\\_viewing\\_-\\_508\\_compliant.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pil_yearbook_fy2018_for_digital_viewing_-_508_compliant.pdf)

### **U.S. Department of Agriculture**

DRAFT IT Project Checklist for Acquisitions, v.1.2 (May 2020). Prepared by Summit Consulting on behalf of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Procurement Operations Division, Office of Contracting and Procurement.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Procurement Operations Division, Office of Contracting and Procurement. 2019. POD-Customer Service Level Agreement for Procurement Services, Version 2.0. October.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Contracting & Procurement, Procurement Policy Division. 2019. Contracting Desk Book v1.40. October.

During interviews, we inquired about the acquisition planning challenges the agencies faced, how they have tried to address those challenges, and the results of these efforts. The main purpose of the



interviews with DOC and DHS was to identify solutions that can be tailored to the SBA. We also inquired about any metrics the agencies use to track progress.

The rest of this section summarizes how the data sources and methods were used to address each evaluation objective.

### **Evaluation Objective 1: Identify Factors that Impede the SBA's Ability to Improve its Acquisition Planning Process**

We used documents and program data, interviews, VSM, and focus groups to address the first evaluation objective: identify barriers that impede the SBA's ability to improve its acquisition planning process. We reviewed the acquisition SOP and acquisition data provided by the SBA to identify issues that should be probed in the interviews. The interview topics that were especially relevant for Objective 1 included: roles and responsibilities, timeliness and quality of submissions, amount of back-and-forth, acquisition workload and competing priorities, and observed pain points. The value stream mapping defined the current process for technology-related acquisitions; we analyzed the as-is VSM to identify bottlenecks and pain points. We also used the VSM as a discussion tool in the focus groups. The focus groups with PMs from other offices, COs, and acquisition PAs solicited feedback on the VSM and helped to identify other barriers. Based on the research for evaluation Objective 1, we created the as-is VSM, summarized available acquisition data, and conducted issue reporting for the interviews and focus groups.

Key measures and analyses for evaluation Objective 1 include:

- Timeliness and quality of acquisition actions and submission of forecasts, as reflected in late acquisition packages data for FY 2019 and other program data and issue reporting
- Identification of bottlenecks in the as-is VSM
- Identification of barriers and pain points from the interviews and focus groups

### **Evaluation Objective 2: Assess Program Manager Satisfaction with the Acquisition Planning Process**

The customer satisfaction survey was our main data source for evaluation Objective 2. We calculated descriptive statistics of the discrete-choice responses and coded open-ended responses. As previously noted, the survey responses also informed the to-be process map by soliciting respondent perspectives on potential changes to the acquisition planning process as summarized in the to-be map.

Measures and analyses of the survey responses included the following:

- Strengths of the SBA's acquisition planning process
- Areas needing improvement
- Satisfaction level, both overall and by program office
- Suggestions for improvement

We received 18 viable responses for a 35 percent response rate. The survey was deployed at the height of the SBA's implementation of the Paycheck Protection Program, and this may have affected response rates. Descriptive statistics on key findings are presented in this section. **Appendix C** includes summary tables of all survey questions.



### **Evaluation Objective 3: Identify How the SBA Can Improve its Acquisition Planning Process**

The Summit Team used all data sources and methods to address Objective 3. The literature review identified acquisition best practices for federal agencies in general as well as findings and recommendations specific to the SBA. The interviews identified opportunities for improvement; interview topics relevant to this objective include: use of integrated project teams or cross-functional teams, previous attempts to improve the acquisition process and the success of those efforts, vetting recommendations that came out of our evaluation process with the program offices and acquisition leadership (Phase 2 of the interviews), and additional ideas from interviewees to improve the process. Based on our analysis of the VSM exercise, subsequent focus groups and interviews, and customer satisfaction survey, we identified ways to improve the process and developed the to-be process map. We also developed a summary of best practices for DOC and DHS that describes how these agencies improved their acquisition process and the implications for the SBA.

We address evaluation Objective 3 with the following measures and analyses:

- Recommendations from the literature review (e.g., GAO and OIG reports) relevant for the SBA
- Analysis of key themes and suggestions from the interviews, focus group participants, and survey respondents to improve the acquisition planning process
- Identification of actions taken by DOC and DHS that could be helpful for the SBA
- A model process as reflected in the to-be process map