

ALL SYSTEMS ARE GO FOR SEWDV

The latest iteration of NASA's governmentwide acquisition contract opened for business about a year ago. Here's what that means for agency customers. **BY FCW STAFF**

NASA's Solutions for Enterprise-wide Procurement program was launched more than 20 years ago with a simple purpose: help the space agency buy computers more effectively.

Yet the multiple-award, indefinite-delivery, indefinite-quantity governmentwide acquisition contract (GWAC) has proven remarkably durable and effective and has evolved to provide a wide range of IT products and services governmentwide.

Now in its fifth iteration, the program was authorized in 1993 by the Office of Management and Budget. The acronym originally stood for Scientific and Engineering Workstation Procurement, and the contract provided technical and engineering-related IT products but not associated services. The acronym changed to its current form in 2007 after computer technology blossomed and firm-fixed-price services became available.



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Today, under SEWP V, all federal agencies can buy IT products, including tablet and desktop computers, servers, peripheral devices, network equipment, storage systems, security tools, software, cloud-based services and videoconferencing systems. They can also get training, maintenance and installation services.

Protests delayed the debut of SEWP V by several months and forced NASA to extend SEWP IV through April 2015. But the latest generation of the GWAC has now been open for business for 14 months. And even after 23 years, analysts say, the vehicle still matters to federal IT buyers because it fills a critical need. Agencies have access to a wide range of products from one reliable source where they can pick and choose what they want. And it's all backed by scrupulous customer service.

SEWP remains deliberately product-centric — both in its huge range of offerings and in its customer service, with tools such as supply chain risk assessment. Most other GWACs have grown increasingly services-oriented, so the focus on products is an important differentiator.

Nevertheless, SEWP V has evolved to be more than simply a catalog of pre-competed product offerings. The program office has made a conscious effort to evolve into a strategic partner that can help agencies better manage all aspects of their purchases.

For example, SEWP has been building a rich database of the relationships between authorized resellers and various manufacturers so that the program office can provide customers with a risk assessment for any item they're thinking of buying via SEWP. The final purchase decision still rests with the customer, but that decision can now be made with much better information.

Detailed reporting is another service SEWP offers its customers. "I believe we are the only program currently that can

SEWP V facts

- 145 prime contract holders, including 120 small businesses
- More than 5 million product items in the contract database of record
- At least 97 distinct agency customers, including all Cabinet-level departments, commissions and independent agencies

Sold through SEWP:

- IT hardware, including servers, laptops and supercomputers
- Network and telecommunication products
- Software products, including software as a service
- Cloud computing
- Audiovisual products
- Teleconferencing and videoconferencing products
- Peripherals and supplies, including printers and power supplies
- Maintenance and warranties
- Installation
- Site planning
- Product training
- Product-based engineering services

SEWP V in fiscal 2015:

- \$2.55 billion in sales
- 24,886 orders

Source: SEWP Program Office

report at the line-item level or the product-classification level," SEWP Deputy Program Manager Darlene Coen told FCW.

Supply chain assessments can be factored into reports on an agency's past SEWP purchases, as can data that demonstrates progress toward strategic sourcing goals, small-business contracting and Energy Star compliance.

Agencies can also create their own SEWP catalogs to address unique requirements and smooth the way for future purchases as the need arises.

"It's very flexible; it's very real-time," Coen said. Although there are rules and regulations involved in creating agency-specific catalogs, the end result can be "an Amazon website type of offering."

"The nice thing about it is that the government is not committed to actually procuring anything on a schedule or for set pricing," she added. Instead, "it's an offering that's up in the cloud...that they can procure from when the government needs it and when the government has funding for those items."

A few agencies have already set up such catalogs, she said, and "we have a lot of interest.... We're trying to keep up with the demand."

Other GWACs are also enhancing their customer-service offerings, and there are overlaps in the IT that's available for purchase. But the competition among GWACs is generally outweighed by the common goal of reducing the thousands of agency-specific contracts that

can bog down federal operations.

SEWP Program Manager Joanne Woytek told FCW that NASA, the National Institutes of Health Information Technology Acquisition and Assessment Center, and the General Services Administration are all "more concerned with the continued proliferation of non-GWAC contracts and the even larger use of open market purchasing than about GWAC competition."

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How to order through SEWP

Most SEWP purchases are made through the contract's electronic purchasing tool. Agencies can first get price quotes using SEWP's online Quote Request Tool, which flags issues that might be of concern and ensures that all relevant rules are followed.

After an order is placed, the SEWP Program Office guarantees a processing time of 24 hours or less.

Agencies can also request a report on past purchases, with details about the technology procured. This helps agencies determine whether they're meeting small-business targets, Office of Management and Budget mandates and other acquisition-related goals.

For purchases of less than \$3,500, agencies can buy directly from the vendor through their chosen SEWP contractor's website.

Regardless of the purchasing path, the SEWP Program Office aims to provide superior service. NASA SEWP Program Manager Joanne Woytek said agencies should contact help@sewp.nasa.gov.

"We will teleconference, hold webinars and, if needed, travel to their locations to understand their issues and requirements," she added. ■

Alphabet SEWP: RFIs, MRRs and RFQs

Agencies can query SEWP vendors in a variety of ways as they work toward obtaining the best products and prices for their needs. Requests for information typically are used to obtain information in advance of requesting quotes. The goal is to determine the availability of certain types of products or solicit the technical feedback needed to craft a viable request for quotations, for example.

Responses to RFIs are typically not quotes, and the information is not verified by the SEWP Program Office.

Market research requests and RFQs, on the other hand, result in quotes. The product items in question must be part of the contract at the time of the quote and are verified when the SEWP Quote Request Tool is used. The key difference is that MRRs do not typically result in an order but instead are used to begin an internal acquisition process.

An RFQ, on the other hand, is typically issued at the end of the acquisition process and results in an order.

Releasing an RFQ, however, does not obligate an agency to make a purchase based on the resulting quotes, and multiple rounds of RFQs are not uncommon.

SEWP's customer service

Competitive pricing is crucial, but the SEWP Program Office has spent years making customer service a core part of the vehicle's value. Here is a sampling of the services SEWP offers.

Pre-order support:

- Provides an online tool for comparison shopping across all SEWP contracts
- Provides an online form for conducting requests for quotations
- Helps customers clarify quote requests

Order processing:

- Receives and double-checks delivery orders and enters order information into the SEWP database
- Forwards delivery orders to contract holders
- Works with contract holders to reconcile all SEWP delivery orders

Post-order support:

- Provides buyers with access to order status information
- Performs quality assurance checks with buyers
- Works with contractors and customers to resolve any issues

Contract management:

- Continually interacts with contract holders at the program and contract levels to ensure contract adherence and program improvements
- Ensures that technology refreshes are processed correctly and in a timely fashion
- Monitors and reports on overall contract performance, including delivery times and customer satisfaction

SEWP timeline

SEWP I

(February 1993–February 1997)

- Emphasized Unix systems to replace proprietary VAX and IBM systems
- \$800 million, four-year delegation of procurement authority (DPA)
- No small-business or 8(a) awards

SEWP II

(November 1996–July 2001)

- Included higher-end systems and administrative IT classes
- \$1.8 billion, four-year DPA as GWAC
- Two small-business set-asides and five 8(a) awards

SEWP III

(July 2001–April 2007)

- Increased web and database enhancements
- \$4 billion, five-year term
- Three small-business set-aside competitions (with two awarded to seven companies) and three 8(a) non-competed set-asides

SEWP IV

(May 2007–April 2015)

- Expanded into Linux and security
- \$17 billion in sales
- One small-business set-aside competition, resulting in 14 awardees
- One set-aside competition for small businesses owned by service-disabled veterans, resulting in six awardees
- Two full and open competitions, resulting in 25 awardees

SEWP V

(May 2015–April 2025)

- Increased focus on cloud- and product-based services
- \$30 billion, 10-year term anticipated
- One small-business set-aside competition
- One set-aside competition for small businesses owned by service-disabled veterans
- One set-aside competition for companies in Historically Underutilized Business Zones

SOURCE: SEWP PROGRAM OFFICE



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