

Present Solutions to Meet Mission Requirements Early in the Government Procurement Process to Improve Win Probability

Understand your customers mission requirements first; then identify solutions to achieve their goals.

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As a continuation from the whitepaper, *Aligning Business and Government Acquisition Process to Improve Win Probability*, this whitepaper discusses the importance of working with the customer to understand and support development of their mission requirements and considers how to best use these insights to increase win probability in future opportunities.

Successful business development professionals meet with customers face-to-face (current or future) early in the Government Procurement Process to develop a clear understanding of their mission requirements and to determine if these requirements are new, current, or evolving. Figure 1 presents a high-level overview of the Federal Government Procurement Process.

Active engagement with customers at this stage not only provides a realistic understanding of the opportunity, but it also allows companies to identify and present potential solutions to meet mission requirements. This early investment increases proposal-win probability and positions your company to deliver more responsive/proactive customer service.

This is a critical business development approach as solutions presented may directly influence development of specifications, Statement of Work (SOW), or Performance Work Statement (PWS) as well as the selection criteria used to award the program. More importantly, working with the customer early in the procurement process may result in a better overall value solution to their requirements.

A concern that prevents some companies from engaging early in the procurement process is: Does this create an Organizational Conflict of Interest (OCI)? If performed within Procurement Integrity Act (41USC423) guidelines, the answer is “No.”

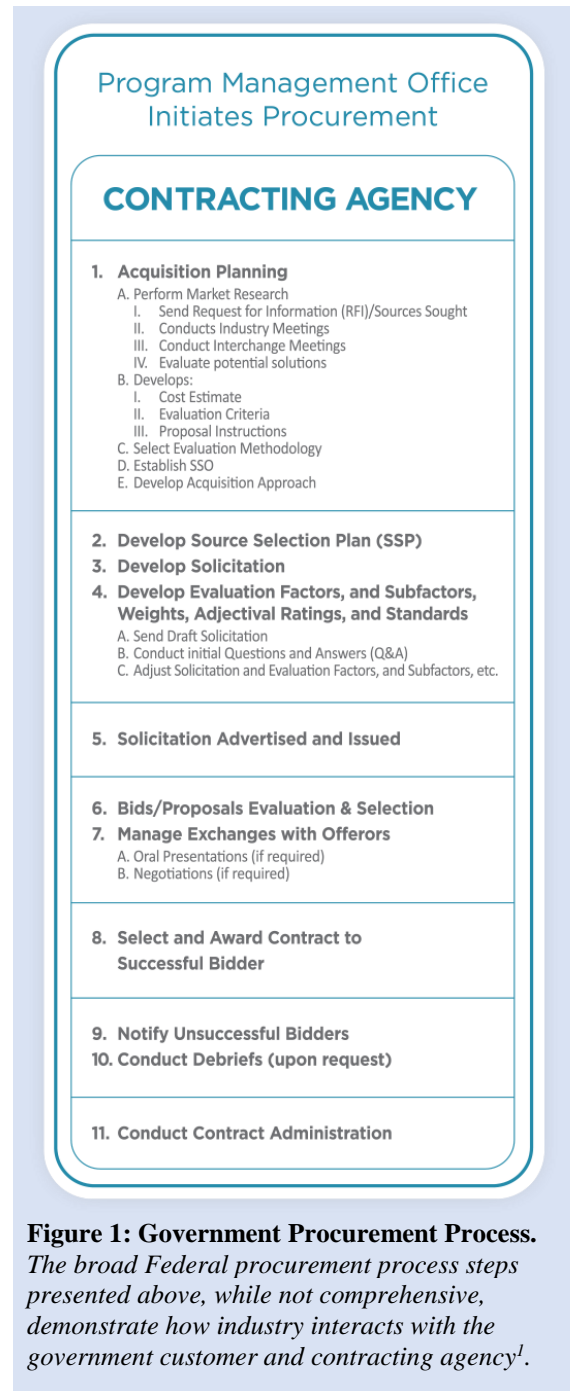


Figure 1: Government Procurement Process. *The broad Federal procurement process steps presented above, while not comprehensive, demonstrate how industry interacts with the government customer and contracting agency¹.*

¹ http://www.acq.osd.mil/osbp/docs/government_contracting_the_basics.pdf, Army Source Selection Manual (February 26, 2009)

The Procurement Integrity Act does prohibit contractors for “participating personally and substantially” in a federal agency procurement including the preparation and review of specifications.¹ The act does not prevent contractors from presenting solutions and information to identify potential solutions to achieve mission requirements; solutions chosen and the subsequent impact to specifications, selection criteria, etc., released for bid is entirely up to government personnel. In fact, discussions between contractors and acquisition personnel “are encouraged” to “gain a better understanding of the commercial market, including appropriate selection criteria.”²

Early Engagement Business Development Strategy

To increase win probability and position your company as both a long-term partner and expert in the field, a core business development strategy should be to focus on engaging the customer early. The principle goal of this effort is to help define their mission requirements in order to achieve the desired outcome: impacting the government’s procurement strategy so that your company is positioned to provide a highly-targeted, best value solution to meet the requirements.

An additional strategy is to position your company to avoid the use of Lowest Price Technically Acceptable (LPTA) for complex systems and services often employed by contracting agencies. This source selection process too often results in poor service and products that are may be technically acceptable but are often of inferior quality. Over the life of the project, LPTA solutions often end up costing far more than budgeted or planned and drive out innovations or application of potential cost-effective solutions. It is important to emphasize to customers that their mission requirements need to take in to account the Total Lifecycle of the product or service to allow the following as discussed in the Memorandum from the Under Secretary of Defense³:

1. *“Whenever the Warfighter will ... “benefit from an innovative and technologically superior solution to meet their mission needs, a tradeoff source selection process between cost or price and non-cost factors is optimal.”*
2. *“Cannot firmly predict the tasks, efforts, and required outcomes that the contractor will be expected to perform, but require professional support services to enhance our mission performance.”*

This approach requires actively engaging customers frequently at the earliest possible phases of the Government Procurement Process by understanding and using the following:

- **Engagement Methods:** Consider the best method to interact with the customer (face-to-face meeting, product demonstrations, etc.) to develop mission requirements or form a clear understanding of the requirements to present potential/alternate solutions
- **Engagement Timing:** Determine when, within the Government Procurement Process, your company should actively engage with the customer to achieve the greatest possible impact

Engagement Methods

There are numerous methods and means to engage your customer prior to or within the first stage of the Government Procurement Process. However, the methods used (combined with timing) have varying levels of impact from substantial to minimum on the opportunity. Table 1 presents just a few methods used to influence mission requirements and the procurement process.

² SD-5 – Market Research, Department of Defense, January 2008, Pages 32-33

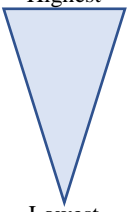
³ Under Secretary of Defense, Memorandum for Secretaries of the Military Departments, Appropriate Use of Lowest Priced Technically Acceptable Source Selection Process and Associated Contract Type, dated March 4, 2011

These interactions can lead to greater insight of the needs facing the customer and may cultivate a better climate of trust. It's also easier to persuade people during personal interaction, so if your goal is to influence the customer about an important requirement, meeting them in person is the best way to achieve your aim.

Engagement Timing

Business development professionals need to understand that Program Management Offices initiate program opportunities long before they engage contracting agencies to develop mission requirements, budgets, and potential contract vehicles to maximize programs success. It is during this timeframe (prior to the Program Management Office engaging a contracting agency) that your company has the greatest opportunity to favorably impact the program. The second-best opportunity for engagement is during the Acquisition Planning phase of Market Research.

In conclusion, engaging your customers at the correct time prior to and within the Government Procurement Process will determine the level of impact your company will have maximum on the overall selection process. Your efforts can shape the customer's mission requirements, the influence procurement in your favor, and improve the odds that your solution is chosen to meet the requirements.

Method	Impact Level
Face-to-Face Meetings	 <p>Highest</p> <p>Lowest</p>
Whitepapers	
Site-Visits	
Product Demonstrations	
Request for Information Response	
Industry Day Attendance	
Trade Show Attendance	
Brochures/Advertising/Website	
Question and Answer Participation	
Table 1: Engagement Methods.	