

## The GSA Bureaucracy: When "Saving Money" Costs Billions

### A Common Sense Lighthearted Guide to Government Procurement Gone Wrong (& How to Fix It)

*Picture this: You hire a personal shopper to save you money at the grocery store. Instead, they take three months to buy milk, charge you extra fees to talk to the cashier, and have no idea what you paid for anything. Welcome to the General Services Administration.*

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#### The \$50 Billion Question: Why Is Everyone Avoiding the "Money-Saving" System?

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, grab your coffee and settle in for a story that's equal parts bureaucratic comedy and taxpayer tragedy. Today we're talking about the General Services Administration (GSA)—the federal government's supposed bargain-hunting superhero that's actually more like a well-meaning relative who "helps" by reorganizing your kitchen while you're out of town.

The GSA was designed with a noble mission: be the government's primary purchasing expert and save taxpayers billions. It sounds great on paper, like most government initiatives. Here's a reality that should make every taxpayer's eye twitch: government agencies avoid using the GSA about **65% of the time**. Let that sink in for a moment. The system specifically designed to save money is so cumbersome that two-thirds of the time, agencies would rather do literally anything else—including paying more money for last-minute deals that bypass competitive bidding entirely.

The Department of Veterans Affairs, for example, only uses GSA pricing for about 35% of their purchases. The remaining 65%? They're out there making procurement deals like college students ordering pizza at 2 AM—probably not the best choice available.

#### The Administrative Nightmare: When Bureaucracy Becomes Performance Art

Now, you might be thinking, "Surely it can't be that bad. How long could it possibly take to process a simple price change?"

Oh, sweet summer child. Let me introduce you to the GSA's greatest hits collection:

**The 90-Day Price Update:** Want to raise your prices by 5% for inflation? That'll be 30 to 90 days, please. In the time it takes the GSA bureaucracy to approve a minor price adjustment.

**The Decimal Point Patrol:** Government contract officers—highly skilled professionals who should be negotiating million-dollar deals—spend weeks examining decimal points and cover letter formatting like they're archaeologists deciphering ancient hieroglyphics. It's like hiring Chef Gordon Ramsay to check if your salt shaker has the right number of holes.

Each contract officer manages around 200 contracts simultaneously. That's not managing—that's drowning in paperwork. These professionals, who could be saving taxpayers millions through strategic negotiations, are instead playing secretary to administrative minutiae.

### **The Middleman Mambo: Adding Fees for No Reason**

Here's where the story gets truly absurd. Despite executive orders specifically pushing for direct purchases from manufacturers (you know, to cut costs), the GSA bureaucracy has perfected the art of doing the exact opposite.

Consider this situation: The government strikes a direct deal with Microsoft for software licenses, a move lauded as a win for taxpayers in subsequent press releases. However, instead of purchasing directly from Microsoft, the GSA bureaucracy funnels the acquisition through a third-party reseller, incurring additional fees. The government then publicly celebrates its "negotiated great deals," while taxpayers inadvertently cover these superfluous middleman costs. It's akin to securing an excellent car price only to pay someone else to facilitate the purchase at the dealership, with an added charge for their involvement.

### **The Data Desert: Navigating Billions with a Broken Compass**

Here's the real kicker: the GSA often knows the listed price for a product (say, \$50 for a Microsoft license) but has absolutely no idea if another agency is paying a fraction of that amount (\$5 per license) through bulk purchasing or negotiated discounts.

Without knowing what agencies actually pay versus what's listed, the government can't negotiate volume discounts, spot wasteful spending, or make informed strategic decisions. It's like being a poker player who can't see their own cards—you're probably going to lose, and lose big.

### **The Vendor Obstacle Course: How to Discourage Innovation in 12 Easy Steps**

Getting approved to sell to the government through GSA schedules is what industry insiders lovingly call a "bureaucratic maze." So cumbersome most hire consultants that can charge up to \$22,000 just to get on the GSA schedule and this process can take many months.

Once companies finally get on the GSA schedule, any changes trigger what's known as "modification madness." Want to add a new cybersecurity product to your offerings? Be prepared for weeks of

back-and-forth about cover letter formatting while your cutting-edge product becomes yesterday's news. That is why most then pay an additional \$500 to \$1,000 a month thereafter to keep your GSA schedule and contracts up to date.

This system effectively rewards companies that are good at navigating bureaucracy rather than those offering the best, most innovative, or most cost-effective products. It's like choosing your surgeon based on their handwriting rather than on their success rate.

Even Amazon—yes, the company that will deliver anything to your doorstep in two days—avoids government contracts because the system feels "old and broken." When Amazon thinks your purchasing process is too complicated, you know you've achieved something remarkable.

### **The Three-Phase Solution: TurboTax Meets Government Procurement**

Here's good news: these issues caused by using a 19th-century bureaucratic method are entirely fixable with modern 21st-century software developed by GSA experts. The solution isn't some impossible dream—it's a practical, three-phase plan that uses software already standard in the private sector, combined with insights from the top GSA consultants.

#### **Phase 1: TurboTax for Government Vendors**

This software streamlines the GSA approval process for companies, guiding them through submissions and automatically identifying errors. This drastically reduces approval times from months to mere days or weeks for qualified companies. By leveling the playing field, it ensures that the most competitive companies, rather than just those with extensive legal resources, can participate.

#### **Phase 2: Automating Administrative Tasks.**

Automated software can streamline routine contract modifications, significantly reducing the burden on contract officers. This system would process most updates, such as simple price adjustments, in minutes or hours instead of months. Only complex issues would be flagged for human review.

Should a formatting or clerical error occur, the system would automatically email the government vendor, providing clarification or options for correction. This automation allows contract officers to dedicate their time to strategic negotiations rather than proofreading.

#### **Phase 3: Establish a Government Marketplace**

Launch a transparent marketplace for all government entities, including state, county, local, universities, colleges, and local school districts. This platform will empower

government buyers with real-time pricing data, allowing them to compare what other agencies are paying and make swift, informed purchasing decisions. The goal is to eliminate blind buying, unnecessary middlemen, and premium prices for last-minute acquisitions.

### **The Win-Win-Win Scenario: Why Everyone Benefits**

**For Taxpayers:** Transparency, efficiency, and an end to billions in wasteful spending. Tax dollars would go toward actual services instead of administrative bloat and unnecessary fees. Citizens would finally be able to see how their money is spent and whether they're getting value.

**For Government Agencies:** Faster access to critical tools (like cybersecurity software that doesn't become obsolete during the approval process), substantial cost savings through real competition, and reduced administrative burden on staff.

**For Businesses:** A level playing field where innovation and value win over bureaucratic navigation skills. Small and medium-sized businesses could compete fairly, while all companies would face reduced administrative costs—savings they could pass on to taxpayers.

**For Society:** When the government can efficiently procure the tools it needs, public services improve for everyone. Better technology for agencies means better services for citizens, from veterans' healthcare to emergency response systems.

### **The Real Challenge: Political Will in the Digital Age**

The technology exists. The solution is ready. The benefits are clear and measurable. So what's the holdup?

The real challenge isn't technical—it's political and bureaucratic. Can we abandon a broken system that benefits a select few middlemen and administrative inefficiencies for a modern one that serves everyone? Can we overcome the institutional inertia that keeps 19th-century processes running in a 21st-century world?

This isn't about partisan politics; it's about common sense. Whether you're a progressive who wants government to work efficiently for the people or a conservative who wants to cut wasteful spending, modernizing GSA procurement should be a no-brainer.

### **The Bottom Line: Your Tax Dollars at Work (or Not)**

Every day the current system continues, taxpayers lose money to unnecessary fees, administrative delays, and poor purchasing decisions. Small businesses are shut out of government contracts while innovative solutions gather dust in approval queues. Government agencies pay premium prices for basic tools while middle management congratulates itself on "great deals" that cost more than direct purchases.

The choice is simple: continue with a fundamentally flawed system that wastes billions annually, or embrace the same technologies that revolutionized private sector purchasing to create a government that actually works for its citizens.

For those who value accountability and common sense, ask yourself this: How much could your local federal installations save by implementing efficient procurement practices? How many small businesses in your area have given up on government contracts due to bureaucratic barriers? How much faster could critical government services like cybersecurity improve with streamlined purchasing?

The inefficiencies within the GSA raise a fundamental question about the ability of our democratic institutions to effectively serve citizens in the modern age. Taxpayers are currently overpaying and observing a government that appears to be making purchasing decisions without proper oversight and accountability.

The necessary software technology exists, and the cost savings and streamlining benefits are evident. The only remaining challenge is whether there is sufficient political will to rectify a system universally acknowledged as flawed. Taxpayers are anticipating action, and their patience is not limitless. Join us.