

DOD ACQUISITION 101

A Guide for Government & Industry Professionals

Executive Summary

The Department of Defense (DoD) operates one of the world’s most complex acquisition systems. Modern reforms emphasize flexibility, speed, and closer collaboration with industry through the **Adaptive Acquisition Framework (AAF)**.

This guide provides a clear, accessible overview of how DoD acquisition works, the major acquisition pathways, the key roles involved, and how industry can engage effectively and ethically in support of mission needs.

Adaptive Acquisition Framework (AAF)

The AAF is the DoD’s modern approach to acquiring capabilities. It allows program teams to select the acquisition pathway that best fits the mission need, schedule, and technical maturity—replacing the rigid “one-size-fits-all” legacy DoD 5000 model.

Key Acquisition Pathways

- **Major Capability Acquisition (MCA):** For large, complex weapons systems
- **Middle Tier of Acquisition (MTA):** Rapid prototyping and rapid fielding
- **Software Acquisition Pathway (SWP):** Modern, Agile/DevSecOps-based software delivery
- **Urgent Capability Acquisition:** Fast response to urgent operational needs
- **Business Systems:** Enterprise systems requiring business process reengineering
- **Services Acquisition:** Training, support, and mission services

Each pathway has unique documentation, oversight, and timelines, giving DoD more flexibility in delivering capabilities to warfighters.

Key Roles in Acquisition

A variety of stakeholders participate in shaping, developing, and acquiring new capabilities.

Primary DoD Roles

- **Program Executive Officers (PEOs):** Oversee portfolios of programs and major decisions
- **Program Managers (PMs):** Lead day-to-day program execution
- **Contracting Officers (KOs):** Hold the legal authority to award contracts
- **Requirements Officers:** Translate mission needs into formal requirement documents
- **End Users / Warfighters:** Provide operational feedback and mission context

Understanding these stakeholders helps industry identify who influences, evaluates, and approves acquisition efforts.

Acquisition Lifecycle Overview

While each AAF pathway differs, most acquisition efforts follow a predictable set of phases.

Typical Lifecycle

1. **Mission Need Identification**
2. **Requirements Development (ICD, CDD, CPD)**
3. **Budget Alignment**
4. **Market Research (RFIs, TIMs, Industry Engagement)**
5. **Acquisition Pathway Selection (AAF)**
6. **Solicitation Release (RFP)**
7. **Evaluation and Award**
8. **Production, Fielding, and Sustainment**

This structure ensures alignment between mission needs, funding availability, and acquisition planning.

Industry Engagement

Industry plays an important role throughout the acquisition lifecycle, especially in early technical and requirements discussions.

Common Engagement Touchpoints

- **RFIs and Sources Sought:** Provide market insights and shape early requirements
- **Industry Days:** Offer visibility into program priorities
- **Technical Interchange Meetings (TIMs):** Enable engineering-level dialogue
- **OTAs (Other Transaction Agreements):** Support rapid prototyping and innovation
- **BAAs and CSOs:** Open channels for innovative solutions

Early, ethical engagement improves government awareness of emerging technologies and enables industry to better understand mission needs.

Acquisition Readiness Checklist

Use this checklist to determine whether your organization is positioned to support a DoD acquisition effort:

- Do we understand the mission gap or operational need?
 - Do we know the PM, PEO, KO, or key influencers?
 - Have we participated in RFIs, TIMs, or industry forums?
 - Are we compliant with required cybersecurity (CMMC) expectations?
 - Can our solution integrate with current systems and architectures?
 - Do we have relevant past performance to support our offering?
-

Appendix A — Acronyms & References

Acronyms

- **AAF** – Adaptive Acquisition Framework
- **MTA** – Middle Tier of Acquisition
- **SWP** – Software Acquisition Pathway
- **PEO** – Program Executive Officer
- **PM** – Program Manager
- **KO** – Contracting Officer
- **ICD / CDD / CPD** – Requirements documents

References

- Adaptive Acquisition Framework – <https://aaf.dau.edu>
- Federal Acquisition Regulations – <https://www.acquisition.gov>
- JCIDS Requirements Guidance – <https://jcids.dau.edu>
- CMMC Program Office – <https://dodcio.defense.gov/CMMC>