July 2023

GSA COMMERCIAL PLATFORMS PROGRAM

Opportunities Exist to Improve Implementation

Why GAO Did This Study

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2018 directed GSA and the Office of Management and Budget to establish and implement a program for agencies to buy products through online marketplaces to, among other things, enhance competition and expedite the procurement process for certain commercial products. GSA began the Commercial Platforms program with an initial proof of concept in June 2020.

The NDAA for Fiscal Year 2018 includes a provision for GAO to review GSA's Commercial Platforms program. This is the third report GAO has completed on this program. This report addresses, among other issues, (1) the program's implementation status, and (2) benefits and challenges GSA and program participants identified with the program. GAO reviewed program documentation, analyzed data on purchases, and interviewed officials from GSA and from eight participating agencies, selected to represent a variety of sizes and spending in the program.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations. GSA, as the agency responsible for implementing the Commercial Platforms program, should (1) develop a plan that helps agencies improve the use of AbilityOne on the commercial platforms, and (2) improve the process for agencies to report purchases in the Commercial Platforms program toward their small business goals. GSA concurred with both recommendations. GAO also received technical comments, which were incorporated as appropriate.

View GAO-23-106128. For more information, contact Marie A. Mak at (202) 512-4841 or MakM@gao.gov.

What GAO Found
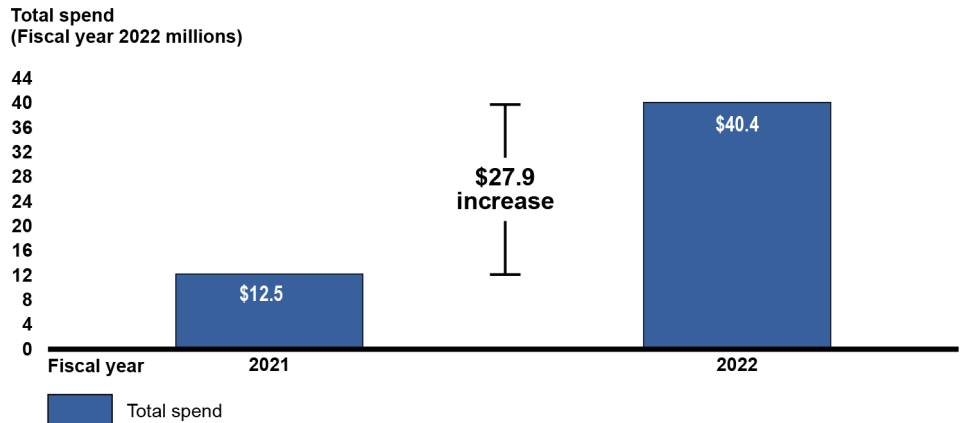
The General Services Administration (GSA) established the Commercial Platforms program to enable purchase cardholders at federal agencies to buy commercially available products using online marketplaces. From the Commercial Platforms program's first full fiscal year in 2021 to fiscal year 2022, the total dollars spent in the program increased by about $28 million.

Federal Agencies' Spend through GSA's Commercial Platform Program, Fiscal Years 2021 and 2022

Source: GAO analysis of General Services Administration (GSA) Commercial Platforms Program data. | GAO-23-106128

Agency participation in the Commercial Platforms program has also increased. In fiscal year 2020, six agencies (including GSA) started in the program. By the end of the 2022 fiscal year, 27 agencies were making purchases. GSA updated its metrics in 2023 to better track and measure program performance. Its metrics include customer satisfaction, customer feedback on price competitiveness, and agency spending in certain categories, such as products with a Made in America label. GAO found that GSA is meeting four out of 11 of the metrics and the agency has identified steps it can take to improve some of the metrics it is not meeting, such as the distribution of sales across the platforms.

Officials from agencies that participate in the Commercial Platforms program reported several benefits. For example, these officials noted that it provides built-in features designed to help buyers identify products from certain federally mandated sources, such as AbilityOne. AbilityOne employs people who have disabilities in jobs that provide services or make products, such as office supplies. However, GAO's analysis indicates that AbilityOne purchases are a small percentage of overall spend and opportunities exist to help agencies increase awareness of AbilityOne products. In addition, the Commercial Platforms program, as implemented by GSA, allows agencies to count purchases made on the platforms from small businesses toward their small business contracting goals. However, the current process that GSA identified for agencies to report purchases from small businesses is resource intensive and not practicable. As the program progresses, GSA has the opportunity to develop a more efficient process to help agencies include these purchases toward their small business contracting goals.

United States Government Accountability Office