

GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS: TAKING AWAY THE MYSTERY

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- This presentation team is provided by the West Virginia Chapter of the National Contract Management Association. NCMA is a world-wide organization of contracting professionals engaged in education and advocacy in matters relating to federal contracting.
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PART I
THE GOVERNMENT
PERSPECTIVE

Ray Jarr, DOE - NETL

WHAT WE'LL COVER -- PART I⁴

- **Market Research**
 - **Sources Sought Notification**
- **Acquisition Planning**
 - **Pre-Solicitation Conference**
 - **Small Business Administration/Office of Small Disadvantaged Business Utilization Office**
 - **Electronic Reading Rooms/Virtual Tours**
 - **Acquisition Approaches – Best Value – Technically Acceptable**
- **Acquisition Schedule**
- **Request For Proposal (RFP)**
- **Evaluation Criteria and Past Performance**
- **Discussions and Debriefings**

MARKET RESEARCH

Market Research is early fact finding to assist the Government in developing an Acquisition Plan. Market Research can consist of:

- Review of current contracts
- Review of available public information from various internet sources and industry information
- Sources Sought Notification

SOURCES SOUGHT NOTIFICATION

- Usually one of the first notifications to the public
- Formal request for information to assist the Government in assessing the availability of industry and determining various planning objectives
- Usually consists of providing brief information to the Government related to capabilities and various business size information
- Information is not “evaluated” by the Government but analyzed to assist in planning objectives

ACQUISITION PLANNING

Acquisition Planning is the Government's determination on the approach to the upcoming Request for Proposal and can consist of the following:

- Pre-solicitation conference
- Engagement of Small Business Administration (SBA) and the Office of Small Disadvantage Business Utilization (OSDBU)
- Electronic Reading Rooms and Virtual Tours

ACQUISITION PLANNING

BEST VALUE CONTINUUM (FAR 15.101)

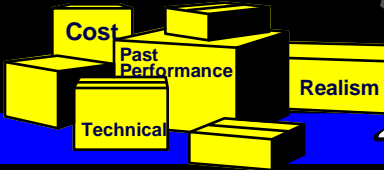
- Tradeoff Process
 - Permits tradeoffs between price and non-price factors
 - May award to other than the lowest priced proposal
 - The perceived benefits of the higher priced proposal shall merit the additional cost & the rationale for the tradeoff must be documented in the file

- Lowest Price Technically Acceptable
 - Proposals are not ranked
 - No tradeoffs allowed

BEST VALUE: THE CHALLENGE

Based upon an integrated assessment Offeror C was chosen

Best government team I've ever seen!



“Best value” means the expected outcome of an acquisition that, in the Government’s estimation, provides the greatest overall benefit in response to the requirement. (FAR 2.101)

My technical approach was better.



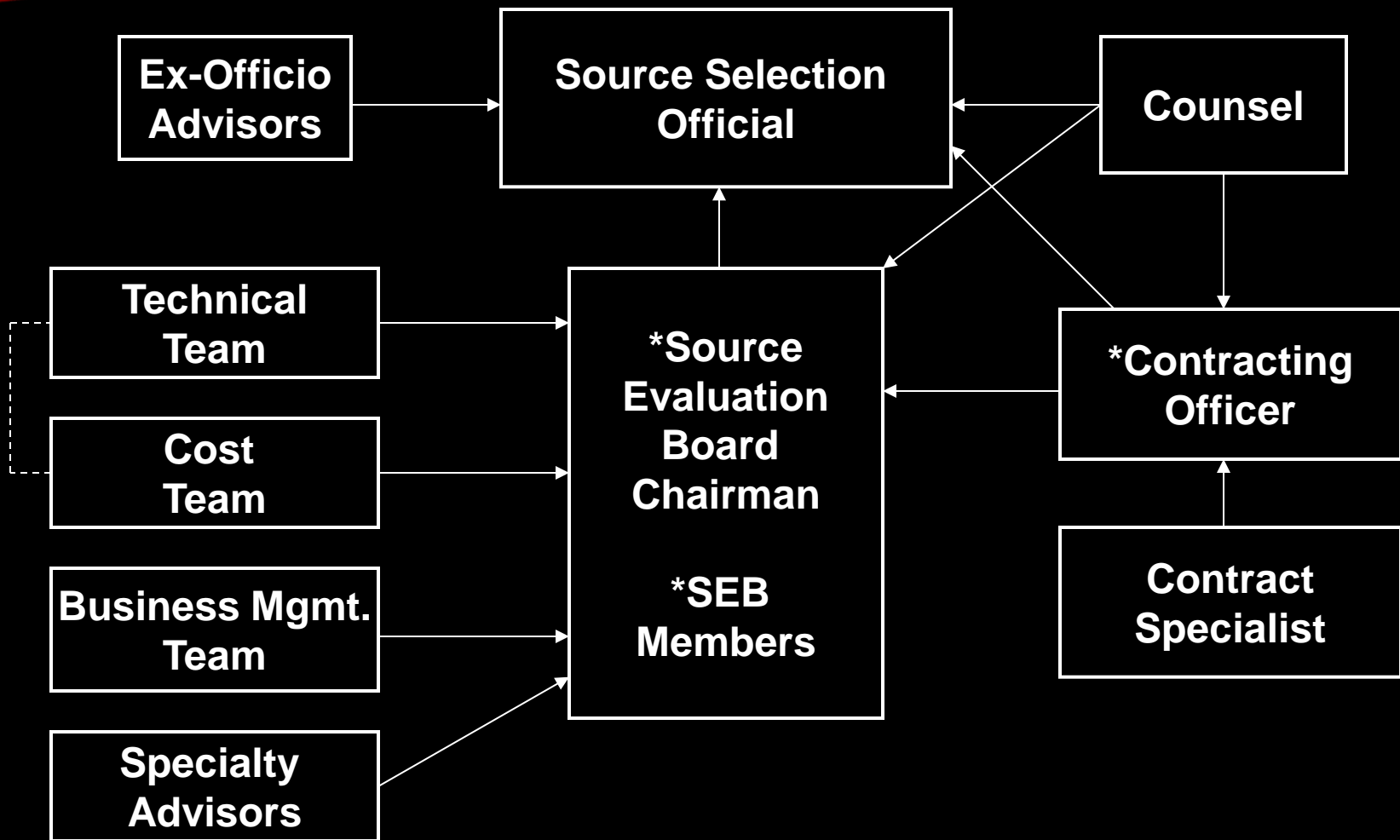
A

But my price is lower.



B

SOURCE EVALUATION BOARD ¹⁰



*The Contracting Officer may also serve as the SEB Chairman or an SEB member.

ACQUISITION SCHEDULE

The best intended schedules are subject to change . . .

Items that may impact schedules, regardless of whether the Government has announced certain anticipated schedule dates:

- Comments/questions received from industry, other sources
- Internal reviews, comments, approvals at various stages of the acquisition process
- Change of intended acquisition plans based on proposals received and unexpected events—
 - Discussions
 - Final Proposal Revisions, and
 - Protests

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)

- The RFP is the formal request for submission of proposals; however, for major or complex RFPs the Government may elect to issue a “Draft RFP” for comment from industry prior to finalization of the formal RFP.
- A Draft RFP is intended to engage industry in acceptance of comments in order to develop and issue the best RFP possible that provides the Government the opportunity to obtain the best value for the services/supplies required.
- Potential Offerors typically are not required to respond to a Draft RFP; however, each solicitation is different and potential Offerors are encouraged to read the RFP carefully.

RFP (CONTINUED)

- The RFP will typically consist of the model contract, which is included in Sections A through J of the RFP.
- Representations and Certifications are included in Section K of the RFP.
- Instructions to Offerors are provided in Section L of the RFP.
 - This section informs the Offeror of what is required to be submitted to the Government and specific instructions regarding submissions. Offerors are highly encouraged to read the entire RFP with special emphasis on what is required to be submitted to be considered for an award.
- Evaluation Criteria is provided in Section M of the RFP.

EVALUATION FACTORS FOR SOURCE SELECTION WITHIN SECTION M (FAR 15.304)

- **Represent key areas of importance to be considered in selection decision.**
 - Not necessary to evaluate all areas of the statement of work.
 - The Government limits the evaluation criteria to required factors and any critical discriminators.
- **Identify meaningful discriminators among proposals.**
 - Define what will distinguish offerors.
 - Reveal measurable differences or risk levels among proposals.

EVALUATION FACTORS FOR SELECTION: SECTION M (FAR 15.304)

Required areas of evaluation (FAR 15.304(c)):

- Price or cost
- Quality of product or service, e.g.,
 - Compliance with solicitation requirements
 - Technical excellence
 - Management capability
 - Personnel qualifications, and/or
 - Experience (what has been performed - capabilities)
- Past performance (quality of the performance)
- Extent of participation of small business concerns for those acquisitions not set-aside for small business
 - Usually considered as part of another factor, such as Management

EXPERIENCE AND PAST PERFORMANCE

- Relevant Experience is the measure of (1) the degree of similarity of previous work performed by the Offeror to that required in the Solicitation , and (2) extent to which the Offeror has performed such work.
- Past Performance is the measure of how well the offeror has performed work similar to that required in solicitation.

DISCUSSIONS

Typically, the Government will announce in the RFP whether discussions are intended or not. However, even if the Government indicates that it intends to award without discussions, it will reserve the right to hold discussions if it is determined to be in the Government's best interest.

DISCUSSIONS (CONTINUED)

- Prior to holding discussions, the Government will establish a competitive range of offerors.
- Discussions may be conducted orally or in writing.
- Upon completion of discussions, the Government will request each Offeror still considered within the competitive range to provide a final proposal revision.
- Final proposal revisions will be evaluated consistent with the evaluation criteria of the RFP.

DEBRIEFINGS

The debriefing is intended to provide information to offerors on how they can improve for future procurement actions.

- **Pre-award** – within 3 days of notification of exclusion from the competitive range; or may request delay until post award
- **Post-award** – within 3 days of notification of award
- In the government's notification letter, advise offerors that a debriefing is available and provide the date (4-8 days after notification).
- Put burden on offerors to accept or reject the date of a post-award debriefing; this may start the protest clock for mandatory stay of performance.
- Debriefing must be requested in writing by offeror per FAR 15.505(a)(1) and FAR 15.506(a)(1).

INFORMATION EXCLUDED

- **Pre-award Debriefing** Does Not Include:
 - Number of offerors
 - Identity of other offerors
 - Content of other offeror proposals
 - Ranking of other offerors
 - Evaluation of other offerors
 - Information prohibited from disclosure in post-award debriefing
- **Post-award Debriefing** Does Not Include:
 - Point by Point comparisons of debriefed offeror's proposal with those of other offerors
 - Information exempt from release under FOIA (trade secrets, confidential commercial or financial information)
 - Names of individuals providing reference information about offeror's past performance



PART II

PROPOSAL PREP AND PRODUCTION

Kevin Lapp, AFM

WHAT WE'LL COVER -- PART II

- **Bid – No Bid Decision**
- **Building the Proposal Development Team**
- **Setting the Tone**
- **Writing**
- **Keeping Things Straight**
- **Compiling the Proposal**
- **Production**

BID VS. NO-BID AND ASSIGNING IMPORTANCE

- Before anything, you should:
 - Make a sound decision as to whether this procurement is in your “wheel-house” or worth stretching for.
 - Assess the win probability.
 - Determine if the reward will be worth the time, effort, money, and resources expended.
- Then, decide how important this capture is to your company?
 - Critical – Very
 - Very – Moderate
 - Moderate - Negligible

BUILDING THE TEAM – WHO AND WHAT DO YOU NEED?

- Assigning a Proposal Manager
 - Critical to your win
 - Expectations . . .
 - Drives the effort
 - Must be given trust and authority
 - Is the lynch pin in the proposal team
- What is it going to take to produce excellence?
 - Total commitment- We WILL Win!
 - Smart choice on people and resources
 - Choose the team and **GET OUT OF THEIR WAY**

BUILDING THE TEAM (CONTINUED)

- Who do I need?
 - Skill sets
 - Availability
 - Cost
- What do I need?
 - Places to work – war room, telework, environment
 - Ways to share information
 - Developing points of control- NDA, Teaming Agreements, Plans of Action
 - Production means, printing and binding, delivery

SETTING THE TONE - EXPECTATIONS

- Communications
- Compliance Matrix
- Team Gap Analysis
- Proposal Schedule
- Proposal Outlines
- Writers Cut Sheets and Themes
- Writing Assignments
- Division of Resources
- Deadlines
- Questions for the government

**Get the entire team to commit to ONE proposal process.
READ THE ENTIRE PROCUREMENT/RFP!**

DON'T WAIT TO START WRITING

- Time will always be of the essence- **keep a sense of urgency.**
 - It always seems to come down to the wire.
 - Have a process- good time management.
- No, it's not a waste of time if you eventually no-bid.
 - Perfect practice makes perfect.
 - You can reuse material .
 - Opportunity to grow technically.

KEEPING THINGS STRAIGHT: VERSION CONTROL

- Have one point of collection and distribution.
 - Assign a person responsible for accepting everyone's writing and distributing current versions for editing.
 - Use the same editing process across the board (strike outs, highlights, notes, track changes).
- Formats for naming electronic files
 - Title, volume, version number, DATE AND TIME
- Daily announcements
 - Remind the team daily of what version they should be working on.
 - Writing assignment checklists and status of submittals.

COMPILING THE PROPOSAL AND PRODUCTION

- Putting the volumes together.
 - Assign the production person or team.
 - Give them enough time.
- Electronic Publishing.
 - Check, check, check, and check again the version and titles of every file.
 - PDF whenever allowed and possible.
- Hard Copy Production.
 - Make a materials list and buy them early.
 - Have a back-up means to produce -- i.e., local printer or secondary office equipment.
- Other Electronic Media.



PART III

BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Brent Armstrong, Brent Armstrong Consulting

WHAT WE'LL COVER -- PART III

- **Best Practices**
- **Reviews**
- **Lessons Learned**

BEST PRACTICES

- *Start early – the early bird usually does get the worm* (if you are just beginning to work on the opportunity when you see a draft or final RFP, then you are most likely too late to submit a winning proposal).
- Establish capture/pursuit and proposal budgets – name a Capture Manager (and supporting cast, if any) and identify a potential person to serve as your Proposal Manager (and supporting cast) should you decide to submit a proposal – *you reap what you sow*.

BEST PRACTICES

- Do intelligence work on the opportunity: the customer, the current statement of work/previous RFP (if applicable), the incumbent if there is one, and potential competition; if you don't know the customer and your actual or potential competition very well, then you aren't likely to win the contract).
- Based on your intelligence, work on the customer, the work, and the competition, assess your potential win probability – if less than a 50% win probability, you should seriously consider passing the opportunity and conserve your business development budget for a better “win” probability to evolve.

BEST PRACTICES (CONTINUED)

- Familiarize yourself in more depth with the customer and work location – visit the site(s) and key customers if at all possible (needs to happen before a draft or final RFP is issued).
- Identify any teaming partners determined to be needed and execute teaming agreements; identify potential key personnel.
- Conduct capture and proposal reviews based on the scope, complexity, and/or dollar value of the opportunity.

BEST PRACTICES (CONTINUED)

- Be sure to include an upfront and compelling *Executive Summary* in your proposal even if one is not required (it is the first thing the evaluators read, and they usually read it all) – be sure your proposal conclusively backs up whatever you put in the *Executive Summary*.
- Do an RFP vs. proposal compliance matrix to ensure you have been responsive to all requirements of the RFP.

BEST PRACTICES (CONTINUED)

- Always submit the proposal at least one day earlier than the due date to ensure an on-time delivery – there have been problems with the electronic submissions (the system does not always work 100% effectively).
- Always request a debriefing from the customer whether you win or lose!

REVIEWS

There are several types of reviews that can be used for the capture/pursuit and proposal processes. These reviews can be effectively utilized for any opportunity but generally depend on the scope, complexity, and dollar value of the acquisition target. One of the keys to achieving effective reviews is getting the right people to lead and staff the teams.

REVIEWS (CONTINUED)

- **Purple Team Review:** Assesses the probability of winning and alignment of the identified opportunity target with your organizational goals/strategic plan.
- **Blue Team Review:** Reviews initial capture strategy and plan.

REVIEWS (CONTD)

Black Hat Team Review: Provides an objective and subjective (comparative analysis and assessment of your competitors; predicts strategies and tactics your competition might use to beat you – exploiting your vulnerabilities and mitigating their own while leveraging their strengths; offers recommendations on strategies/tactics for mitigating your vulnerabilities and leveraging strengths. *This review requires brutal honesty – it is not a time to sugar coat!*



REVIEWS (CONTINUED)

- ***Pink Team Review:*** Reviews storyboards to confirm the solution set and to validate the proposal strategy.
- ***Green Team Review:*** Reviews and evaluates the cost/price solution.

REVIEWS (CONTINUED)

- **Red Team Review:** Reviews the draft proposal (technical and cost) to assess strengths and weaknesses, and how the proposal might score with the customer based on the RFP Statement of Work (SOW) and evaluation criteria.
- **Gold Team Review:** Reviews and approves the final proposal cost and price.
- **White Team Review:** Compiles “lessons learned” from capture planning through proposal.

LESSONS LEARNED

- The *White Team* compiles the “*lessons learned*” from capture planning, pursuit, and proposal activities.
- Discuss and evaluate the lessons learned for applicability to future opportunities.
- Learn from what you did right and what you did wrong
What did we do right/what worked? What did we do wrong, and why didn't it work? Fix your mistakes so you don't repeat them in future pursuits.

WRAP UP AND CONCLUSIONS

- Maximize your “win” potential by consistently applying best practices to opportunity assessments, capture/pursuit management activities, and proposal development.
- Conduct the appropriate reviews to support the capture/pursuit process and write the best proposal you can.
- Learn from what you did right that worked and what you did wrong that needs to be corrected/improved for application to future opportunities.

QUESTIONS ???

