

MAS Contractor Outreach

Common Catalog Platform

User Engagements Summary

February 2021

Disclaimer: This document synthesizes feedback from the CCP MAS contractor engagements. It should not be construed as a requirements document or guarantee of functionality



Executive Summary

The General Services Administration is in the process of **developing requirements for a new user interface** for managing catalogs, the **Common Catalog Platform (CCP)**.

The intention is for the **CCP to replace the Schedule Input Program (SIP) for MAS contract holders**

- To ensure **CCP requirements are developed based on user needs**, the Catalog Management team solicited feedback from current MAS contract holders via **Focus Groups** and a **Request for Information (RFI)** in survey format
- The goal of these interactions was to **educate MAS contract holders** about the CCP, **better understand current pain points**, and **identify desired functionality** for the future
- **Contractor feedback** provided extremely useful insights to the Catalog Management team, and **resulted in 477 potential user stories** to be considered for inclusion in the final CCP requirements.
- Key response themes centered on **user-friendliness, process complexity, product details, oversight, and support**.

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Document Outline

1. **Provide background on our new user interface, the Common Catalog Platform (CCP)**
2. **Provide an overview of recent engagements focused on user requirements** for the new catalog management (CM) system, the Common Catalog Platform (CCP)
 - Contractor focus groups
 - Request for Information (RFI) as a survey
3. **Summarize major MAS contractor response themes** identified during outreach



The CM initiative seeks to reimagine catalog management at GSA through the consolidation & replacement of existing systems

Core Current-State Issues



CM Solution

- To address these issues, CM will **replace legacy systems** with 3 modern alternatives:
 - **Common Catalog Platform (CCP)**
 - Authoritative Catalog Repository (ACR)
 - Verified Product Portal (VPP)
- In addition to updating GSA systems, the initiative will also **improve policies and processes** throughout the CM environment
- For more information about the solution, visit our [contractor focus group material](#) or [Interact Page](#)

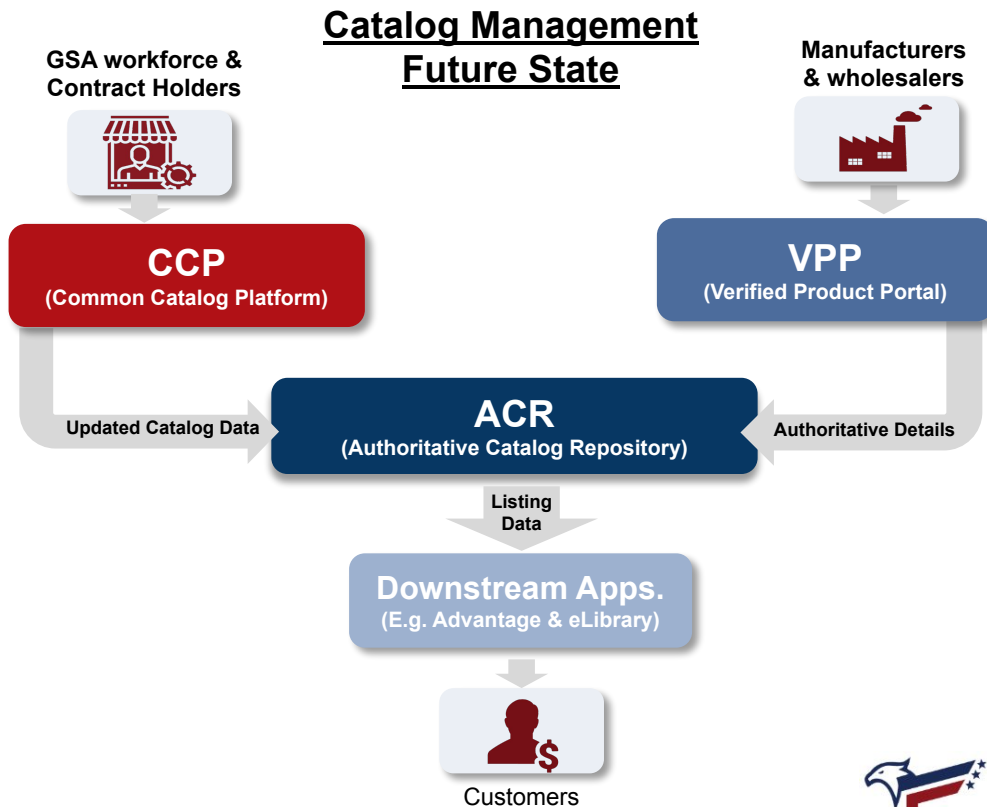
The Common Catalog Platform was the subject of these engagements



The CCP will allow contractors to access & manage their catalogs, which will be integrated with the broader CM environment

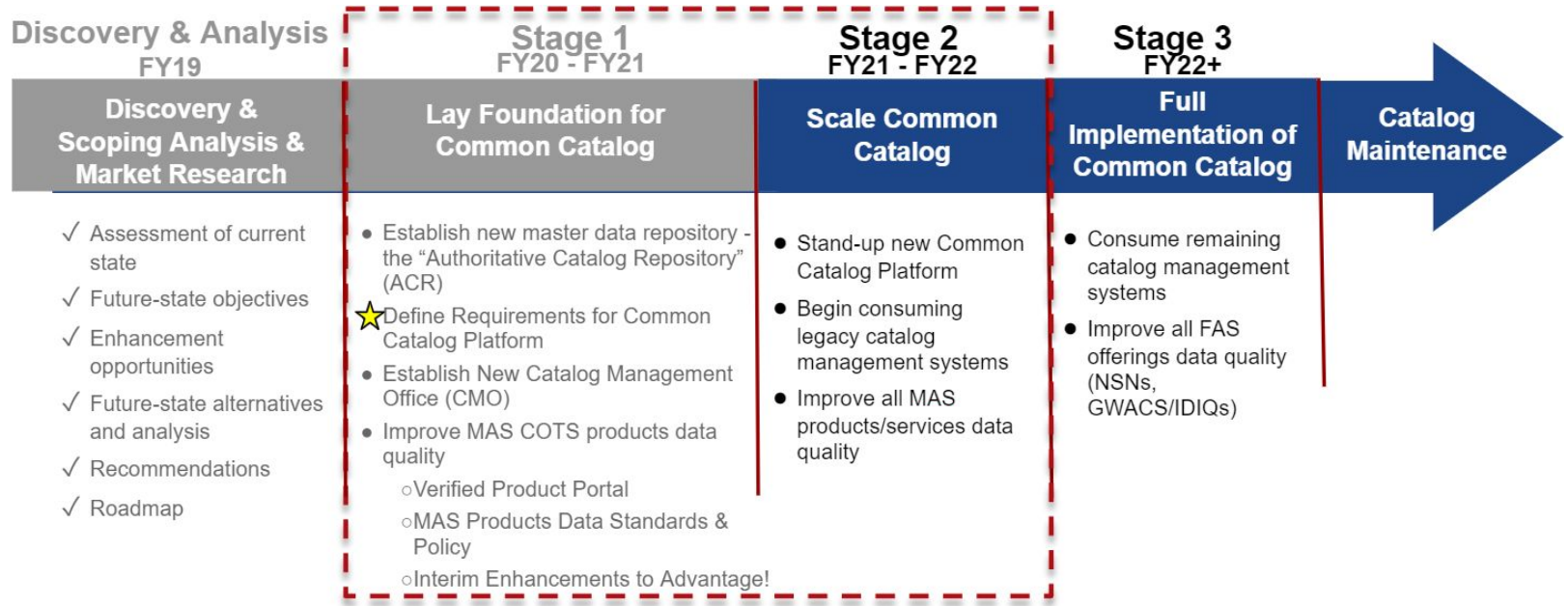
Overview

- **Common Catalog Platform (CCP):** GSA workforce and contract holders will use the CCP to upload, edit, and make changes to catalogs. **The CCP will replace SIP.**
- **Authoritative Catalog Repository (ACR):** Catalog data will be stored in the ACR, a new cloud-based database that will store all catalog data
- **Verified Products Portal (VPP):** Manufacturers will use the VPP to provide authoritative product content and supplier authorization details that will be used to standardize catalogs
- **Advantage:** ACR data will feed into customer facing tools like GSA Advantage! where catalog transactions can occur



The CM initiative is in the process of developing the CCP requirements & long-term vision for improved functionality

GSA Catalog Management Roadmap



Document Outline

1. Provide background on our new UI, the CCP
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 - **Contractor focus groups**
 - **Request for Information**
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To ensure the CCP meets the needs of MAS contractors, CM conducted a series of focus groups in Oct. and Nov. 2020

Common Catalog Platform Focus Groups – MAS contractors

Objectives

- **Educate participants on the CM initiative** and core CM pain points
- **Present the CCP solution** and its key improvements
- **Solicit user stories** around contractors' experience and suggestions for CM processes, systems, and policies

Format

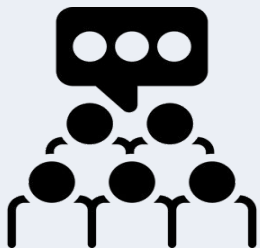
- **Two hours** per focus group with **~12 contractors** per group
- **Participants held a variety of roles** at their companies and had varying levels of experience with GSA systems
- **Groups assigned** based on common concerns (e.g. EDI vs. SIP users etc.)

Content

- **Summarize** CM initiative and primary systems
- **Discuss** desired functionality, pain points, and unique insights
- **Present mock-ups** on proposed functionality



The team collected & synthesized feedback from contractors representing a range of industries, companies, and backgrounds



8

Focus Groups



98

Participants*



279

User Stories

Industries Represented

- Facilities, Furniture & Furnishings, Office Management, Industrial Products & Services
- Scientific Management & Solutions, Medical Equipment & Supplies, Information Technology
- Professional Services, Transportation & Logistics, Security & Protection

*Participants included contractors that hold both GSA and VA schedules and represented 63 unique companies



To enrich focus group data and provide more opportunities for feedback, CM also engaged contractors through an RFI survey

Common Catalog Platform Request for Information – MAS Contractors

Objectives

- **Better understand catalog management** from the contractor perspective
- **Develop and prioritize new features** based on the collected information

Format

- **30 questions**, the majority were multiple choice
- **Text boxes** were offered to **explain answers** as well as to **list desired future state features**

Content

- Questions focused on **measuring** current pain points, **researching** potential areas of development, and **testing** solution ideas
- Contractors were asked **specific questions** depending on their catalog management mechanism and the content of their catalog



The team collected & synthesized survey feedback from a large pool of respondents with a wide range of representation



241

Responses



100%

Large Category
Representation



198

User Stories

Respondent Breakdown

172 Small
Businesses
(72%)

68 Other-
Than-Small
(28%)

182 primarily
SIP users

9 EDI
users

50 utilizing
“3rd party”
catalog service
providers



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Response Theme 1: User-friendliness

Current State Issues

- In the current state, contractors feel that **the system is not user friendly**, the **UI looks antiquated**, and it **lacks the flexibility** of modern portals.
- The system often **does not communicate with itself**, forcing contractors to repeatedly upload the same information.
- **SIP is still a desktop application**, which creates problems for collaborating internally, keeping one's system up to date, working around firewalls, OS interoperability, and being limited to one physical computer.



Access catalog from the Web



Collaborate with coworkers in the system



Automatically prompt contractors for documentation



Real-time cataloging issue alerts



Response Theme 2: Complex and Lengthy Processes

Current State Issues

- contractors provide an exorbitant amount of information, only to have their **uploads rejected, altered, or obscured** from customers.
- contractors submit and **wait on lengthy mods**, never knowing in real time if their change was successful.
- contractors want to **remove the duplicative 2-step eMod/SIP process**, integrating their catalog management tool with other GSA systems.
- These roadblocks make it **harder for contractors to adjust their pricing and products** at the speed of business.

Future State Requests



1-step process to enter data for both contracting & catalog systems



Line-item edits and deletions to change parts of a larger catalog



Mod speed and transparency for rapid modification approval and status updates



Auto-generated T&C files to attach to contractor submissions

Response Theme 3: Inadequate Product Detail

Current State Issues

- Contractors think that **customers are not getting necessary information** about their products and services.
- Many believe it is very **difficult to adequately provide information** like photos, stock, product variations and configurations, country-of-origin, or shipping details.
- When they try to provide what they can, **strict submissions standards** and template fields often reject their picture and file uploads.

Future State Requests

Additional product information fields

List product variants attached to a base product

Better manage and display inventory details

Flexibility to provide varying types of pictures and files at upload

Show and caption best available product photos

52%

Want larger character limits for product descriptions

50%

Want to link photos to descriptions



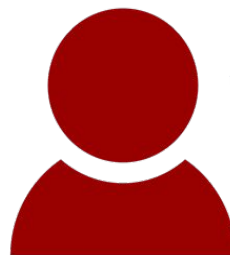
Response Theme 4: Need for Greater GSA Oversight & Adjudication

Current State Issues

- **33%** of contractors surveyed note **“products listed by unauthorized sellers” is a top concern** because unfair competition can hurt their business.
- Contractors notice others not following standard rules and best practices **without repercussions from GSA.**
- Contractors believe **ETS or trade-barred items don't get taken down quickly** enough.

Future State Requests

- **Improved monitoring and adjudication** of information like country of origin, business size, product specifications, and pricing.



*“Unverified contractors are carrying products that they should not be selling... **Let's get the grey market out of Advantage**”*



Response Theme 5: Insufficient Guidance and Support

Current State Issues

- **45%** of MRAS respondents indicate that GSA support **does not enable effective catalog management**.
- contractors believe **catalog policies are too complicated** and the **guidebooks are hard to comprehend**, if they are even available.
- contractors often **need to call the helpdesk**, which isn't always effective due to a perceived **lack of technical expertise** and the inability to share screens.

Future State Requests



Assist customers through the purchasing process and provide an easy way to interface with contractors.



Immediate and clear notifications, emphasizing plain-language instructions.



Contractors in some groups had their own unique response themes

“ I want SIP to be user friendly enough for one person to update ”



Utilizing 3rd party catalog services

- **20% of survey respondents** use a 3rd party to manage their catalog
- **Many would prefer to directly manage their catalogs** via an intuitive, functional user application

“ If those API endpoints were offered as a complement to EDI, it would make our lives a lot easier ”



Electronic Data Interchange Users

- **Receptive to switching** to API or a better user application (CCP)
- Want to see **streamlined templates, larger accepted file sizes, and an EDI tech. support group**

“ SIP...treat[s] service providers like product providers. It would be very helpful if there was some way to differentiate that ”



Managing Service Catalogs

- **Listing fields should vary** based on product / service needs for more tailored catalogs
- Need an **alternative to labor categories** and a method to differentiate **company capabilities by SIN**

Contractor feedback has been invaluable to developing CCP requirements; thank you to all our participants!

- **Participant feedback has directly impacted the CCP requirements** and will continue to inform CCP development.
- If you would like to **share any additional comments** on the Common Catalog Platform or to **participate in future engagement activities**, please email CatalogManagement@gsa.gov
- The CM team aims **to make an award for development in FY21** and to **start developing the solution in FY22**

