

The Office of Acquisition and Logistics Management Newsletter

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STILL TIME TO PURCHASE LAB EQUIPMENT DURING FY17

NIH ORS DSEIS Extends New Equipment Sales (NES) Procurement Deadline

Need to purchase new lab equipment and/or instruments before the end of FY17 but worried about those pesky end-of-fiscal year deadlines? Don't fret. The Division of Scientific Equipment and Instrumentation Services (DSEIS) in the Office of Research Services (ORS) can help you acquire lab equipment on its current NES pricelist.

DSEIS has set up an interim purchase process that allows the NIH Intramural community more time to procure new lab equipment before FY17. The DSEIS Interim NES Procurement Process will be available between August 7 and September 11.

The DSEIS deadlines, the NES equipment pricelist, and Interim NES Procurement Process form will be available on the [ORS website](#).

Keep these important dates in mind:

Until COB August 4, 2017: You can purchase new lab equipment on the DSEIS NES pricelist through the NIH ORS DSEIS using the standard NBS Internal Requisitions process.

August 7 through COB September 11, 2017: Use the DSEIS Interim NES Procurement Process to acquire new equipment for your lab.

After COB September 11: No lab equipment may be purchased through DSEIS until FY18.

DSEIS: Your on-campus source for lab equipment – purchase, rental, maintenance, and fabrication

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RATIFICATION OF UNAUTHORIZED COMMITMENTS BELOW SAT NO LONGER REQUIRE OGC COORDINATION

Ratification of Unauthorized Commitments below the Simplified Acquisition Threshold (SAT) \$150,000 no longer require Heads of Contracting Activity (HCAs) to coordinate requests for ratification with the Office of the General Counsel (OGC).

However, this does not change the fact that Unauthorized Commitments, regardless of the dollar amount, must still be signed by the Head of the Contracting Activity (HCA) at NIH.

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RATIFICATION OF UNAUTHORIZED COMMITMENTS BELOW SAT NO LONGER REQUIRE OGC COORDINATION

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HHS ACQUISITION ALERT 2017-02

RATIFICATION OF UNAUTHORIZED COMMITMENTS - COORDINATION WITH OGC

Date of Issuance: 5/31/2017

Purpose:

This purpose of this memorandum is to clarify department-wide guidance for HHS contracting officials regarding HHSAR § 301.602-3(c)(5), to require Heads of Contracting Activity (HCAs) to coordinate requests for ratification with the Office of the General Counsel (OGC) for unauthorized commitment in an amount at or exceeding the simplified acquisition threshold (SAT), which is currently \$150,000.

Guidance:

Pursuant to FAR § 1.602-3, the HCA is permitted to ratify an unauthorized commitment only if all conditions set forth under subsection (c) are met. One such condition is the requirement that "[t]he contracting officer recommends payment and legal counsel concurs in the recommendation, unless agency procedures expressly do not require such concurrence." Agency procedures for HHS further set forth in the HHSAR § 301.602-3(c)(5), specifically as follows: "The HCA shall coordinate the request for ratification with the Office of the General Counsel, General Law Division [GLD] and submit a copy to the SPE." This alert clarifies the HHSAR's guidance to require HCA's to coordinate ratification requests with the Office of the General Counsel, General Law Division [GLD] on ratification requests exceeding the simplified acquisition threshold of \$150,000.00.

GSA FEDERAL SUPPLY SCHEDULE DELIVERY OR TASK ORDERS MAY INCLUDE INCIDENTAL OPEN MARKET ITEMS—WHEN FOLLOWING THE PROPER PROCESS AND DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

Occasionally the necessary product or service to be purchased using a GSA Federal Supply Schedule may include incidental open market items. For example, a piece of equipment that is on GSA FSS that should also include cables or ancillary components.

Where the authority of the contracting office is sufficient, Open Market items may be purchased “inside” of a GSA FSS Delivery Order. There are specific rules and documentation requirements that must be followed.

Effectively, the Open Market items must be processed and documented as an Open Market buy alongside the Delivery Order process and documentation (and inside the same contract file). This can be properly documented by using the [Procedures and Award File Documentation Checklist for Purchase Orders Delivery and Task Orders or BPA Orders 20160504](#). Another valuable resource on our SharePoint site in the [Tools Section](#) is the [Multiple Award Schedules Desk Reference, Version 6](#) (see page 65).

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GSA FEDERAL SUPPLY SCHEDULE DELIVERY OR TASK ORDERS MAY INCLUDE INCIDENTAL OPEN MARKET ITEMS—WHEN FOLLOWING THE PROPER PROCESS AND DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

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Open Market Items

In accordance with FAR 8.402(f), for administrative convenience, an ordering activity Contracting Officer may add items not on the GSA Schedule contract – e.g., open market items – to a GSA Schedule BPA or an individual task or delivery order only if:

- All applicable acquisition regulations pertaining to the purchase of the items not on the Schedule contract have been followed (e.g., publicizing (FAR Part 5), competition requirements (FAR Part 6), acquisition of commercial items (FAR Part 12), contracting methods (FAR Parts 13, 14, and 15), and small business programs (FAR Part 19)).
- The ordering activity Contracting Officer has determined the prices for the items not

on the Schedule contract are fair and reasonable.

- The items are clearly labeled on the order as items not on the Schedule contract.
- All clauses applicable to items not on the Schedule contract are included in the order.
- The ordering Contracting Officer has determined that the items are within the scope of the Schedule contract.

It is important to recognize that GSA has negotiated prices or determined prices to be fair and reasonable only for those supplies and services that are awarded to Schedule contracts. **Therefore, the ordering activity must comply with the requirements for full and open competition, by following all applicable acquisition regulations and determining price reasonableness for open market items.**

CONTRACTING OFFICERS GET NEW PROTECTIONS

In June the [Follow the Rules Act](#) was signed into law. The Act prohibits agencies from taking personnel actions against employees who refuse orders that would require violating a law, rule, or regulation. Prior to the law, a 2016 Federal Circuit Court decision ruled that the Whistleblower Protection Act protected employees only when they refused to violate law. This new law protects Federal employees (including Contracting Officers) from personnel actions for refusing to violate a regulation or rule as well (including the FAR). The Act now protects employees who are placed in the difficult position of either carrying out an order that would force them to violate a law, regulation, or rule or facing disciplinary action.

NIH OFFICES OF ACQUISITION HOLD A TELEWORK DAY

On May 23, 2017, the NIH Offices of Acquisition (OA) held an NIH-wide Continuity of Operations (COOP) telework day to test access to various systems. The day started with holding the Office of Acquisition and Logistics Management (OALM) Acquisitions Management Committee meeting using WebEx. NIH OA employees were encouraged to telework on the test day. A common list of systems to test and actions to perform was distributed in advance by OALM.

Employees were asked to test systems and infrastructure including:

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NIH OFFICES OF ACQUISITION HOLD A TELEWORK DAY

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- 1) NBS (New Business System)
- 2) PRISM
- 3) Oracle
- 4) MarkView
- 5) IC-specific systems
- 6) POTS/AMBIS (Purchasing Online Tracking System/Administrative Management Budget Information System)
- 7) DGS (Document Generation System)
- 8) DCIS (Departmental Contract Information System)
- 9) SAM (System for Award Management)
- 10) CPARS (Contractor Performance Assessment Reporting System)
- 11) FedBizOpps (Federal Business Opportunities)
- 12) nVision
- 13) Electronic Subcontracting Reporting System (eSRS)
- 14) HHS Small Business Review System (SBRS)
- 15) FAITAS (Federal Acquisition Institute Training Application System)
- 16) ITAS (Integrated Time and Attendance System)
- 17) Telework Agreement system
- 18) Outlook
- 19) Lync
- 20) SharePoint
- 21) PDAs (cell phones, BlackBerrys, tablets, etc.)
- 22) VPN (Virtual Private Network)
- 23) Check office phone voicemail

Specific actions were to be processed such as posting FedBizOpps notices, using DGS to prepare contracts/modifications/requests for proposals, using NBS/PRISM for contracts/modifications/closeouts, processing DCIS records, approving 2-way match invoices, generating nVision reports, processing purchase card actions and reconciliations remotely, and performing a data call test between the OALM and NIH OA Directors.

Finally, employees were asked to hold a virtual meeting, send emails, schedule a meeting using Outlook, communicate using a PDA, and access commonly used acquisition websites. To gain maximum benefit from this exercise, employees were encouraged to test systems and complete as many actions as possible.

A survey was used to record what acquisition and administrative systems were accessed and if any issues were encountered during the test day. Two hundred eighty four (284) surveys were submitted, which is up from 237 responses last year. Some of the survey results include:

- 97% of respondents indicated they had all necessary material available to perform all of their job functions for an extended period of time (more than one business week) in the event of an emergency situation. This is up from 90% reported on last year's survey.

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NIH OFFICES OF ACQUISITION HOLD A TELEWORK DAY

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- The most common acquisition system accessed on the telework day was NBS-Prism-Oracle (229 responses or 81%) and the most common administrative system being Outlook (268 responses or 94%).
- The most common acquisition actions accomplished was approving a 2-way match invoice (76 responses or 27%) and processing FPDS/DCIS records (72 responses or 25%).
- The most common issue reported was trouble connecting with or slow VPN and/or Outlook
- When asked if there were any tasks or functions that would require additional information or refinement to be performed in the event of an actual emergency or extended period of COOP telework, 231 respondents (81%) indicated some variation of “No” or “Nothing”
- A few respondents appear to still use paper files and non-digital signatures to complete actions, however it was much lower than reported on last year’s survey.
- Some issues reported that were related to software installs/updates and use of communication tools were reported (e.g. JAVA, Lync, WebEx, Skype)

Some best practices for teleworkers are:

- Having a telework agreement and understanding your responsibilities as a teleworker is important.
- Have a hard copy of important phone numbers (e.g., supervisor, help desk) when you telework. If computer connectivity becomes an issue, you cannot submit an electronic help desk ticket.
- Take work computer home even if not scheduled to telework. This is important during the winter months when weather can be bad.
- Get in the habit of occasionally attempting to perform functions and access systems that you do not normally do while teleworking.
- If you have issues with losing connections/slow speed, ensure your home internet service provider and WIFI/network are adequate and operating effectively.
- Staff should familiarize themselves and actually use the communication technology they have.

In addition, some best practices for managers are:

- Telework is a cornerstone of COOP.
- Implement telework to the greatest extent possible so systems are in place to support successful telework in an emergency.
- Practice telework so that you are comfortable managing a distributed workgroup.
- Provide equipment, technology, and technical support for successful telework.
- Encourage personnel that are eligible for telework, but choose not to, to still establish an Adhoc telework agreement and occasionally telework.
- Communicate who is expected to telework in an emergency.

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NIH OFFICES OF ACQUISITION HOLD A TELEWORK DAY

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The survey results indicate improved telework capabilities and EM/COOP preparedness from last year. Overall, the NIH-wide COOP telework day was extremely successful! Thank you to all who participated in the telework day and provided feedback via the survey.

DO NOT SPLIT PURCHASES TO AVOID MICRO-PURCHASE LIMITS

A recent VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) report found that several VA purchase cardholders made unauthorized commitments by splitting purchases and exceeding micro-purchase thresholds for supplies and services (currently \$3,500 for supplies, \$2,500 for services, and \$2,000 for construction).

In addition, VA's OIG found that approving officials did not adequately monitor cardholders to ensure compliance and several purchases for services were improperly made because there were no contracts established.

A split purchase is the intentional breakdown of a known requirement to stay within a cardholder's single purchase limit or a delegation of authority. Consequently, the micro-purchase limits and competition requirements are circumvented. Per Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) 13.003, purchase requirements cannot be split to avoid obtaining competition for purchases over the micro-purchase limit or to avoid other prescribed levels of review or approval. Intentionally splitting an order or a purchase to stay within a purchase limit is a violation of law.

Below are some examples of splitting a purchase:

Example 1: A cardholder circumvents the micro-purchase limit by splitting an order of \$5,800 into two purchases. Two separate orders of \$2,900 are purchased from the same vendor in two separate orders on the same day.

Example 2: A cardholder splits an order for \$5,600 into three purchases. The cardholder purchases one copier rental for \$2,500, another for \$1,500, and a third for \$1,600. All are from the same vendor in three separate orders on the same day.

Example 3: The cardholder, on the same day, gets a request from his/her supervisor to purchase four identical laptops, each costing \$1,000. The cardholder places two separate orders on day 1 to avoid exceeding \$3,500; and on day 2 places the remaining two orders.

When cardholders exceed their delegation of authority or the authority stated in their warrant—they do not have the authority to commit the government and an unauthorized commitment results. An unauthorized commitment also known as an unauthorized procurement action requires ratification by the HCA.

If a purchase cannot be made within the cardholder's authority, the requirement must be made by a cardholder with a higher single purchase authority or the requirement should be submitted to the appropriate Office of Acquisition for processing.

In addition, please keep the following in mind:

- The annual total for recurring payments such as monthly maintenance and phone bills must be below the micro-purchase threshold, otherwise it should be placed on a written contract with appropriate terms and conditions.

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DO NOT SPLIT PURCHASES TO AVOID MICRO-PURCHASE LIMITS

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- NIH Approving officials are responsible for monitoring cardholder purchases for adherence to purchase card requirements and must understand the consequences for failing to adhere to these requirements.
 - Cardholders who are uncertain as to whether a purchase is appropriate should ask their Card Approving Official (CAO), IC Purchase Card coordinator, or contact the NIH Purchase Card Program for further guidance.
 - Anyone who deliberately violates the FAR requirements regarding split purchases may have their card accounts cancelled, could be held personally liable for the charges, and could face further disciplinary action.
- Please see [VA OIG Report on Split Purchases](#) for the complete report.

NIH PROPERTY MANAGEMENT BRANCH

The NIH Property Management Branch's (PMB) mission is to provide comprehensive, data-driven, strategic asset alignment, and policy development for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to ensure proper utilization and accountability of Government property while realizing the lifecycle value of asset management. Our vision is to provide world-class integrated Asset Management to the NIH Community. PMB's main goal is to pursue customer satisfaction by providing quality, responsive support, we strive to maintain open communications and a collaborative partnership with the NIH property community.

PMB is always looking for ways to raise the bar and improve the overall accountability of property items throughout the NIH. The following is where we've begun, to future initiatives:

Past

In 2010, PMB transformed property management programs and policy to strengthen the inventory and reconciliation process as well as ensuring we were in compliance with the Department of Health and Human Services property management policies and procedures.

Present

- ◇ PMB along with the Institutes and Centers are effectively managing over 255,000 accountable property assets with an acquisition value of over \$1.6B (These assets are located in over 180 NIH buildings, on and off campus to include off-site locations e.g.- Arizona, Detroit, Massachusetts, Montana, and North Carolina);
- ◇ Effectively managing over 1,800 contracts with over 14,000 property items (Government Furnished Equipment (GFE) and Contactor Acquired Property (CAP), valued over \$350M;
- ◇ Conducting effective annual personal property inventories, in which inventory results are measured and shared with the ICs;
- ◇ Conducting annual Staff Assistance Visits (SAV) with each I/C. The purpose of the Staff Assistance Visit (SAV) is for PMB to strengthen relationships with I/C PAOs, enhance communication, and improve efficiency and effectiveness in the overall management of property assets within NIH. The program is an informal session between the PMB Inventory Management Specialist (IMS) and the I/C PAO, outlining asset accountability procedures in

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accordance with the General Services Administration (GSA), Health and Human Services (HHS), and NIH policy and guidance manuals. In addition, best practices are shared with the I/C PAO pertaining to property management concepts, technologies and operating practices;

- ◇ Conducting Personal Property Management Council (PPMC) Meetings with the NIH Property Community – The primary function of the PPMC is to foster a reputable working relationship across the NIH Property Community, serves as a communication and information exchange on property issues, discuss best business practices, seek customer feedback on the property support provided by PMB, and to solicit customer comments on current e.g. – NBS/Sunflower enhancements;
- ◇ Conducting Property and Acquisition Management Council (PAMC) Meetings – The PAMC serve as a stepping stone to achieve effective communications between the acquisition and contract property communities and also serve in an advisory capacity to the Director, Office of Acquisition and Logistics Management (OALM) on all aspects of contract property management, including policies and procedures and assist NIH staff in the administration of government property furnished or acquired under NIH contracts.

Future

- ◇ Leverage technology through the use of IT applications; e.g. - Property Management Portal;
- ◇ Strive to achieve better control and management of accountable property assets by reducing discrepancies within the system of record (Sunflower) to significantly improve asset accountability;
- ◇ Improve data quality of property assets assigned to accountable users;
- ◇ Bring awareness of property accountability and property responsibility to accountable users.

PMB has implemented the following programs:

- ◇ Reception and Integration Program - The purpose of this program is to provide an overview of the processes, procedures and policies as well as introduce key team members from PMB and provide the available tools and information that will help newly appointed I/C PAOs be successful on his/her responsibilities;
- ◇ Initiated NIH Recycling Personal Electronic Items for all NIH employees:

On March 25, 2015, President Obama signed Executive Order (E.O.) 13693, Planning for Federal Sustainability in the Next Decade. One goal of E.O. 13693 is to promote Electronics Stewardship by establishing, measuring, and reporting environmentally sound practices with respect to the agency's disposition of all agency excess or surplus electronic products. PMB, building on this E.O., provides a recycling option for selective personal electronic items. This program, henceforth referred to as the Recycling of Employee's Personal Electronic Items is available to NIH employees and provides a mechanism to have their personally owned electronics recycled through an approved GSA Responsible Recycling (R2) recycler at no cost. A R2 recycler provides important benefits, such as:

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- ◇ Reduces environmental and human health impacts from improper recycling;
- ◇ Increases access to quality reusable and refurbished equipment to those who need them; and
- ◇ Reduces energy use and other environmental impacts associated with mining and processing of virgin materials conserving our limited natural resources.

Scope

The Property Management Branch provides a no-cost recycling option for selective personal electronic items for NIH employees including contractors and volunteers. This implementation guidance provides NIH Employees with a list of items eligible for recycling.

Program Eligible Items:

Laptops, Printers, Flat Screen TVs (no size limit), Notebooks, Inkjet Cartridges, DVD Players, PCs, Toner Cartridges, Blue-Ray Players, Servers, Tablets/Readers, VHS Players, Hard Drives, Smartphones, Digital Cameras, Portable Disk Drives, Cell Phones, Microwaves, Power Supplies, MP3 Players, Coffee makers (No glass), Monitors, GPS Devices, Paper Shredders, Keyboard, Radios.

Procedures for Turning-In Personal Property Items

NIH Employees can turn-in their excess personal electronic items to the Property Reutilization and Disposal Section (PRDS) located at the Gaithersburg Distribution Center (GDC) or the Surplus Yard located on Main Campus, Monday through Friday during the hours of 8:00 am - 3:00 pm. The GDCs is located at 16050 Industrial Drive, Gaithersburg, MD and the Surplus Yard is located behind Building 25 and next to parking lot 14G. Upon arrival, employees will stop by the front office to sign in and obtain assistance from the PRDS staff.

1. Upon arrival at the GDC or Surplus Yard, PRDS employees will:
 - a. Accept personal property items along with the Record of Recycling Personal Property form;
 - b. Tag Employee Personal Property Items to differentiate from NIH government equipment;
 - c. Media Sanitization – PRDS staff will degauss all hard drives in order to remove sensitive data. Degaussing is simply the act of "erasing" data from magnetic media;
 - d. Ensure all Personal Property Items (including hard drives) are recycled via a R2 certified recycler.
2. NIH Employee responsibilities:
 - a. Fill out the Record of Recycling Personal Property form;
 - b. Transport their personally owned property items to the GDC or Surplus Yard on Main Campus.

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The PRDS is not responsible for sensitive information on electronic items turned in, although the PRDS will degauss all hard drives, it is the ultimate responsibility of the employee to ensure all sensitive information is removed prior to turning the item in.

PMB would like your assistance regarding the drafting orders correctly in order to mitigate discrepancy findings on internal annual audits.

There appears to be a problem with buyers at the I/C level writing award documents (Delivery Orders, BPA Calls/Orders and Purchase Orders) as dollar based transactions. By doing so, this creates numerous problems across the NIH property community and is the cause for discrepancy findings on internal annual audits conducted by the NIH A123 Audit Team.

Problems encountered by changing PO(s) from quantity based to dollar based transactions include the following:

- Resets the unit price from the actual acquisition cost to \$1.00 and increases the order quantity;
- Does not create a decal worksheet within the system of record (Sunflower) for each accountable property asset (When property items are ordered as separate line items on the order, it creates a decal worksheet. Decal worksheets should be created for all property assets with an acquisition cost of \$5,000 and above or deemed sensitive);
- Causes the I/C PCO to create manual additions within Sunflower which includes adding the acquisition cost (That's "IF" the I/C PCO can distinguish the acquisition cost from the order or other documents);
- Allows for errors when manually adding assets to Sunflower;
- If manual additions are not captured, causes "overages" on the annual property asset inventory; and
- IC PAO - I/C PCO have no visibility of property assets ordered until the asset is actually delivered to the I/C & received in Sunflower (If communicated properly), or identified during the annual inventory as an overage.

Per policy, all accountable property assets shall be ordered by "quantity" (see NBS Table of Unit of Measure Classes and Values), have its own line item and have object class code 31 annotated. By doing so, this will ensure:

- A decal worksheet is created for each accountable property asset; and
- Acquisition costs are accurately captured for each property asset (correctly annotated on the decal worksheet barring any discount, etc.).

Excess Serviceable Property Items

The Property Reutilization and Disposal Section located at 16050 Industrial Drive, Gaithersburg, MD has excess serviceable property items that your I/C may be able to utilize in lieu of procuring new property assets. The serviceable excess property items are free to any I/C and is available on a first-come basis. In FY 2017, the PRDS has redeployed over 2,000 serviceable excess property items valued over \$5M, back to the NIH.

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Capital Property Documentation Requirements in Sunflower

Institutes and Centers are now required to upload purchase order documents in Sunflower for capital property assets (assets with an acquisition value of \$25,000 and greater). Documents will also be required (uploaded) for all cost adjustments for capital property assets prior to PMB approval. This practice will mitigate the NIH A123 Audit Deficiency finding: “Lack of review over fixed asset entries into Sunflower causing variances between the invoice and the asset value documented; acquisition and related supporting documentation for fixed assets are not adequately maintained”. This will also assist the Office of Financial Management prior to approving actions affecting the general ledger.

Please feel free to contact the Property Management Branch if you have any questions or concerns regarding your personal property needs.

ACQUISITION TRAINING INFORMATION

Acquisition Training at NIH

Acquisition Training Classes that are offered by the NIH Training Center can be accessed at the following link:

[Acquisition Management Training](#).

Federal Acquisition Certification Coursework

CON courses and other Federal Acquisition Certification required courses can be found at the [NIH Training Center](#), [Federal Acquisition Institute](#), and [Defense Acquisition University](#).

Section 508 Accessibility Training

Section 508 Accessibility Training courses can be accessed at:

[CIT Section 508 Accessibility training website](#).

Green Purchasing Training

Green Purchasing Training and other Green Training courses can be found at: [OALM Green Purchasing Website](#).

As a reminder, per HHS policy, all contracting officers, contract specialists, purchase cardholders, card approving officials, CORs and acquisition staff in job series 1102, 1105, and 1106 are required to take the Green Purchasing training every two calendar years. The training includes online training modules for your convenience.

Questions regarding Green Purchasing Training should be sent to:

GreenPurchasing@mail.nih.gov.

ACQUISITION TRAINING INFORMATION

NIH Blanket Purchase Agreement (BPA) Lists Available Online

Lists of all NIH Blanket Purchase Agreements (BPAs) can be found at the NIH Blanket Purchase Agreement [webpage](#).

This location contains Two BPA Lists:

1. Complete vendor alphabetical list;
2. Vendor list sorted by commodity; and

If you have any questions or need further clarification, please contact the BPA helpline at 301-496-5212 or [email](#).

Hvala ti

“Thank You” in Bosnian

SPECIAL THANKS

**We'd like to thank all those who contributed to this issue
and to future editions of the OALM Newsletter.**

The OALM Newsletter will be published six (6) times in calendar year 2017. OALM invites your comments and suggestions for future articles. We encourage staff to submit articles that would be of interest to our readers. We will do our best to include such articles in future editions of the OALM Newsletter.

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If you have any questions or comments regarding the information, policy and/or procedures published in *this* issue, you may contact Annette Romanesk at the email address above. For future issues please contact the Simplified Acquisitions Helpline on (301) 496-0400 or via email at OALMNewsletter@mail.nih.gov and you will be referred to the appropriate editor.