

**I/ITSEC Presentation to Industry**  
**"Unraveling the Mystery of the PEO STRI Source Selection Process"**  
**PCO Panel Discussion: Q&A Session**  
**Wednesday, 30 Nov 2011, 3:00-5:00**

Q: When does the "cone of silence" start?

A: The environment is not necessarily "cone of silence," however, when the official draft RFP (includes sections B, L, and M) is released, or if no draft is issued, when the final RFP is issued, all communication must go through the PCO in order to ensure an even playing ground. We highly encourage you to ask questions and/or comment on all aspects of the draft RFP and final RFP.

Q: After the draft RFP is out, are all communications in writing or can we still meet?

A: Generally, responses to draft documentation should be submitted in writing to the PCO. However, if you need clarification in order to submit your response or have a particular concern, you can contact the PCO. The PCO will decide if a one on one meeting is appropriate.

Q: How do you determine your Small Business (SB) strategy and evaluation?

A: The SB strategy and evaluation is specific to each procurement and is based on the information we gather during the market research phase. If there are at least two small businesses that are capable of performing the effort, the procurement will be set aside for SB. If market research indicates there are small business subcontracting opportunities, that will be incorporated into the solicitation. It is helpful to us if you provide specific information about your capabilities as it relates to the procurement.

Q: When do you make your SB determination?

A: The SB determination is made early in the acquisition process. One of the purposes of the Sources Sought Notice (SSN) is to gather information to formulate our SB strategy. Per the FAR, we are required to look for SBs; and if there are two or more small businesses that can perform the requirement, we must set it aside. It's very important to provide information specific to each SSN or Request for Information (RFI) in order to help us determine our SB strategy.

Q: Is asking questions during the solicitation phase a rolling process? Sometimes answers create more questions.

A: Yes, it is a rolling process. We try to answer questions during the solicitation phase as quickly as possible. However, we are using the same team who is working concurrent efforts, so it may take some time before the Government responds.

Q: Will these charts be available?

A: These slides will be posted to the PEO STRI homepage.

Q: Is there a preferred way for us to let you know that we think something is proprietary when asking a question?

A: Yes, mark only the information that is specifically proprietary. Do not mark your entire response proprietary. The PCO will contact you if they have any comments or concerns about the proprietary markings.

Q: What is the advantage of responding to a SSN if I can only do part of it?

A: Responding to a SSN when you can only perform part of it, will help us determine our acquisition strategy and may provide you more opportunities to compete. Depending on the responses received from our market research it may benefit the Government to conduct a separate competition for a specific component. Explain any teaming arrangements in your response to an SSN because we could also use that information to determine the small business participation percentage, if the requirement cannot be broken up.

Q: What is the criteria for when budgets are or aren't disclosed?

A: Generally, when the budget is tight and we need to see if we can even afford the program, we'll state the budget. Additionally, we may ask for a ROM in the beginning of the process to decide if we can move forward. We may not give a budget when it's not a firm number or it is not yet known how much we will receive.

Q: Is there a way to get information back on our SSN responses?

A: We are working on revising our procedures; however, in the mean time, if you specifically request it we will get it back to you.

Q: When do you put out SSNs?

A: We typically put out a SSN to help develop our acquisition strategy; so as soon as we have a requirement and have assurance of funding we would try to post a SSN. This is early in the process and is part of our market research.

Q: How do you use market survey information?

A: Market Research is used to develop the Acquisition Strategy, refine requirements, and develop evaluation criteria (discriminators). Market Research is also used to monitor current market capabilities and not necessarily for an immediate requirement.

Q: There is a push towards FFP, which typically requires a tight SOW. When requirements aren't tight, industry has to price risk into it. What is the Government doing in this regard?

A: We are continuously training our workforce how to write performance specs and performance SOWs. One way for industry to assist us is to provide comments or make suggestions, to include addressing risk and the contract type, if that is a concern, during the draft RFP and RFP phases.

Q: How are you holding Large Businesses (LB) accountable to ensure they are meeting Small Business requirements?

A: There are different methods to enforce SB participation and it depends on the organization; PEO STRI takes this very seriously and we typically exceed our SB goals. There are annual reporting requirements levied on the prime to report how they've fulfilled their subcontracting goals. Contractor Performance Assessment Review

System (CPARS) reviews can also provide insight on how well a LB has fulfilled their SB participation requirements. SB participation can be an evaluation factor in new solicitations. It is also considered before an option gets exercised, as well. SB participation and how well they've followed through in the past may be considered when we are negotiating in sole source environments (for profit rate).

Q: Sometimes there is hesitancy to give you advanced information because the SSN requires that responses not be proprietary.

A: If we state not to provide proprietary information in response to a SSN, call the PCO and explain the situation. This will be taken into consideration and we may change the parameters, if necessary.

Q: What do you need to make an award without discussions?

A: The RFP must state we intend to award without discussions; and there must be a clear awardee and it be in the Government's best interest not to go into discussions. Time constraints, budgetary considerations, and complexity of the requirement are a few factors the Government considers in anticipating discussions or not; and is determined on a case by case basis at the discretion of the PCO and SSA.

Q: If we are otherwise in the competitive range, but take exceptions to the solicitation, will you keep us in the competitive range?

A: It depends; It is a very big risk to take exception to anything in a solicitation. Depending on the exception taken, you could be determined noncompliant.

If there is something in the solicitation you intend to take exception to, bring this up to the PCO during the question and answer period.

Q: Do you have guidelines for being more responsive to industry?

A: We have recently begun several new initiatives in order to be more responsive to industry. We now conduct monthly Procurement Administrative Lead Time (PALT) meetings that are open to the public. These meetings provide real-time updates on current efforts. Typically, the Acquisition Center Division Chiefs and Program Managers or Deputy Program Managers are available to answer questions. We are also developing a new Communications Instruction for our workforce to be more responsive.

Q: Where are RFIs and SSNs posted?

A: Typically, RFIs and SSNs are posted to both FedBizOpps and our STRIBOP (and sent to the current STOCII email list).

Q: If you do a limited competitive, such as only SDVOBs, do you go through FedBizOpps?

A: Yes. Under STOCII we must solicit the effort to the entire SB lot.

Q: How is risk related to a cost realism adjustment?

A: The specific cost/price evaluation methods will be described in the solicitation. To assess risk, the proposed cost will be adjusted for evaluation purposes only. The adjustment is based on the cost realism analysis and reflects how well the offeror

understands the Government's requirement. A cost realism adjustment is usually conducted only on cost type contracts. However, cost realism can be performed on FFP efforts as well.

Q: How do you establish your award timelines?

A: We use a tool called PALT to help develop our timeline. The PALT has been discussed at length at the monthly PALT meetings and is available for contractors to see on our website. Things that affect the award schedule can include the number of proposals received, holiday schedules, the number of evaluators, peer reviews, discussions, the evaluation factors, and other requirements, or a change in requirements.

Q: What is best value, tradeoff, and Lowest Price Technically Acceptable (LPTA)?

A: Tradeoff and LPTA are two methods we use in best value procurements. In LPTA, there is no tradeoff. Under LPTA, the Government has determined that the "best value" will be obtained by paying the lowest price offered by an offeror that submits an acceptable technical proposal. In the tradeoff method, we are able to award to other than the lowest priced offeror or to other than the highest technically rated offeror, if it is in the best interest of the Government. If our acquisition strategy utilizes LPTA as our best value method and you believe tradeoff is better suited (or vice versa), bring this to the attention of the PCO during the solicitation question and answer phase. The PCO will take this into consideration.

Q: What are the definitions for proposal ratings?

A: The rating definitions are stated in the solicitation and should be consistent with the DOD Source Selection Manual, dated July 2011.