

**Department of Homeland Security Reverse Industry Day VII**  
*Promoting Collaboration to Advance the Mission*  
Thursday, November 7, 2019

RID VII was a half-day program held on Thursday, November 7, at the Washington Hilton, 1919 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington, DC. The agenda was designed to offer government attendees insight into how industry addresses procurement requirements, and the challenges requirements present to industry leadership and staff via scenario-based learning. Topics included: Multi-Step Evaluation Processes and Evaluation Techniques, the Value of Kickoff Meetings and Mitigating the Impact of a Lapse in Appropriations.

More than 545 people attended, with the majority (431) participating virtually. A total of 315 attendees participated in the web-based survey that was disseminated after the event:

- 99% reported they were very satisfied or satisfied with the sessions that were delivered
- 58% of attendees were Contracting Officer's Representatives, followed by Program Managers (23%) and Contracting Officers (20%)

Attendee feedback included:

- *These are an ingenious idea. Please continue them. Appreciate the ability to attend online – this was my first time doing so.*
- *This is the best one I have attended so far, and it was an excellent use of time. The location/setup was very good and the ability to call-in and fully participate was helpful. Sessions were very clear and useful, targeted.*
- *I enjoy the mock scenarios because it gives better insight into how contractors view our RFPs.*
- *Appreciated the in-depth discussion on how the lapse in appropriation affected both industry and government. The advice on contingency plans was very informative and useful. Overall great DHS RID VII – it was really engaging and informative.*
- *The information was very helpful to understand the process from the perspective of potential bidders and the importance of planning for our upcoming recompetete.*

**Session I – Industry Perspectives on Multi-Step Evaluation Processes and “Show Me, Don’t Tell Me” Evaluation Techniques**

**Moderator:** Krista Sweet, Director of Policy at Homeland Security & Defense Business Council

**Role players:**

- Adam D’Angelo, Senior Director of Technology, Dev Technology Group
- Helene Johnson, President, Bid2Win Consulting
- Michael Matechak, Senior Vice President, ArdentMC
- Bob Nunnally, Director of Corporate Growth, Oasys International Corp.
- Daphne Zweifel, Vice President of National Security, Procentrix

This session employed role-playing scenarios to demonstrate the process a company goes through preparing a bid response. Participants discussed the reasoning behind a bid decision and explored their beliefs and perceptions regarding multi-step solicitations.

The scenario began with the fictitious company discussing the released draft RFP for a government agency. The RFP was for a single award BPA with an estimated value of \$50 million and a period of performance of one base year and four option years. The bid solicitation included a video requirement, task challenges and oral presentation for a complex IT procurement. The company had been tracking the RFP for 20 months and comments were due in 10 days.

Discussion of the initial RFP response process included several topics and concerns. With the current timeline, the company would need to work through the holidays. The competition for the procurement would be high since it also included nontraditional companies. One of the good things that the company liked about the procurement was that it was a new requirement and included development. Also, there would be a library, so the expectation was that the agency would be open about its processes. Overall, the company felt that the Government was asking for a lot in the technical evaluation. There were concerns regarding the impact on staff and recruitment. With the demo and user task challenge, the company felt it had a chance to be successful. However, with the key personnel requirement, the company felt that the government was setting them up to fail as they, like many companies, do not carry a bench of staff. At least eight people would be needed to prepare the response, and those people would be pulled from billable work, impacting current customers. Additionally, the company will need to work on the logistics of getting their subcontractors in place.

The six key personnel were not defined and no explanation of their specific roles and responsibilities was given. The company discussed that the government should allow companies to demonstrate which key personnel would work best for the procurement.

There were also pricing concerns regarding the cost of doing the videos, the level of effort for the technical submission, the key personnel and an unclear timeframe between the response phases.

The company did not feel that the videos were necessary. The technical staff was not comfortable on camera and would impact how the video was perceived by Government.

In developing comments for submission, the company agreed that the government needed to kill the video submissions, not prescribe the key personnel, include fewer challenges and provide a minimum timeframe between phases. Additionally, acceptance criteria were needed for the tasks.

The second scenario focused on the same company's decision to respond to the final RFP. The procurement remained a single award BPA for an estimated \$50 million. The company discussed the curveballs included in the final RFP - past performance would be submitted from the prime contractor only and steep qualifications for key personnel would require recruitment. Positives included that the government was willing to collaborate - videos were eliminated and well-defined criteria for acceptance was provided.

After much discussion about time, staffing and cost concerns, the company ultimately agreed to respond to the final RFP. The company decided to schedule pink/red reviews and cut bait if necessary, prior to submitting a proposal.

After the roleplaying, participants discussed key takeaways:

- For a company to bid, leadership must be convinced that the bid has a great chance of being successful. Industry likes the multi-phase approach because the companies know early whether they really have a chance of being successful.
- Industry needs meaningful feedback concerning why they did not meet a phase or were unsuccessful.
- The government should not be overly prescriptive with their key personnel or there will be an assumption that the bid is wired for a particular company.
- There needs to be absolute clarity on goals and show how the response links directly to those goals.
- The timeline of the phases matter since companies will likely need to invest in multiple phases at the same time. There needs to be well-defined criteria and user stories.
- The Government needs to allow industry the flexibility to solve the problem.
- There is a real cost associated with preparing and submitting responses – in particular, videos, oral presentations and technical reports. The real cost includes loss of billable hours since personnel need to be taken off billable projects to work on these proposals.
- When the government is looking for something new, industry needs to hear from the customer. In talking to industry clarity of the problem will be front and center.
- The decision to bid is all about the risk to the company.

Question & Answer

*Q: The industry role players had questions concerning video submissions, key personnel, solicitations looking to be for particular vendors, and EOD.*

A: Soraya Correa responded to the industry comments. In regard to the video submissions, she looked to what the PII was currently doing. The videos are for the feel of the company and should not be complex productions. The key personnel criticism is valid. DHS has lost protests over the criteria of key personnel. Additionally, there are too many labor categories. There should be discriminators to allow for differences and flexibility for the government. For timelines, government should be providing information to industry early and often. Finally, DHS is doing too many BPAs.

## **SESSION II – Value of Kickoff Meetings**

**Moderator:** Sherry Frank, Director, Communications & Industry Liaison, DHS

**Participants:**

- Terry Bjornsen, Senior Director, ASRC Federal
- Olin Green, Senior Vice President, VariQ
- Seth Moore, CEO, T-Rex Solutions LLC
- Cristina Mossi, CEO, Devis

The second session discussed the significance of the kickoff meetings and the essential topics that need to be included for a successful meeting. The first panelist stressed the importance of kickoffs from an industry's view and how it sets the tone for the contract relationship moving forward. The panelist noted that kickoffs are a must for industry no matter the size or the complexity of the procurement, and

listed elements for a sound kickoff meeting. The elements included an agenda, the work, coordinating logistics, and determining who should participate. The agenda element controls the timeline for each critical agenda item and the topics that will be discussed. The work element contains the deliverables, copy of contract or intel that will support a clear discussion. The logistic element should at least cover: When is the kickoff? Where? In-person or via conference call? Any need for security? Logistics are necessary for the kickoff to run smoothly. The participants include the essential personnel who are involved in the kickoff. The essential personnel should at least include the Contract Specialist, Contract Officer, Contract Manager, CEO, COR and Program Manager. The first panelist then explained what not to do in a kickoff meeting - negotiate, debrief or identify exact details of the performance.

#### Pre-kickoff Goals

- Establish positive initial rapport
- Identify agenda items and documents necessary for a successful kickoff meeting
- Outline expectations of discussions not required at kickoff

The second panelist highlighted the need for industry to understand an organization's mission from the customer's perspective. The contractor needs to know the context of the mission to successfully achieve what the customer wants. Contracts are specific about requirements but do not provide mission context. He said it is critically important for industry to understand the customer's mission and how they can help meet their mission. The second panelist then spoke about how to align the organizational structure between the government and contractor. Counterparts and lines of communications should be established to mitigate issues. In a kickoff meeting, proposal assumptions and dependencies need to be made. These assumptions should be understood by both parties and if not, re-planning is required. The contract work breakdown structure should manage measurable finite pieces, define the ownership of those pieces and align them with the government organizational structure. There needs to be communication regarding deliverables (timelines, templates) and identification of stakeholders not in the kickoff meeting. Industry wants to understand the 90-day staffing plan, clearances as well as requirements to make the process run smoothly. At the end of the kickoff meeting there should be a review of action items as well as a distribution of meeting notes.

#### Details of Successful Program/Project Start & Execution

- Clarify scope, schedule and deliverables
- Establish communication strategy
- Identify key stakeholders and responsibilities – Program, CO, COR and industry
- Outline onboarding/security process and procedures

The third panelist noted that the kickoff should determine how the government and contractor will work together and coordinate a regular schedule of meetings moving forward. He then shared an anecdote of a badly executed kickoff meeting where everyone had a "fingerprint" on the problem. The bottom line is that parties involved in a contract need to work together and not outline what they're going to do to each other.

#### Details of Successful Transition-In Activities

- Invoicing procedures
- Clearance process

- Communications cadence

The fourth panelist clarified that kickoff meetings are a great time to set up expectations. There needs to be on-going dialogue for healthy expectations, requirements and how to establish a good CPAR. If a risk arises, communicate with counterpart to mitigate it. Parties should identify the risk, find a risk path and discuss the impact of the risk.

#### Contractor/Government Performance Expectations for Achieving Exceptional Outcomes

- Expectations during 30-60-90-day period
- CPARs
- Risks
- Issue resolution

The moderator informed the audience that the Acquisition Lifecycle Management System is the system where security clearances get processed and notifications go to the CO and CS. Working in conjunction with the CIO and CRSO, one of the enhancements coming soon is to provide notifications to vendors faster. Contractors will be able to input a program point of contact. Meaning the notification will go to the CO and CS as well as a vendor's name, phone number and email address. This will help with the workload on all levels and will also be able to use in kickoff meetings.

#### Question & Answer

*Q: Which specific questions should you bring to a kickoff meeting for the CS and CO?*

- A: (Olin) Questions to clarify scope, deliverables and how to invoice.
- A: (Terry) Questions regarding how to accomplish the mission.
- A: (Seth) Questions regarding when to communicate and communications during emergencies.
- A: (Cristina) Approval questions, establish communications and definitions.

*Q: In your view, what worked well and what has not worked well in a kickoff meeting?*

- A: (Terry) What worked well: The right personnel were present including PM and the leads.
- A: (Seth) What did not work well: No one planned, and questions weren't getting answered.

*Q: From a CO/management perspective from the contracting side, what can the government do to assist with kickoff meetings?*

- A: (Cristina) Clearly define the outcomes of the meeting, being prepared, brief rundown of the contract type/mechanism. Want in verbal not in writing the expectations of the contract and the deliverables.
- A: (Seth) Industry would like to know the difficulties in the process.
- A: (Olin) The right people and right agenda make the kickoff meeting successful.

*Q: Can you share an anecdote of a lesson learned that needed to be asked during the kickoff meeting?*

- A: (Seth) Mission expectations were not understood. Ask if there are KPIs in the contract and what are the mission objectives.
- A: (Terry) Staffing changes during the first year and how will that impact the contract.
- A: (Olin) Key personal requirements were incorrect.

- A: (Cristina) Change in platform requirements in other technology.

*Q: In a transition period the outgoing contractor is taking their A-team and putting them onto other projects. What techniques have you seen or used to keep that A-team during the transition period?*

- A: (Terry) Committing engagement from the COs and PMs.
- A: (Seth) It is a slippery slope and you can't tell people to stay or not.

## Session II Closing Statements

Soraya Correa, *Chief Procurement Officer*

- The kickoff meeting is the opportunity for us to let the vendor know where the landmines are. Where are the areas of concern? Where are you going to bump into issues? This correlates to environmental and unseen stakeholder issues.
- A government opportunity to identify if they had any concerns in the proposals.
- Discussion on clarifying what you bid vs. what we asked you to do. Kickoff meetings set the stage on how to communicate going forward.

## **Session III – Mitigating the Impact of a Lapse in Appropriation**

**Moderator:** Lauren Edwards, Communications and Industry Liaison, Office of the Chief Procurement Officer, Department of Homeland Security

### **Participants:**

- Alba M. Alemán, CEO Citizant Inc.
- Cate Garris, Large Business Perspective
- Soraya Correa, Chief Procurement Officer, Department of Homeland Security

The third session was a panel that addressed proactive measures that should be taken during a lapse of appropriations - what can be done and what can be avoided to make the experience better for all parties involved. The moderator, Lauren Edwards, asked which practices can be implemented to help ease the impact of a lapse in appropriations. The panelists spoke of their experiences from previous lapses in appropriations and what facilitated them the most during this process.

The first panelist, Alba M. Alemán, spoke of receiving and distributing as much information as possible and then developing a plan for what's next. She broke down her communication timeline for before, during, and after a lapse in appropriations, noting that the more information people have at these stages of the process, the less stressed they will be. She emphasized that the better informed an employee is during a shutdown, the greater the likelihood of a smoother transition to work upon return after a lapse. The last thing to remember was to stay positive through the entire process. Staying positive helps employees to stay calm while they are waiting out the process.

The second panelist, Soraya Correa, spoke of some of the items that DHS has in place when there is a lapse in appropriations. Items such as call trees and operational plans help identify who their essential personnel are and what their essential contracts are. These plans need to be updated and modified as the year progresses. She also mentioned to track how many invoices you have in a que prior to a shutdown and recommended trying to process as many as possible prior to the lapse occurring. It is also

important to know in advance if your contract is subject to a shutdown and what the expectations are for that contract during a shutdown. Her last recommendation was to put industry in a position that they understand what is expected of them during a shutdown.

The third panelist, Cate Garris, spoke about what went well and what the government can do better when there is a lapse in appropriations. Two factors that she highlighted were - knowing how long you can run a business withstanding the financial impacts of a shutdown and knowing how fast you can get back to work when the shutdown expires. She emphasized the importance of pre-planning and modeling what is going to happen once the shutdown concludes so that there is a smooth transition back to work.

To conclude, the greatest factors to help mitigate the burden of a lapse in appropriations are planning, distributing as much information to all parties as often as possible, and knowing exactly what contracts are impacted by a shutdown and attempt to satisfy as many contracts as possible prior to a shutdown.