

Office of Personnel Management

Vendor Communication Plan (Revised 2/2020)

This Vendor Communication Plan provides direction to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) acquisition workforce and our vendor community about how to engage and increase dialogue prior to the award of contracts. OPM will continue conducting acquisitions in the most effective, responsible, and efficient manner possible. In recognition of the importance of vendor communication to the acquisition process, OPM's Office of Procurement Operations has developed the guidelines contained herein.

I. Statement of agency commitment

The OPM believes that proper communication with vendors prior to award will position us to obtain better services for the workforce and streamline the acquisition process as it relates to requirements definition, the solicitation phase and the evaluation phase.

OPM commits to the following:

1. Engaging in timely, constructive communication with the vendor community for high-dollar, complex procurements;
2. Including small businesses and subgroups of small businesses in communications with industry through agency postings and vendor outreach efforts;
3. Fostering relationships and encouraging the inclusion of vendors that the agency has not worked with in the past;
4. Identifying procurements that are likely to involve opportunities for additional communication with industry and publicizing communication engagement opportunities on the beta.SAM.gov website (www.beta.sam.gov), including pre-solicitation and/or pre-proposal conferences for procurements that may be high value, high-risk, complex and/or appear to have a limited supplier base; and
5. Protecting non-public information including vendors' confidential information and the agency's source selection information.

II. Identification of person responsible for promoting vendor engagement

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III. Brief description of efforts undertaken or planned to reduce barriers and promote engagement

- A. OPM's goal is to continue to look for opportunities to train the workforce and promote communication with industry. These opportunities include formal training sessions held throughout the year and presentations during the agency's annual Acquisition Planning Conference. OPM will continue to benchmark our efforts with the best practices of other agencies to identify additional opportunities for implementation at OPM.
- B. OPM will continue to utilize small, veteran-owned, service-disabled veteran-owned, HUBZone, small disadvantaged, and women-owned small businesses to the maximum extent practicable.
- C. To prevent any misunderstandings regarding communication with vendors, the OPM acquisition workforce has been provided the April 30, 2019 memorandum from the Office of Federal Procurement Policy ("Myth-Busting #4" – Strengthening Engagement with Industry Partners through Innovative Business Practices).
- D. An agency Industry Liaison has been designated by the Senior Procurement Executive to serve as a conduit among acquisition stakeholders and promote strong agency vendor communication practices. This includes promoting timely responses to general vendor requests where appropriate, including from new entrants and small businesses.

IV. Criteria for identifying, as a condition of approval by the agency's investment review board (or similar body), which acquisitions must include vendor input in the pre-award phase and the extent of the required engagement

Acquisition plans for high-risk, large-dollar and complex programs (i.e., major IT systems and re-competitions) will discuss the vendor engagement strategy in the "Acquisition Streamlining" and "Source-selection procedures" sections. The vendor engagement strategy shall address the following:

- 1. Inclusion of at least one industry day, pre-solicitation or pre-proposal conference;
- 2. Approach and strategy to ensure reasonable amount of one-on-one engagement; and
- 3. Approach and strategy for discussions, as needed, in accordance with FAR Part 15; or
- 4. Justification for why steps i, ii and/or iii presented above are unnecessary.

Acquisition Plans shall include Milestone Plans that reflect when vendor engagement will occur during the acquisition process.

V. Publication of engagement events to include industry days, small business outreach sessions, pre-solicitation conferences, RFP questions and answer sessions, etc.

- A. OPM will publicize upcoming industry days, small business outreach sessions, pre-solicitation conferences, RFP questions and answer sessions on the beta.SAM.gov website as a single portal of information for interested vendors.
- B. To increase small business participation and awareness, OPM will send emails regarding selected industry days, small business outreach sessions and pre-solicitation conferences to small businesses that have expressed an interest in doing business with OPM.

VI. Description of roles and responsibilities

- A. The Contracting Officer will be responsible for determining the acquisition strategy for each procurement and engaging the vendor community. The Contracting Officer shall determine the appropriate means of communication for each procurement, including but not limited to, industry days, pre-solicitation or pre-proposal conferences and one-on-one meetings. The Contracting Officer shall ensure that procurement ethics rules are not violated and communicate to the Program Office how vendor engagement will occur. The Contracting Officer shall use information gained during vendor engagement to make acquisition strategy decisions such as source selection process, contract type, level of small business participation, evaluation factors, etc. The Contracting Officer shall collaborate with the Program Office, agency Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization, agency Acquisition Policy and Innovation Division and Industry Liaison, the Small Business Procurement Center Representative (SBPCR) and the Office of General Council as appropriate.
- B. The Program Manager (PM)/Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) shall perform market research and coordinate communication with the vendor community jointly with the Contracting Officer. The PM/COR will use information obtained to define requirements as they relate to the current market.
- C. The Office of General Counsel (OGC) serves as the Ethics Officer. OGC will provide advice regarding how and when to communicate with the vendor community to ensure exchanges are fair, transparent and in accordance with all procurement integrity rules.
- D. The Program Officials perform market research to identify capable small business concerns and establish qualification and evaluation criteria that are within the reach of small businesses and allow adequate lead time for industry days, pre-solicitation, one-on-one engagement and pre-proposal conferences.

- E. The OSDBU will conduct small business outreach conferences and meetings to assist businesses in understanding OPM's business practices.
- F. The agency Industry Liaison will respond to general inquiries from the vendor community, provide support to Contracting Officers when developing acquisition strategies when appropriate, considering the complexity of the requirement or requested, and communicate best practices and guidance to the agency's acquisition workforce.

VI. Training and awareness efforts for employees and contractors

- A. OPM will continue to provide formal training sessions throughout the year and presentations during the agency's annual Acquisition Planning Conference attended by agency employees. Additionally, the OPM acquisition workforce has been provided the April 30, 2019 memorandum from the Office of Federal Procurement Policy ("Myth-Busting #4" – Strengthening Engagement with Industry Partners through Innovative Business Practices).
- B. For vendors, this Vendor Communication Plan will be made available on OPM's website, www.opm.gov.

VII. Vendor engagement during the pre-award phase

- A. Contracting officers are encouraged to include vendor input in the pre-award stage using one or more of the techniques noted in FAR 15.201(c), Exchanges with industry before receipt of proposals. In addition to these techniques, contracting officers may use innovative technology such as social media when appropriate; however, all techniques outside of FAR Part 15 must be approved by the appropriate division director.
- B. Pre-award industry exchanges should be conducted only if the resulting interaction may add value to the procurement process. If conducted, Contracting Officers should ensure the procurement schedule allows for a reasonable amount of time for exchanges and one-on-one engagement in accordance with FAR Part 15.

VIII. Vendor engagement during the post-award phase

OPM complies with its internal Contracting Policy 1752.205-70, Announcement of Contract Award, and with FAR 5.3 Synopses of Contract Awards, in terms of synopsisizing and publicly announcing all contract awards. These actions take place at the time of, and not before, the contract is awarded.

IX. Links to existing policies

OPM will comply with the Federal Acquisition Regulation when communicating with the vendor community: <https://www.acquisition.gov/>

OPM contract policies and regulations are available at the following web site:

<http://www.opm.gov/doingbusiness/contract/policies.aspx>

X. Plans to follow-up with employees and industry representatives within 6 months of posting the vendor engagement plan

- A. OPM will seek comments from its acquisition workforce to gauge the effectiveness of this plan.
- B. Vendors attending industry days, pre-proposal or pre-solicitation conferences will be asked to rate and provide comments regarding how effectively OPM communicates.