3.10 – Acquisition and Grants Office

The NOAA Acquisition and Grants Office (AGO) manages NOAA’s acquisition and grants functions, which are integral to achieving NOAA’s mission. Nearly half of NOAA’s annual appropriations are processed through acquisitions and grants. The AGO partners with Line Offices (LOs), Staff Offices (SOs), and the Department of Commerce (DOC) to manage a complex acquisition and grants process in an environment of constrained budgets and growing demands and expectations.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The AGO’s operating model is comprised of four key components: 1) the guiding principles of improved communication, improved cooperation, and talented people; 2) consolidation of acquisition requirements; 3) strategic sourcing to create large omnibus contracts for common products and services; and 4) a strong focus on contract management and acquisition oversight.

The AGO includes a Policy and Oversight Division (POD), Staff Services Management Division (SSMD), four Acquisition Divisions, and a Grants Management Division. There are two Acquisition Divisions headquartered in Silver Spring, Maryland, and two headquartered in Norfolk, Virginia, and Seattle, Washington. The Acquisition Divisions located in Norfolk and Seattle also include branches in Kansas City, Missouri, and Boulder, Colorado. The organizational structure of the AGO is depicted in Figure 3-1.
ACQUISITION MANAGEMENT

The AGO ensures acquisitions are processed in a timely, effective, and efficient manner. The office works in concert with LOs and SOs as they develop and submit their requirements plans to ensure that the needs of the programs are communicated. The Western and Eastern Acquisition Divisions, generally, handle acquisitions in their geographic area of responsibility (with some exceptions which may be found in the Client Service Matrix located on the AGO website under “Make a Purchase”). The Satellite and Information Acquisition Division (SIAD) is responsible for developing and executing contracts for the National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service (NESDIS). The Strategic Sourcing Acquisition Division (SSAD) is responsible for developing and executing omnibus solutions to streamline the acquisition of commonly purchased products and services. NOAALink and Professional and Technical (ProTech) Services are two examples of such solutions.

- **NOAALink** is a program whose principal purpose is to improve IT acquisition practices across NOAA. NOAALink aims to establish enterprise-wide solutions, standardize common IT products and services, and leverage purchasing power. In so doing, NOAALink strives to recognize the most significant cost advantages possible. More information about NOAALink can be found at [http://www.cio.noaa.gov/NOAALink/index.html](http://www.cio.noaa.gov/NOAALink/index.html).

- **ProTech** is a suite of multiple-award, indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity (IDIQ) strategically sourced contract vehicles providing professional, scientific, and technical services to NOAA. The suite includes five domains (each with its own IDIQ contract): Satellite, Fisheries, Weather, Oceans, and Enterprise Operations. ProTech aims to significantly reduce the number of acquisition transactions, realize acquisition cost savings, achieve managerial and administrative efficiencies, and responsibly identify industry sources best positioned to successfully support NOAA’s mission. More information about ProTech can be found at [http://www.protechservices.noaa.gov](http://www.protechservices.noaa.gov).

INTERAGENCY AGREEMENTS

The AGO has executed Interagency Agreements (IAAs) to provide for assisted acquisition services with three Federal agencies: the General Services Administration (GSA) Federal Acquisition Service (FAS), the Department of Health and Human Services Strategic Acquisition Services, and the Department of Interior National Business Center. These IAAs are available for use by NOAA’s LOs and SOs in the event that an AGO Acquisition Division cannot support a procurement.

Before any action is sent out to one of these agencies, the LO or SO representative must coordinate with their servicing Acquisition Division’s Head of Contracting Office, as discussed in the instructions posted with each IAA.

The governing documents for these IAAs can be found on the AGO’s Interagency Agreements for Assisted Acquisitions webpage.
ACQUISITION ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

**Acquisition Liaisons** track acquisition status, including collecting and submitting requests, monitoring request priorities, and disseminating information and communications for their respective LOs and SOs. Centralized knowledge management responsibilities include identifying and coordinating the development and dissemination of processes, policies, and standard operating procedures. Acquisition Liaisons are also members of the Acquisition Management Advisory Committee.

**Acquisition Program Managers** are assigned to oversee and manage all aspects of a single acquisition or a single program involving multiple acquisitions greater than $10 million in value. This includes managing the acquisition from requirements development through receipt and acceptance of products or services and closeout of the contract.

**Acquisition Management Advisory Committee (AMAC)** is an advisory entity comprised of representatives from the acquisition community in NOAA’s LOs and SOs, AGO, and DOC. The AMAC consults on high-priority acquisition issues and is vital in communicating changes in legislation, policy, and procedures within their respective offices.

**AGO Director** has an outward-facing role, liaising with DOC on acquisition policy, systems, and legal matters, and responding to audit matters with the Office of Inspector General (OIG) and Government Accountability Office (GAO). The AGO Director makes final budget and operational strategy decisions and is responsible for strategic partnerships. The AGO Director is the Senior Bureau Procurement Official and Competition Advocate for NOAA.

**Senior Bureau Procurement Official (SBPO)** is the senior career procurement official within NOAA who has been delegated contracting authority and is responsible for carrying out the day-to-day operations of the AGO. The SBPO is responsible for overall acquisition authority within NOAA. The SBPO must be a procurement professional who has both experience and training in the area of Federal procurement and contracting.

**NOAA Competition Advocate** is the individual with the responsibility to fulfill the requirements of FAR Subpart 6.502 and with the authority to approve justifications for Other than Full and Open Competition. The Competition Advocate is responsible for reviewing acquisition plans before submission to the approving official when the use of Other than Full and Open Competition procedures is anticipated.

**AGO Deputy Director** supports the AGO Director in determining the future directions for office programs; setting priorities for current and future activities; providing guidance and staff support to NOAA management in the areas of acquisition and financial assistance; monitoring contract operations throughout NOAA to ensure compliance with requirements established by the Department; and developing and implementing policy and procedures for NOAA. The AGO Deputy Director also serves as the Acting Director of the AGO in the absence of the AGO Director.

**AGO Chief of Staff (COS)** is responsible for providing advice, support, and guidance in the following areas: administrative management; budget formulation and execution; financial management, planning, and reporting; acquisition and procurement program management; organizational and employee development; human resource management and human capital planning; property management; inter and intra-agency agreements; and accounting, collections, and billings. The AGO COS is instrumental in transforming the AGO administrative
activities from transactional processing to strategically-focused business operations that directly serve the organizational strategic direction.

**Division Directors (DDs)** are responsible for supporting and managing the day-to-day operations of their respective AGO divisions. DDs are responsible for conducting customer management and outreach, coordinating and providing advisory services to stakeholders, applying project management techniques, and managing and developing the workforce. See the POD Director and SSMD Director definitions (below) for additional, specific responsibilities assigned to these roles.

**POD Director** is responsible for managing and drafting acquisition policy; overseeing the AGO operating practices to facilitate consistent and efficient operating methods; managing data calls; overseeing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Program, Purchase Card Program, Field Delegate Program, Policy Program, and SBPO Review Program; and conducting compliance file audits of the AGO Acquisition Divisions, Field Delegates, and Purchase Cardholders.

**Staff Services Management Division (SSMD) Director** is responsible for the AGO’s budget, human resources, information systems, property, records, and emergency management.

**Head of Contracting Office (HCO)** is the individual, designated by the SBPO, to head the contracting office within each Acquisition Division. The HCO must be a procurement professional in the Contracting Series, General Schedule (GS) -1102. The SBPO issues each HCO a Level III (unlimited) Contracting Officer warrant, which delegates the authority to enter into, administer, and/or terminate contracts, and to make related determinations and findings.

**Contracting Officers (COs)** are delegated the authority to enter into, administer, and/or terminate contracts, and to make related determinations and findings. COs are in the Contracting Series, GS-1102. COs may be issued a Level I (up to $150,000), Level II (up to $1,000,000 or the limits set forth in FAR 12.203 when using commercial item procedures), or Level III (unlimited) CO warrant. COs are authorized to perform the functions assigned by the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), Commerce Acquisition Regulation (CAR), and the Commerce Acquisition Manual (CAM) on behalf of the Government based on their specified warrant level. COs also coordinate and provide advice to stakeholders and manage contracts to ensure supplies and services are optimally acquired from pre-award through closeout.

**Contract Specialists** are responsible for assisting the CO with generating solicitation and award documents using required contracting procedures (e.g., sealed bidding, negotiation), administering those awards, performing contract closeout, and/or assisting in other roles as assigned by the CO. Contract Specialists are in the Contracting Series, GS-1102. They do not require a warrant, as contract specialists are not delegated the authority to enter into, administer, or terminate contracts. This authority remains with the CO.

**Contracting Officer’s Representatives (CORs)** serve as the technical liaison between the CO and the contractor. CORs are responsible for overseeing and monitoring performance to ensure that all of the technical and deliverable requirements under the contract are met and performing other contract management duties as assigned in writing by the CO. The delegated functions/responsibilities include, but are not limited to: furnishing technical direction; monitoring contract performance; ensuring compliance with contract terms and conditions; maintaining an arms-length relationship with the contractor; and assisting the CO in contract closeouts. CORs must maintain a Level I, II, or III Federal Acquisition Certification for Contracting Officer’s Representatives (FAC-COR) in accordance with CAM 1301.670 Contracting Officer Representative Certification Program.
Field Delegates (FDs) are non-GS -1102 personnel located within LOs and SOs who have been issued a Level I CO warrant (up to $150,000) by the NOAA SBPO. Any LO/SO intending to nominate an individual as a FD must first contact their respective Acquisition Liaison and FD Program Manager to obtain guidance on the various education, training, certification, and other requirements that must be met before the proposed nominee can be warranted. FDs may be authorized to make purchases up to the Simplified Acquisition Threshold (SAT). FDs generally manage the entire life-cycle of their contracts, which primarily consist of commercial items and services. Only specially-trained FDs may award non-commercial acquisitions, to include construction contracts, with certain limitations.

Requisitioner is responsible for preparing the electronic requisition using C.Request and submitting the requisition to the appropriate Acquisition Division. The requisitioner works with the COR, CO, and/or contract specialist after the requirement has been identified through completion of the award.

Additional Information
More information on NOAA’s acquisition guidance and policies is available at [http://www.ago.noaa.gov/acquisition/regulation_and_guidance.html](http://www.ago.noaa.gov/acquisition/regulation_and_guidance.html).

The NOAA Acquisition Manual (NAM) provides detailed information on NOAA’s acquisition policies and requirements. NOAA’s Acquisition Process Guide provides information on the end-to-end acquisition process, as well as templates, guides, and other documents for use by NOAA staff involved in any part of the acquisition process.

PURCHASE CARD PROGRAM (PCP) ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Department of Commerce Bankcard Program is a functional area under the AGO POD that manages the Bankcard Program for DOC and NOAA. The program’s mission is to provide excellent customer service by delivering accurate and timely program information and reports, centralizing database management, and expanding e-commerce in support of the GSA SmartPay 2® DOC Purchase Card Program (PCP).

Agency Program Coordinator (APC) is primarily responsible for, but not limited to:

- Managing the PCP for NOAA,
- Performing oversight functions;
- Conducting monthly/quarterly reviews on PCP transactions and convenience checks to ensure compliance with internal controls;
- Providing guidance to PCP stakeholders;
- Managing purchase card and convenience check accounts;
- Reviewing cardholder and approving official transactions;
- Maintaining records of completed training;
- Maintaining bureau data within the servicing bank’s tool;
- Providing training;
- Maintaining training records;
- Recommending and processing terminations; and
- Resolving billing discrepancies with the servicing bank.

Approving Officials (AOs) are primarily responsible for, but not limited to:
• Providing pre-approval of cardholder transactions;
• Ensuring charges are accurate;
• Ensuring purchases are for official Government business;
• Ensuring funds are available;
• Ensuring cardholders reconcile transactions and statements in a timely manner;
• Maintaining purchase card transaction files;
• Ensuring cardholders are current with training requirements;
• Maintaining cardholder training certifications;
• Resolving questionable transactions with cardholders;
• Requesting changes to cardholder accounts;
• Reporting changes in cardholder status;
• Ensuring cardholders report lost/stolen/compromised cards to the APC; and
• Reporting suspected instances of waste, fraud, and/or abuse.

Purchase Cardholders (CHs) are primarily responsible for, but not limited to:

• Making authorized purchases for official Government business only;
• Obtaining valid purchase requests with certified funds and required approvals;
• Complying with Federal, DOC, and NOAA laws, regulations, policies, and guidance as it relates to the purchase card;
• Complying with spending limits (micro-purchase threshold and monthly cycle limits);
• Maintaining a monthly purchase card ordering log for all transactions;
• Maintaining purchase card transaction files in accordance with records retention requirements;
• Reconciling accounts and disputing unresolved or invalid transactions;
• Safeguarding purchase card account information;
• Reporting unauthorized use, lost, stolen, or compromised cards;
• Complying with accountable property procedures; and
• Reporting suspected fraud, waste, abuse, and/or misuse.

Additional information on the Purchase Card Program can be found at http://www.ago.noaa.gov/acquisition/bankcard.html.

GRANTS MANAGEMENT DIVISION ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Grants Management Division (GMD) manages NOAA’s financial assistance awards from NOAA Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland. The GMD serves as the single conduit and final decision station for all actions involving financial assistance. Approximately one-fourth of NOAA’s annual appropriations are expended through financial assistance (e.g. grants and cooperative agreements).

Financial Assistance Instruments

Grants and cooperative agreements are the only financial assistance instruments awarded by the GMD.

Grant is the legal instrument reflecting a relationship between NOAA and a recipient when: (1) the principal purpose of the relationship is to transfer anything of value in order to accomplish a
public purpose of support or stimulation authorized by Federal statute, and (2) no substantial involvement is anticipated between NOAA and the recipient during the performance of the contemplated activity.

Cooperative agreement is the legal instrument reflecting a relationship between NOAA and a recipient when: (1) the principal purpose of the relationship is to transfer anything of value to accomplish a public purpose of support or stimulation authorized by Federal statute, and (2) substantial involvement (e.g., collaboration, participation, or intervention by NOAA in the management of the project) is anticipated between NOAA and the recipient during performance of the contemplated activity.

Types of Financial Assistance Instruments

- **Competitive Awards** are awards made with discretionary funds after a solicitation has been published in a Notice of Funding Opportunity posted at Grants.gov, where NOAA chooses a proposal based on merit review and the application of established evaluation and selection criteria. NOAA may also treat an award that was solicited and reviewed through another Federal agency’s competitive process or through a competitive solicitation process developed by several Federal agencies acting in partnership as competitive.

- **Non-Competitive Awards** are awards made with discretionary funds, but without the benefit of competition. The basis for non-competitive awards is outlined and expanded upon in the [DOC Grants Manual](#). The basis for these awards includes:
  - Only One Source Identified
  - Unusual and Compelling Urgency
  - International Agreement
  - National Security
  - Public Interest

- **Institutional Awards** are awards where funds are awarded based on competition with the intent to maintain a long-term partnership between NOAA and the recipient. New institutional awards may be made on a non-competitive basis if: (1) the recipient performs satisfactorily and submits the appropriate application document, and (2) the results of the periodic reviews validate the effectiveness and continued desirability of the use of Institutional Awards for the program.

- **Awards Mandated by Statute and Limited by Statute** are nondiscretionary awards in which DOC cannot exercise judgment in selection. These awards are either made to organizations that are specifically named in statute or in which eligibility has been limited by law to a particular class of applicants.

- **Formula Awards** are non-discretionary awards to states and territories, which must be awarded if the eligible applicant meets certain qualifying conditions and submits an acceptable proposal. A formula determined by statute establishes the eligibility for and distribution of funds.

Grants Officers are individuals authorized to obligate Federal funds on behalf of NOAA. They are a part of the Grants Management Series, GS-1109. Grants Officers perform the final review
of financial assistance award documents to ensure completeness and adherence to applicable policies, procedures, and regulations. Grants officers have the overall responsibility for the grant(s) or cooperative agreement(s) and provide leadership and supervision to grants management specialists in all aspects of grants administration. They render expert advice to NOAA program officers, AGO and NOAA leadership, and recipients of NOAA grants or cooperative agreements on all issues concerning financial assistance. Additionally, they advise and assist the GMD Director with planning, strategies, regulations, announcements, guidelines, and procedures applicable to NOAA’s financial assistance programs. They have advanced experience managing all phases of the Federal grants lifecycle.

**Grants Management Specialists** are responsible for the administration of NOAA grants and cooperative agreements. They are a part of the Grants Management Series, GS-1109. The duties include:

- **Application Review and Negotiations** - Participating in the review of applications for NOAA financial assistance under all NOAA programs by providing grants administration guidance on policy, procedures, and compliance with applicable DOC and Federal regulations.

- **Review of Applications Selected for Funding** - Determining the appropriate funding instrument (contract, grant, or cooperative agreement) under which the award will be made; performing cost analysis on proposed applications; developing and incorporating special and standard administrative financial award conditions, requirements, and/or responsibilities; submitting the necessary application and/or award documents to the DOC attorney (if required) for review and clearance; performing due diligence as it pertains to risk assessment; preparing correspondence, memoranda, specific award terms and conditions, award documents, and amendments to awards; and submitting final award and amendment documents to the grants officer for signature.

- **Grant Administration and Monitoring Activities** - Performing grant administration by monitoring the NOAA administrative financial and/or programmatic standard and special award conditions; reviewing all prior approval requests (including budget revisions, changes in research objectives and principal personnel, foreign travel, etc.); conducting reviews to determine compliance with the terms and conditions of the awards; ensuring that all financial program income, patent, property, and audit issues have been resolved; reviewing financial reports; and conducting all actions necessary for the closeout of awards.

Additional information on the GMD, including guidance and policies on NOAA grants, is available at [http://www.ago.noaa.gov/grants/policy.html](http://www.ago.noaa.gov/grants/policy.html).

Additional information on the AGO, including guidance and policies on NOAA acquisition and grants, is available at [www.ago.noaa.gov](http://www.ago.noaa.gov).