



GUIDE ON HOW TO USE AN 8(a) COMPANY FOR YOUR DIGITAL SERVICE NEEDS

8(a) DIGITAL SERVICE INITIATIVE FOR SBA 8(a) AWARDS
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ABSTRACT

Agencies are under pressure yet willing to utilize digital services. Program offices are frequently frustrated by long procurement lead-times, competition requirements, and lack of adequate coaching around new implementation methods, which slows down the successful adoption of modern technology at agencies. The use of SBA's 8(a) program can solve many of these problems.

U.S. Digital Service :: Executive Office of the President

ALPHA VERSION

The Small Business Administration (SBA) and United States Digital Service (USDS) partnered together to provide increased ability to:

1. Give a clear, easy, and fast path to agencies to start digital services projects
2. Entice non-traditional vendors into the Government space through the 8(a) program
3. Increase the number of contracts awarded to quality digital service providers
4. Reduce administration for the SBA and agencies by providing an easy on-ramp to and release from the 8(a) program for projects within scope

Background

Agencies are under pressure yet willing to utilize digital services. Program offices are frequently frustrated by long procurement lead-times, competition requirements, and lack of adequate coaching around new implementation methods, which slows down the successful adoption of modern technology at agencies.

The use of SBA's 8(a) program can solve many of these problems. The 8(a) program can get requirements on contract quickly with a sole source procurement of up to \$4 million dollars in value. It also provides agencies a perfect, low-risk gateway to accelerated acquisitions and product delivery. There are a number of vendors existing in the SBA 8(a) program with significant experience implementing modern technology and digital services. However, agencies hesitate to use the 8(a) program due to concerns about the repetitive acquisition requirements. This results in a missed opportunity to use a fantastic government program and get digital solutions into citizens' hands faster.

Solution

The Small Business Administration has provided a memo which provides an exemption to the repetitive acquisition rule for agencies that want to use the 8(a) direct award to experiment with digital services. To take advantage of the exemption at this time, agencies may only award contracts within the general scope of the three statements of objectives (SOO's) provided by the SBA.

At the completion of the contract, agencies can keep any follow-on work within the 8(a) program or switch to another contracting method or vehicle without getting SBA approval. If agencies choose to get out of the 8(a) program, they don't need SBA's or their OSDDBU's permission, provided they stayed within the scope of the initiative.

The scope of these acquisitions are best for agencies who are beginning to adopt digital services. They provide an opportunity to learn digital services techniques, try out modern technology stacks, and begin iterative development.

Behind the Statements of Objectives

Three Statements of Objectives limit the scope of the Digital Services Memo under the 8(a) direct award program:

1. Learn the Process – Culture change, practical application, and retrospective. This is for agencies with very little education and experience with implementing iterative and design approaches; such as agile software development or lean design.
2. Select Your Tech – Alternatives analysis, demonstration, and retrospective. This is for agencies that who are looking to move to modern technology stacks, platforms, or solutions but want hands-on guidance through the process of determining which works best in their agency environment.
3. Digital MVP – Discovery and design, develop MVP, retrospective. This is for agencies with stakeholders that have a working level of understanding of User Experience (UX) design thinking and/or agile software development. This effort allows for the design, development and release of a Digital Minimum Viable Product to solve an agency need or problem.

The SOO's mentioned above are in listed order of maturity of modern technology understanding and implementation, from the less mature (Learn the Process) to more mature (Digital MVP). The SOO's can be used independently yet they also build upon one another. The SOO's can also be combined and included in one Request for Quote/Proposal.

Delivery

In the SOO's, there are listed "outputs". Getting to these outputs, or delivered product, is the measure of the successful contract. Each SOO includes a retrospective which is to be used as information which can inform the next contract in the event more work is needed. Once the contract deliverables are received, the requiring office again is free to choose from all acquisition alternatives (including non-8(a) alternatives).

Note: It is important to capture past performance as these efforts are completed. It will help the acquisition community and the 8(a) companies get meaningful work in the digital service space.

What is not in Scope:

As the purpose of this initiative is to help agency's get started with digital services through the use of an 8(a) company, the scope does not include:

- solutions intended to serve as the full system/solution implementation
- operations & maintenance efforts, unless minor in nature to meet the overall outputs
- other non-included services; such as content strategy, data architecture and migration, etc; unless minor in nature to meet the overall outputs.

Get Started

1. Identify which SOO(s) is most appropriate for your agency/program and tailor for your requirement. Be sure to include in the “History Section” any pertinent information related to your technical environment, operating constraints, organizational information or history related to the end users of the systems, etc. which will help the offeror tailor their solution to your requirement.
2. Identify capable 8(a) vendors (this may include vendors with valid GSA Stars II contracts)
3. Proceed through the normal procurement process per FAR 19.8. *(Note: If using GSA Stars II, follow GSA’s ordering guide, which can be found at <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/105243>)*
 - a. Selecting acquisitions for the 8(a) program (FAR 19.803)
 - b. Agency evaluation (FAR 19.804-1)
 - c. Agency offering (FAR 19.804-2)
 - i. Include the 8(a) Digital Services Memo dated ____ __, 2016 and indicate that your award is within scope of the 8(a) Digital Service Initiative.
 - d. SBA acceptance (FAR 19.804-3)
 - e. Pricing the 8(a) contract (FAR 19.806)
 - f. Estimating fair market price (FAR 19.807)
 - g. Pre-award considerations (FAR 19.809)
 - h. Preparing the contracts – sole source (FAR 19.811-1)
 - i. Preparing the contracts – contract clauses (FAR 19.811-3)
4. Send the memo, dated ____ __, 2016 to your agency’s Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) office. The OSDBU should also receive the RFP, or other associated solicitation or contract documents, with at least one of the three SOO’s incorporated. This ensures that the OSDBU is aware of your award’s connection to the memo.
5. At the completion of the contract, agencies can keep any follow-on work within the 8(a) program or switch to another contracting method or vehicle without getting SBA approval for removal from the program.

Glossary

The following is a glossary of terms included in this initiative:

Agile Software Development

Agile software development is a method of software development that utilizes an iterative development process, designs services based on real user needs, and constantly improves software from user feedback.

Demonstration

A demonstration is an early sample, model, or release of a product built to test a concept or process or to act as a thing to be replicated or learned from. It is a term used in a variety of contexts, including semantics, design, electronics, and software programming.

Digital Minimum Viable Product (MVP)

In product development, the digital minimum viable product (MVP) contains just enough core functions of the system to be able to get validated learning from users about the system as to whether or not it is a successful first start to a solution to the problems they face. Features that may be useful, but not essential, are not considered until the MVP is delivered.

Statement of Objectives (SOO)

As opposed to a Statement of Work, which is highly descriptive about how work should be conducted, a Statement of Objectives identifies the broad, basic, top-level objectives of an acquisition/procurement and is used as a focusing tool for both the Government and offeror. As agile and UX is an objective based process, the use of performance-based contracting methods aligns well.

User Experience (UX)

User Experience helps understand the different ways people will interact with services, including the actions they take online, through a mobile application, on a phone, or in person. Every encounter — whether it's online or offline — should move the user closer towards their goal.