

DoW Acquisition Transformation



How It Changes Your Federal Go-to-Market Strategy

Based on Executive Order 14265 and the DoW Warfighting
Acquisition System (WAS) Published Nov. 10, 2025

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Executive Summary

The Department of War is in the middle of the most significant transformation of its acquisition system in a generation. Rooted in Executive Order 14265, signed in April 2025, and formalized through the November 2025 Warfighting Acquisition System (WAS) memoranda issued by Secretary Pete Hegseth, these reforms are not incremental adjustments to a familiar process. They represent a fundamental rethinking of how the Pentagon buys things, who it buys from, and what it values in a vendor.

The short version: speed, commercial solutions, and demonstrable outcomes now outrank compliance, credentials, and lengthy proposals. The acquisition system that rewarded companies for checking bureaucratic boxes is being dismantled and replaced with one that rewards companies that can move fast, solve real problems, and deliver results at scale.

For companies marketing services and solutions to the federal government, this is not a disruption to manage, it is an opportunity to seize—but only if your marketing strategy, messaging, and positioning shift to match the new environment.

This white paper explains what has changed, why it matters, and what your organization needs to think about as you decide how to respond.

“To move fast with speed and rigor, the Department must maximize flexibility by removing unnecessary process and reducing regulations...”

—DoW Acquisition Transformation Strategy, Pg. 19, November 2025



What Changed and Why

From the Defense Acquisition System to the Warfighting Acquisition System

On November 7, 2025, Secretary Hegseth formally redesignated the Defense Acquisition System (DAS) as the Warfighting Acquisition System (WAS). The old system was built around process compliance and risk avoidance. The new system is built around one question: how do we get the best capabilities to the warfighter as fast as possible?

The WAS places the acquisition enterprise on what Hegseth described as a “wartime footing.” Every element of the procurement process is now expected to demonstrate how it accelerates delivery, not how thoroughly it documents compliance.

“The Defense Department is rapidly transforming our antiquated acquisition processes and revitalizing the atrophied Defense Industrial Base by prioritizing speed, flexibility, and rigorous execution.”

—Secretary Pete Hegseth, November 2025



The Five Pillars of Acquisition Reform

The Warfighting Acquisition System is organized around five strategic pillars. Understanding what each one means for your business is the starting point for building a marketing strategy that fits the new environment.

Pillar	Description	What It Means for You
1. Rebuild the Defense Industrial Base	Expand the supplier base beyond the legacy Big 5. Open direct access for non-traditional and sub-tier vendors.	The playing field is opening. Companies that have never won federal work now have a path. Existing vendors that fail to adapt will lose ground they assumed was protected.
2. Elevate the Acquisition Workforce	Empower program managers with longer tenures, performance KPIs, and real authority to move faster.	The people making buying decisions are changing. Who you know, and how well they know you, matters more than ever in this environment.
3. Maximize Acquisition Flexibility	Prioritize OTA, CSO, and commercial contracting instruments. Reduce FAR/DFARS regulatory burden dramatically.	The front door to federal contracts has changed. Companies that understand the new entry points will move faster than those still approaching the market the old way.
4. Technical and Execution Excellence	Reward companies that demonstrate working solutions over those that produce the best paperwork.	What you bring to a first meeting now determines whether there is a second one. The way you present your capabilities needs to reflect that shift.
5. Lifecycle Risk Management	Embed sustainment planning early. Hold vendors accountable for long-term performance, not just delivery.	Government buyers are evaluating your organization's depth, not just your solution. Your marketing needs to convey the full picture of who you are as a partner.

The Big Shift: Old Way Versus New

The table below captures the core contrasts between the acquisition environment that most GovCon companies built their businesses around and the one that is replacing it.

Old Acquisition Approach	New Warfighting Acquisition System
Compliance-first culture	Speed and execution culture
Requirements-based procurement	Solutions-based procurement
5 major prime contractors dominate	Open to non-traditional vendors at every tier
Long, rigid acquisition cycles (5-10+ years)	Agile, compressed timelines (months to 1-2 years)
Cost Accounting Standards (CAS) required	Transition to commercial (GAAP) accounting
Paper proposals and capability statements	Prototype, demo, and working solution preferred
FAR/DFARS-heavy contract vehicles	OTA and CSO as default instruments where feasible
Prime gatekeepers control sub-tier access	Direct government-to-supplier engagement enabled

Is your marketing strategy, messaging, and positioning ready to support your BD and captiv teams in the new procurement environment?

The Regulatory Relief Picture

One of the most significant practical changes for companies, especially non-traditional vendors and commercial technology companies that have historically avoided the federal market, is the dramatic reduction in regulatory burden.

Cost Accounting Standards (CAS), which required companies to implement specialized, government-specific accounting systems, are being replaced with standard commercial GAAP accounting. This removes one of the single largest barriers to entry for commercial companies that could not justify the compliance overhead of government contracting.

The Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) and the Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement (DFARS) are being significantly reduced in scope and application. The Truth in Negotiations Act (TINA), which required extensive cost and pricing data in negotiations, is being scaled back wherever competition exists. These were systemic friction points that slowed acquisition and discouraged commercial vendors from participating.

On the IT side, Commercial Solutions Offerings (CSOs) and Other Transaction Authority (OTA) agreements are now the preferred, and in many cases default, instruments for acquiring software and technology capabilities. Commercial software and SaaS solutions are explicitly preferred over custom government-built systems, a reversal of decades of procurement culture.

Bid protest reform is also underway. A loser-pays model is being pursued to reduce the frivolous protest activity that incumbents have historically used to tie up contract awards and discourage challengers. If implemented, this levels the playing field for smaller and non-traditional companies competing against entrenched primes.

“...the Department will incentivize the warfighting acquisition workforce (WAW) to pursue solutions from a broader industrial base for novel or more effective solutions by strengthening the guidance, training, and resources on the effective use of Commercial Solutions Offerings (CSOs), other transactions, and related agreements, commercial acquisition, and rapid contracting practices.”

—DoW Acquisition Transformation Strategy, Pg. 8, November 2025

The Direct-to-Supplier Revolution

Why Sub-Tier Suppliers Now Have a Direct Path to Government Buyers

For most of the post-Cold War era, the defense industrial base was controlled by a small number of large prime contractors. At the peak of consolidation, more than 50 major prime vendors had collapsed to just five dominant players. The government bought from the primes, and the primes subcontracted down the supply chain. Sub-tier suppliers, no matter how capable or innovative, were largely invisible to the government buyers who ultimately needed their products.

The WAS is designed to reverse this. **The DoW is actively mapping supply chains at every tier, identifying sub-tier suppliers of critical components, and creating mechanisms to contract with them directly.** The goal is both industrial base resilience and access to innovation that is currently trapped behind prime contractor gatekeepers.

For Tier 2 and Tier 3 suppliers, this is a structural change in how the market works. The question is not whether this shift creates opportunity. It does. **The question is whether your company is positioned to be visible and credible to government buyers who are looking directly at your tier for the first time.**

“Go Direct-to-Supplier: Negotiate and invest directly with all companies and suppliers throughout the industrial base, not just through the big prime contractors, saving money and time.”

—DoW Aquisiton Transformation Strategy, Pg. 8, November 2025

Priority Capability Areas

The DoW has concentrated its initial direct supplier engagement in capability areas it has identified as critical gaps in the defense industrial base. Companies operating in these spaces are at the front of the line for direct government engagement.

- + Munitions and ammunition production
- + Sensors and surveillance systems
- + Fuses and energetics
- + Advanced materials and critical minerals
- + Hypersonic and directed energy components
- + Domestic semiconductor and microelectronics manufacturing
- + Cybersecurity and resilient communications infrastructure

If your company operates in any of these areas, **the window for establishing direct visibility with government buyers is open right now. How well you use it depends entirely on how your marketing and positioning are built.**

“...establish the contractual and resourcing mechanisms, as well as acquisition strategies, to smartly pursue development, production, and sustainment of subsystems, parts, and components through expanded use of direct-to supplier relationships.”

—DoW Acquisition Transformation Strategy, Pg. 8, November 2025

Positioning as a Single-Source Risk Eliminator

The supply chain fragility exposed by recent global events has made domestic sourcing and surge capacity into genuine strategic priorities for the DoW. This is not procurement language. It is a national security language.

Here is the hard truth. Many of the most strategically valuable companies in defense supply chains are invisible to the decision-makers who need them most. Not because their capabilities are lacking. Because their marketing is. If you are a domestic manufacturer, a surge-capable supplier, or a critical single-source provider and you are not being recognized as a strategic asset, you do not have a capability problem. You have a marketing problem.

Sub-tier suppliers that can demonstrate domestic sourcing, surge capacity, and supply chain resilience are not just vendors. They are essential infrastructure. The question is, does your messaging and digital presence tell the story so the right people know it?

Solutions Over Specifications How the DoW Now Defines a Good Vendor

One of the most operationally significant changes in the WAS is the shift from requirements-based to solutions-based procurement. In the old model, the government issued detailed specifications and evaluated vendors on how closely they met them. Compliance with the spec was the primary evaluation criterion.

In the new model, the DoW presents operational problems to industry and asks companies to propose solutions. The emphasis is on outcomes, not adherence to a predetermined technical spec. Companies that can identify a real mission problem, propose a credible solution, and demonstrate it through a working prototype now have a path to contract award that does not require checking every box in a specification document.

Does your messaging and digital presence tell the story so the right people know it?

This changes what a winning vendor looks like. That means **your branding, messaging, and marketing have to change too. Companies that adapt their positioning now will have a advantage** over those still organizing their materials around credentials and compliance history.

The New Procurement Flow

Understanding how the new solicitation and award process works shapes everything from how you approach a first conversation to how you **structure your marketing materials to support business development and capture activities.**

1	Operational Problem Posted	The DoW presents a kill chain gap or mission need through consortia or open solicitations rather than a rigid RFP specification.
2	Industry Proposes Solutions	Any qualified vendor can respond. No pre-set technical specification is required to bid. The door is open to non-traditional and commercial companies.
3	Prototype and Demo	Vendors show working solutions instead of submitting paper proposals. Speed of demonstration and practical functionality are evaluated directly.
4	Contract Award	The best solution wins. Speed and practical execution outweigh full specification compliance.

The implications for how you present your company, what you lead with in a first meeting, and how your website and marketing materials are structured are significant. Getting those elements right requires a clear understanding of where you fit in this flow and how government buyers at each stage will evaluate what they find when they look you up. Your BD and Capture teams work harder than they need to if the market doesn't know, like, and trust you.

The New Power Structure Who Now Holds the Checkbook

Understanding who to target in your government marketing strategy is just as important as knowing what to say. The WAS has shifted where acquisition authority lives, and your business development targeting needs to reflect that.

Portfolio Acquisition Executives (PAEs)

PAEs now control budget, requirements, and acquisition direction for entire capability portfolios. They are the new checkbook holders in the WAS structure. **Building visibility and relationships at the PAE level requires a different kind of marketing approach than the ones most GovCon companies have historically used.** These are not people who read capability statements. They are people who respond to credibility signals, peer recognition, and clear evidence that you can deliver at the speed they are now being held accountable for.

Program Managers (PMs)

Under the WAS, program managers have longer tenures and are evaluated against performance KPIs tied to delivery speed. They are now incentivized to take risks on innovative vendors rather than default to incumbents out of caution. This changes the nature of the PM relationship from one built on familiarity over years to one that can be accelerated by demonstrating the right capabilities at the right moment. **Your marketing has to reach them before your competitors do.**

Capability Trade Councils (CTCs)

CTCs signal where the DoW is actively pivoting budget. Tracking CTC decisions and being visible in the conversations around those pivot areas is an early-mover advantage that most companies are not yet taking seriously. **Understanding how to build that kind of market intelligence into your positioning strategy is one of the higher-value activities in the new acquisition environment.**

The New Entrant Advantage

One of the more counterintuitive aspects of the WAS is that not having legacy government contracting infrastructure is no longer a disadvantage. The WAS is explicitly designed to break the incumbency advantage that made the old system so difficult to enter.

Companies that are fast, commercially mature, easy to work with, and scalable now have genuine competitive advantages in federal procurement. **The challenge is making sure the right buyers know about you before the opportunity is shaped and closes.** Visibility in the new acquisition environment is not automatic. It has to be built, and it has to be built the right way for the audience that is now doing the buying.

What Has To Change In Your Marketing Messaging

The single most important change most GovCon companies need to make to their federal marketing materials is the language. The compliance-heavy, credential-forward messaging that worked in the old acquisition environment actively works against you in the new one. The table below captures the most common messaging shifts we see companies needing to make.

Stop Saying This	Start Saying This
"We are compliant"	"We deliver fast"
"We meet all requirements"	"We reduce time to field"
"We have decades of experience"	"We are ready to deploy now"
"See our full capability statement"	"Here is our working prototype"
"We support the warfighter"	"Here is the mission problem we solve"
"We have extensive past performance"	"Here is how fast we can scale and deliver"

The underlying principle is straightforward. Government buyers in the WAS environment are not evaluating vendors on how impressive their past performance binder is. They are evaluating vendors on whether they can solve a specific problem faster than the alternatives. **Every element of your marketing needs to clearly speak to buyers' problems.**

Getting the messaging right is harder than it looks. It requires a deep understanding of the specific mission problems your buyers are dealing with, the language they use to describe them, and the proof points that will be credible to someone who has heard a thousand vendor pitches. This is not a copywriting exercise. It is a positioning exercise that requires both market knowledge and marketing expertise to execute well.

Your Website Is Sending a Signal Right Now

Every government buyer, program manager, and PAE who hears about your company will check your website before they agree to a meeting, respond to an outreach, or put you on a short list. What they find shapes their impression before you have said a word.

Most GovCon websites are built for the old acquisition environment. They lead with certifications, past contract vehicles, and capability lists organized around NAICS codes. In the new environment, that kind of website sends one signal loud and clear: this company operates like the slow, process-heavy vendors the WAS is designed to leave behind.

A website built for the WAS environment is organized entirely differently. It leads with outcomes, demonstrates speed and delivery capability through real evidence, simplifies the path from interest to conversation, and looks like a high-performing commercial organization rather than a government contractor brochure. The gap between those two things is significant, and most companies underestimate how much it is costing them.

While business development provides access and capture informs your direction, it is the clarity of your proposal that finalizes the solution. Marketing is the force multiplier that accelerates all three.

Visibility in the New Procurement Channels

The procurement channels that matter most have changed. OTA consortia, Commercial Solutions Openings, direct agency engagement, and the relationships surrounding Portfolio Acquisition Executives are now the front doors to federal contract opportunities. Companies that built their business development around the traditional FAR-based RFP process are approaching the market through doors that are becoming less important every year.

Building a presence in the right channels, with the right message, at the right time requires both an understanding of how those channels work and the marketing infrastructure to execute consistently across them. It is not a single project. It is an ongoing program, and the companies that treat it that way will be significantly ahead of those that approach it as a one-time initiative.

Content That Builds Credibility with the Right Buyers

Government buyers in the WAS environment are doing more research before they engage with vendors than they ever have before. They are reading, watching, and evaluating whether a company understands the problems they are trying to solve before they agree to a meeting.

Companies that are producing clear, substantive content about the mission areas they serve, the problems they solve, and the results they deliver are building the kind of credibility that shortens sales cycles and generates inbound interest from the right buyers. **Companies that are not are invisible until they show up in a response to a solicitation, which is often too late to establish the credibility needed to win.**

Building that kind of content program requires a clear strategy, consistent execution, and a deep enough understanding of the audience to produce material that resonates rather than generic thought leadership that no one reads. It is one of the highest-leverage marketing investments a GovCon company can make right now, and one of the hardest to do well without the right expertise behind it.

Your BD and Capture teams work harder than they need to if the market doesn't know, like, and trust you. Clear, concise messaging is critical.

What This Means for Different Types of Companies

Non-Traditional and Commercial Technology Companies

The barriers that kept commercial technology companies out of the federal market are being systematically removed. GAAP accounting is now acceptable. The preferred contract vehicles are designed for companies that have never navigated FAR-based procurement. The DoW wants what commercial companies have built and is creating pathways to buy it faster.

The challenge for these companies is visibility. Government buyers cannot engage with vendors they have never heard of, and the channels through which GovCon buyers discover new vendors are different from the commercial channels most technology companies know well. Building a credible federal market presence as a non-traditional vendor requires a specific strategy, and getting it wrong is just as costly as not trying at all.

Tier 2 and Tier 3 Suppliers

Sub-tier suppliers now have a direct path to government buyers that did not exist before. The opportunity is real. The challenge is that these buyers did not know your company existed until recently, and first impressions in this environment are formed by what they find online, not by a prime contractor introduction.

Building the marketing presence and positioning to take advantage of direct government engagement is a different kind of problem than most Tier 2 and Tier 3 companies have had to solve before. The companies that figure it out early will establish relationships and past performance under the new vehicles before their competitors even realize the opportunity is there.

Established GovCon Companies

Incumbency is less protective than it has ever been. The WAS is explicitly designed to reduce the structural advantages of entrenched primes and established vendors. Bid protest reform, direct supplier engagement, and the preference for commercial solutions are all eroding theroats that legacy GovCon companies have historically relied on.

The companies that will continue to win are those that adapt their marketing, modernize how they present themselves, and demonstrate that they can operate with the speed and commercial orientation that the new system rewards. Companies that keep marketing the way they always have will find that the environment that rewarded this approach is being dismantled around them faster than they expect.

Cybersecurity and IT Companies

Commercial software and SaaS solutions are now explicitly preferred over custom government builds, and the regulatory burden on IT acquisition has been significantly reduced. For cybersecurity and technology companies, **the question is no longer whether the federal market is accessible. It is whether your marketing is positioned to reach the right buyers through the right channels with the right message.**

The companies that lead with deployment speed, integration capability, and mission-relevant outcomes rather than certification stacks and compliance credentials will find significantly more traction in the new environment. **Getting the positioning right requires understanding what government IT buyers are actually evaluating now versus what they were evaluating three years ago.**

“The Department will overhaul the processes in place to balance speed and rigor, while promoting competition, incentivizing faster execution, taking calculated and shared risks to accelerate increased production, and shifting from a culture of compliance to rapid and mission-focused execution.”

—DoW Aquisition Transformation Strategy, Pg. 38, November 2025

A Word on Timing

Every major policy shift creates a window of opportunity for companies that move early and a compounding disadvantage for companies that wait. The WAS is no different.

Right now, in mid-2026, the transformation is still being implemented. Program managers and PAEs are still learning how to use the new authorities. The new contracting vehicles are expanding. The full weight of the WAS is not yet in effect. This is the period when positioning decisions made by the companies paying attention will have disproportionate impact.

The companies that build their positioning, establish visibility in the right channels, and develop direct relationships with the buyers who now have authority will have a significant head start over competitors who wait for the environment to fully settle before they act. By the time the dust clears, the early movers will have relationships, track records, and credibility that late entrants cannot replicate quickly.

Companies that continue marketing the way they always have—or have not been investing in marketing at all—will find that the environment that may have rewarded that approach is being dismantled around them.

The best time to reposition how you go to market for the DoW Warfighting Acquisition System was six months ago.

...The second best time is NOW.



Conclusion

The DoW Acquisition Transformation is real, it is accelerating, and it is already reshaping who wins contracts and who gets left behind. Executive Order 14265, the Warfighting Acquisition System memoranda, and the FY 2026 National Defense Authorization Act together represent the most significant structural change to federal procurement in a generation.

For companies marketing services and solutions to the federal government, the rules have changed. Speed beats credentials. Solutions beat compliance. Demos beat proposals. Commercial positioning beats defense contractor branding. Direct relationships with program managers and PAEs matter more than prime contractor endorsements.

The companies that understand this shift and act on it now will have a material competitive advantage in the federal market for the next several years. The ones that do not will be competing in an environment that no longer rewards the strategies they were built around.

Getting the marketing right in this new environment requires a combination of things that are genuinely difficult to assemble on your own: deep knowledge of how the new acquisition channels work, the expertise to translate that into positioning and messaging that resonates with the right buyers, the technical capability to build the marketing infrastructure that supports it, and the consistency to execute across all of it over time.

If your organization is ready to take advantage of the opportunity the WAS creates, we would like to have that conversation.

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About Ocean 5

Ocean 5 is a growth-driven marketing agency for government contractors.

The five most common problems we solve are:



Messaging is outdated, vague, or too technical.



Website/digital presence is stale.



Messaging is inconsistent across business development and marketing materials.



Not seeing ROI on trade show activities.



We need the flexibility to pivot and re-prioritize our marketing activities.

Our GovCon support services include:

- Strategic planning workshops
- Website design and development
- Content
- Graphic design
- Social media
- Email marketing
- Public relations
- Search engine optimization
- Digital marketing/advertising
- Marketing automation

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About Ocean 5 Strategies

We are recognized for our expertise in established business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-government (GovCon, B2G) companies with a growth goal.

Our clients include cybersecurity, staff augmentation, IT/technology/IoT, software/SaaS, engineering, logistics, and manufacturing companies looking for a strategic marketing partner to help them get to the next level.

We specialize in growth-driven website design, SEO and GEO, digital advertising, content marketing, and strategic marketing programs built around our proprietary SWIM® methodology.



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