

The Acquisition Shift to AAS Is Happening and Most Vendors Are Not Ready

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The Quiet Power Reshaping Federal Acquisition

The General Services Administration (GSA) Assisted Acquisition Services (AAS) has quietly become one of the most substantial forces shaping how federal agencies acquire complex capabilities. Yet many contractors continue to pursue AAS-led opportunities as if nothing has changed.

AAS operates less as a procurement executor and more as a risk filter and decision enabler for its agency customers. It compresses timelines while safeguarding mission-critical outcomes. As agencies increasingly rely on AAS for mission-essential acquisitions, AAS has become a foundational infrastructure designed to preserve delivery confidence when failure is not an option.

Teams that win under AAS understand a hard truth: AAS rewards credibility, clarity, and execution confidence. It does not reward volume, theory, or ambition.

GSA AAS: Where Risk Is Filtered Before Award

Agencies turn to AAS when the acquisition is complex, politically visible, time-sensitive, or mission-critical. An AAS-led acquisition signals that the customer has prioritized disciplined execution, integration control, and accountability.

For industry, this fundamentally changes the evaluation lens and how teams must approach bidding. The question is no longer whether a solution is compelling on paper. It is whether the offeror can be trusted to deliver under pressure and whether the offeror has proven that capability before.

AAS removes ambiguity early. Confidence must be earned quickly.

Different AAS Approaches Send Different Signals

Each AAS approach communicates a distinct buyer intent to industry. Contractors that fail to read these signals will experience friction from misalignment before the evaluation even begins. Under AAS, GSA uses three approaches based on buying intent and need. They are as follows:

FEDSIM

Signals urgency, complexity, and elevated risk sensitivity. Agencies are buying execution confidence, proven teams, and leaders who perform under orals pressure. Field-tested approaches matter more than conceptual elegance.

FLEX

Signals speed and adaptability. Buyers value rapid response and decisiveness. Contractors must communicate concisely, demonstrate operational realism, and show they can execute within real-world constraints.

INNOVATE

Signals controlled experimentation. Agencies are not buying scale; they are buying evidence. Pilot outcomes, operational learning, and measurable risk reduction determine advancement.

OCAS - Another New Assisted Acquisition Signal, With a Different Scope

OCAS (the Office of Centralized Acquisition Services) is a new GSA acquisition entity operating within the Federal Acquisition Service (FAS). A result of an executive order from last year and led separately from AAS, OCAS represents a parallel but distinct acquisition posture.

OCAS concentrates on government-wide goods and services with broad, repeatable demand (i.e., common technology, facilities support, and operational supplies) used across agencies. While the scope differs from AAS's mission-centric focus, the expectation does not.

Contractors should anticipate the same acquisition discipline, process rigor, and professionalism. OCAS is designed to standardize, centralize, and reduce friction at scale for the procurement of common goods and services. Success depends less on differentiation through complexity and more on reliability, pricing realism, and the ability to perform consistently across the enterprise. The signal is clear: OCAS rewards execution discipline over novelty, and readiness over rhetoric.

Why Agencies Keep Choosing AAS and What That Means for Industry

AAS allows agencies to move faster while shifting acquisition risk to a mission-proven partner. Protest exposure drops. Execution confidence rises. For industry, the implications are significant:

- Evaluation windows are shorter.
- Orals carry disproportionate weight.
- Ideas without proof are discounted.
- Pricing realism outweighs theoretical innovation.

Under AAS, bidders either inspire confidence quickly or do not advance.

The AAS Success Playbook

To compete effectively in AAS-led pursuits, contractors must act differently:

- Track AAS demand signals earlier than traditional capture cycles.
- Engage agencies around mission risk, not feature sets.
- Align solutions to buyer confidence, not technical superiority.
- Treat orals as a primary evaluation event.
- Build teams that demonstrate cohesion, not just credentials.
- Anchor past performance in outcomes delivered under pressure.
- Price for realism and defensibility.
- Prepare scenario-based responses that mirror AAS evaluation behavior.
- Demonstrate Day One execution readiness.
- Eliminate theoretical language that increases perceived risk.

What matters is not how much you do, but how deliberately you choose what to do.

The Revolutionary FAR Overhaul (RFO): The Accelerator, Not the Disruptor

The Revolutionary FAR Overhaul (RFO) will not redefine AAS. It will accelerate it. RFO-driven standardization, automation, and data-driven evaluation will further reward clarity, traceability, and execution readiness. FEDSIM, FLEX, INNOVATE, and OCAS are positioned to reinforce these dynamics, not dilute them. Teams misaligned with AAS speed and discipline will encounter immediate friction as GSA updates templates and tools to reflect RFO requirements.

What Leaders Should Do Now

RFO and GSA AAS are not trends. They represent a structural shift in how the government buys risk-managed capability.

Leaders should act immediately to:

- Pressure-test AAS capture strategies.
- Assess orals readiness across active and future pursuits.
- Reframe solution narratives around delivery confidence.
- Evaluate whether teams inspire trust or quietly erode it.

In this new buying environment, confidence functions as currency. It signals control, readiness, and reduced risk. Contractors that build and demonstrate it consistently are the ones that continue to win.

At Deep Water Point & Associates, we help contractors compete and win in AAS-led environments by aligning capture strategy, story, solution design, slide architecture, and orals performance around what evaluators value most: risk reduction, execution confidence, and delivery credibility. We pressure-test positioning, eliminate perceived risk, and prepare teams for FEDSIM-driven evaluations where decisions are made quickly and second chances are rare.

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