

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

CIRCULAR NO. A-76 (REVISED 1999)

August 4, 1983

TO THE HEADS OF EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS AND ESTABLISHMENTS

SUBJECT: Performance of Commercial Activities

1. Purpose. This Circular establishes Federal policy regarding the performance of commercial activities and implements the statutory requirements of the Federal Activities Inventory Reform Act of 1998, Public Law 105-270. The Supplement to this Circular sets forth the procedures for determining whether commercial activities should be performed under contract with commercial sources or in-house using Government facilities and personnel.
2. Rescission. OMB Circular No. A-76 (Revised), dated March 29, 1979; and Transmittal Memoranda 1 through 14 and 16 through 18.
3. Authority. The Budget and Accounting Act of 1921 (31 U.S.C. 1 et seq.), The Office of Federal Procurement Policy Act Amendments of 1979. (41 U.S.C. 401 et seq.), and The Federal Activities Inventory Reform Act of 1998. (P. L. 105-270).
4. Background.
  - a. In the process of governing, the Government should not compete with its citizens. The competitive enterprise system, characterized by individual freedom and initiative, is the primary source of national economic strength. In recognition of this principle, it has been and continues to be the general policy of the Government to rely on commercial sources to supply the products and services the Government needs.
  - b. This national policy was promulgated through Bureau of the Budget Bulletins issued in 1955, 1957 and 1960. OMB Circular No. A-76 was issued in 1966. The Circular was previously revised in 1967, 1979, and 1983. The Supplement (Revised Supplemental Handbook) was previously revised in March 1996 (Transmittal Memorandum 15).
5. Policy. It is the policy of the United States Government to:
  - a. Achieve Economy and Enhance Productivity. Competition enhances quality, economy, and productivity. Whenever commercial sector performance of a Government operated commercial activity is permissible, in accordance with this Circular and its Supplement, comparison of the cost of contracting and the cost of in-house performance shall be performed to determine who will do the work. When

conducting cost comparisons, agencies must ensure that all costs are considered and that these costs are realistic and fair.

- b. Retain Governmental Functions In-House. Certain functions are inherently Governmental in nature, being so intimately related to the public interest as to mandate performance only by Federal employees. These functions are not in competition with the commercial sector. Therefore, these functions shall be performed by Government employees.
  - c. Rely on the Commercial Sector. The Federal Government shall rely on commercially available sources to provide commercial products and services. In accordance with the provisions of this Circular and its Supplement, the Government shall not start or carry on any activity to provide a commercial product or service if the product or service can be procured more economically from a commercial source.
6. Definitions. For purposes of this Circular:
- a. A commercial activity is one which is operated by a Federal executive agency and which provides a product or service that could be obtained from a commercial source. Activities that meet the definition of an inherently Governmental function provided below are not commercial activities. A representative list of commercial activities is provided in [Attachment A](#). A commercial activity also may be part of an organization or a type of work that is separable from other functions or activities and is suitable for performance by contract.
  - b. A conversion to contract is the changeover of an activity from Government performance to performance under contract by a commercial source.
  - c. A conversion to in-house is the changeover of an activity from performance under contract to Government performance.
  - d. A commercial source is a business or other non-Federal activity located in the United States, its territories and possessions, the District of Columbia or the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, which provides a commercial product or service.
  - e. An inherently Governmental function is a function which is so intimately related to the public interest as to mandate performance by Government employees. Consistent with the definitions provided in the Federal Activities Inventory Reform Act of 1998 and OFPP Policy Letter 92-1, these functions include those activities which require either the exercise of discretion in applying Government authority or the use of value judgment in making decisions for the Government. Services or products in support of inherently Governmental functions, such as those listed in [Attachment A](#), are commercial activities and are normally subject to this Circular. Inherently Governmental functions normally fall into two categories:

(1) The act of governing; i.e., the discretionary exercise of Government authority. Examples include criminal investigations, prosecutions and other judicial functions; management of Government programs requiring value judgments, as in direction of the national defense; management and direction of the Armed Services; activities performed exclusively by military personnel who are subject to deployment in a combat, combat support or combat service support role; conduct of foreign relations; selection

of program priorities; direction of Federal employees; regulation of the use of space, oceans, navigable rivers and other natural resources; direction of intelligence and counter-intelligence operations; and regulation of industry and commerce, including food and drugs.

(2) Monetary transactions and entitlements, such as tax collection and revenue disbursements; control of the Treasury accounts and money supply; and the administration of public trusts.

- f. A cost comparison is the process of developing an estimate of the cost of Government performance of a commercial activity and comparing it, in accordance with the requirements of the Supplement, to the cost to the Government for contract performance of the activity.
- g. Directly affected parties are Federal employees and their representative organizations and bidders or offerors on the instant solicitation.
- h. Interested parties for purposes of challenging the contents of an agency's Commercial Activities Inventory under the Federal Activities Inventory Reform Act of 1998 are:

(1) A private sector source that (A) is an actual or prospective offeror for any contract or other form of agreement to perform the activity; and (B) has a direct economic interest in performing the activity that would be adversely affected by a determination not to procure the performance of the activity from a private sector source.

(2) A representative of any business or professional association that includes within its membership private sector sources referred to in (1) above.

(3) An officer or employee of an organization within an executive agency that is an actual or prospective offeror to perform the activity.

(4) The head of any labor organization referred to in section 7103(a) (4) of Title 5, United States Code that includes within its membership officers or employees of an organization referred to in (3) above.

#### 7. Scope.

- a. Unless otherwise provided by law, this Circular and its Supplement shall apply to all executive agencies and shall provide administrative direction to heads of agencies.
- b. This Circular and its Supplement apply to printing and binding only in those agencies or departments which are exempted by law from the provisions of Title 44 of the U.S. Code.
- c. This Circular and its Supplement shall not:

(1) Be applicable when contrary to law, Executive Orders, or any treaty or international agreement;

(2) Apply to inherently Governmental functions as defined in paragraph 6.e.;

(3) Apply to the Department of Defense in times of a declared war or military mobilization;

(4) Provide authority to enter into contracts;

(5) Authorize contracts which establish an employer-employee relationship between the Government and contractor employees. An employer-employee relationship involves close, continual supervision of individual contractor employees by Government employees, as distinguished from general oversight of contractor operations. However, limited and necessary interaction between Government employees and contractor employees, particularly during the transition period of conversion to contract, does not establish an employer-employee relationship.

(6) Be used to justify conversion to contract solely to avoid personnel ceilings or salary limitations;

(7) Apply to the conduct of research and development. However, severable in-house commercial activities in support of research and development, such as those listed in [Attachment A](#), are normally subject to this Circular and its Supplement; or

(8) Establish and shall not be construed to create any substantive or procedural basis for anyone to challenge any agency action or inaction on the basis that such action or inaction was not in accordance with this Circular, except as specifically set forth in Part 1, Chapter 3, paragraph K of the Supplement, "Appeals of Cost Comparison Decisions" and as set forth in Appendix 2, Paragraph G, consistent with Section 3 of the Federal Activities Inventory Reform Act of 1998.

d. The requirements of the Federal Activities Inventory Reform Act of 1998 apply to the following executive agencies:

(1) an executive department named in 5 USC 101,

(2) a military department named in 5 USC 102, and

(3) an independent establishment as defined in 5 USC 104.

e. The requirements of the Federal Activities Inventory Reform Act of 1998 do not apply to the following entities or activities:

- (1) the General Accounting Office,
- (2) a Government corporation or a Government controlled corporation as defined in 5 USC 103,
- (3) a non-appropriated funds instrumentality if all of its employees are referred to in 5 USC 2105(c), or
- (4) Depot-level maintenance and repair of the Department of Defense as defined in 10 USC 2460.

8. Government Performance of a Commercial Activity. Government performance of a commercial activity is authorized under any of the following conditions:

- a. No Satisfactory Commercial Source Available. Either no commercial source is capable of providing the needed product or service, or use of such a source would cause unacceptable delay or disruption of an essential program. Findings shall be supported as follows:

- (1) If the finding is that no commercial source is capable of providing the needed product or service, the efforts made to find commercial sources must be documented and made available to the public upon request. These efforts shall include, in addition to consideration of preferential procurement programs (see Part I, Chapter 1, paragraph C of the Supplement) at least three notices describing the requirement in the Commerce Business Daily over a 90-day period or, in cases of bona fide urgency, two notices over a 30-day period. Specifications and requirements in the solicitation shall not be unduly restrictive and shall not exceed those required of in-house Government personnel or operations.

- (2) If the finding is that a commercial source would cause unacceptable delay or disruption of an agency program, a written explanation, approved by the assistant secretary or designee in paragraph 9.a. of the Circular, must show the specific impact on an agency mission in terms of cost and performance. Urgency alone is not adequate reason to continue in-house operation of a commercial activity. Temporary disruption resulting from conversion to contract is not sufficient support for such a finding, nor is the possibility of a strike by contract employees. If the commercial activity has ever been performed by contract, an explanation of how the instant circumstances differ must be documented. These decisions must be made available to the public upon request.

- (3) Activities may not be justified for in-house performance solely on the basis that the activity involves or supports a classified program or the activity is required to perform an agency's basic mission.

- b. National Defense.

(1) The Secretary of Defense shall establish criteria for determining when Government performance of a commercial activity is required for national defense reasons. Such criteria shall be furnished to OMB, upon request.

(2) Only the Secretary of Defense or his designee has the authority to exempt commercial activities for national defense reasons.

- c. Patient Care. Commercial activities performed at hospitals operated by the Government shall be retained in-house if the agency head, in consultation with the agency's chief medical director, determines that in-house performance would be in the best interests of direct patient care.
  - d. Lower cost. Government performance of a commercial activity is authorized if a cost comparison prepared in accordance with the Supplement demonstrates that the Government is operating or can operate the activity on an ongoing basis at an estimated lower cost than a qualified commercial source.
9. Action Requirements. To ensure that the provisions of this Circular and its Supplement are followed, each agency head shall:
- a. Designate an official at the assistant secretary or equivalent level and officials at a comparable level in major component organizations to have responsibility for implementation of this Circular and its Supplement within the agency.
  - b. Establish one or more offices as central points of contact to carry out implementation. These offices shall have access to all documents and data pertinent to actions taken under the Circular and its Supplement and will respond in a timely manner to all requests concerning inventories, schedules, reviews, results of cost comparisons and cost comparison data.
  - c. Be guided by Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) Subpart 24.2 (Freedom of Information Act) in considering requests for information.
  - d. Implement this Circular and its Supplement with a minimum of internal instructions. Cost comparisons shall not be delayed pending issuance of such instructions.
  - e. Ensure the reviews of all existing in-house commercial activities are completed within a reasonable time in accordance with the Federal Activities Inventory Reform Act of 1998 and the Supplement.
10. Annual Reporting Requirement. As required by the Federal Activities Inventory Reform Act of 1998 and Appendix 2 of the Supplement, no later than June 30 of each year, agencies shall submit to OMB a Commercial Activities Inventory and any supplemental information requested by OMB. After review and consultation by OMB, agencies will transmit a copy of the Commercial Activities Inventory to Congress and make the contents of the Inventory available to the public. Agencies will follow the process provided in the Supplement for interested parties to challenge (and appeal) the contents of the inventory.
11. OMB Responsibility and Contact Point. All questions or inquiries should be submitted to the Office of Management and Budget, Room 6002 NEOB, Washington, DC 20503. Telephone number (202) 395-6104, FAX (202) 395-7230.

12. Effective Date. This Circular and the changes to its Supplement are effective immediately.

Attachment A  
OMB Circular No. A-76

## EXAMPLES OF COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES

### Audiovisual Products and Services

- Photography (still, movie, aerial, etc.)
- Photographic processing (developing, printing, enlarging, etc.)
- Film and videotape production (script writing, direction, animation, editing, acting, etc.)
- Microfilming and other microforms
- Art and graphics services
- Distribution of audiovisual materials
- Reproduction and duplication of audiovisual products
- Audiovisual facility management and operation
- Maintenance of audiovisual equipment

### Automatic Data Processing

- ADP services - batch processing, time-sharing, facility management, etc.
- Programming and systems analysis, design, development, and simulation
- Key punching, data entry, transmission, and teleprocessing services
- Systems engineering and installation
- Equipment installation, operation, and maintenance

### Food Services

- Operation of cafeterias, mess halls, kitchens, bakeries, dairies, and commissaries
- Vending machines
- Ice and water

## Health Services

- Surgical, medical, dental, and psychiatric care
- Hospitalization, outpatient, and nursing care
- Physical examinations
- Eye and hearing examinations and manufacturing and fitting glasses and hearing aids
- Medical and dental laboratories
- Dispensaries
- Preventive medicine
- Dietary services
- Veterinary services

## Industrial Shops and Services

- Machine, carpentry, electrical, plumbing, painting, and other shops
- Industrial gas production and recharging
- Equipment and instrument fabrication, repair and calibration
- Plumbing, heating, electrical, and air conditioning services, including repair
- Fire protection and prevention services
- Custodial and janitorial services
- Refuse collection and processing

## Maintenance, Overhaul, Repair, and Testing

- Aircraft and aircraft components
- Ships, boats, and components
- Motor vehicles
- Combat vehicles
- Railway systems
- Electronic equipment and systems
- Weapons and weapon systems
- Medical and dental equipment
- Office furniture and equipment
- Industrial plant equipment
- Photographic equipment
- Space systems

## Management Support Services

Advertising and public relations services  
Financial and payroll services  
Debt collection

#### Manufacturing, Fabrication, Processing, Testing, and Packaging

Ordnance equipment  
Clothing and fabric products  
Liquid, gaseous, and chemical products  
Lumber products  
Communications and electronics equipment  
Rubber and plastic products  
Optical and related products  
Sheet metal and foundry products  
Machined products  
Construction materials  
Test and instrumentation equipment

#### Office and Administrative Services

Library operations  
Stenographic recording and transcribing  
Word processing/data entry/typing  
Mail/messenger  
Translation  
Management information systems, products and distribution  
Financial auditing and services  
Compliance auditing  
Court reporting  
Material management  
Supply services

#### Other Services

Laundry and dry cleaning  
Mapping and charting  
Architect and engineer services  
Geological surveys  
Cataloging  
Training -- academic, technical, vocational, and specialized  
Operation of utility systems (power, gas, water steam, and sewage)  
Laboratory testing services

## Printing and Reproduction

- Facility management and operation
- Printing and binding -- where the agency or department is exempted from the provisions of Title 44 of the U.S. Code
- Reproduction, copying, and duplication
- Blueprinting

## Real Property

- Design, engineering, construction, modification, repair, and maintenance of buildings and structures; building mechanical and electrical equipment and systems; elevators; escalators; moving walks
- Construction, alteration, repair, and maintenance of roads and other surfaced areas
- Landscaping, drainage, mowing and care of grounds
- Dredging of waterways

## Security

- Guard and protective services
- Systems engineering, installation, and maintenance of security systems and individual privacy systems
- Forensic laboratories

## Special Studies and Analyses

- Cost benefit analyses
- Statistical analyses
- Scientific data studies
- Regulatory studies
- Defense, education, energy studies
- Legal/litigation studies
- Management studies

## Systems Engineering, Installation, Operation, Maintenance, and Testing

- Communications systems - voice, message, data, radio, wire, microwave, and satellite
- Missile ranges
- Satellite tracking and data acquisition

Radar detection and tracking  
Television systems - studio and transmission equipment, distribution systems, receivers, antennas, etc.  
Recreational areas  
Bulk storage facilities

## Transportation

Operation of motor pools  
Bus service  
Vehicle operation and maintenance  
Air, water, and land transportation of people and things  
Trucking and hauling