Winning and Managing Federal Projects

By Jim Kendrick

RESPONSIBILITY FOR RESULTS

Increased Contractor Responsibility for Results is at the core of Federal procurement reform. Today, the government wants to buy results…not just hours of effort. This new focus can pay off for both government customers and smart contractors, but the risks are considerable.

PERFORMANCE SPECIFICATIONS

A **performance specification,** according to the Navy's acquisition reform site, is a statement of required *results* with criteria for verifying compliance–without stating methods for achieving the required results. It defines the functional requirements for the item, the environment in which it must operate, and its interface requirements. "The opposite of a performance specification is a detailed specification" that gives design solutions such as how a requirement is to be achieved or how work is to be performed. For example:

• "Provide 500 megabytes of computer mass storage for 24 months with 100 percent uptime and 100 percent data reliability" is a **performance specification.**

• "Provide 500 megabytes of mass storage on a Compaq/Digital server with RAID 5, Microsoft Windows NT, 24/7 staffing, and a UPS power supply with 5 hours of backup capacity" is a **detailed specification.**

With performance specifications, a contractor has more flexibility…and responsibility. Particularly on fixed-price contracts, the flexibility may provide options that increase profitability and still lower the competitive bid price. Of course, the successful contractor's solution must work, because failure to meet performance specifications is often coupled with financial penalties.

You may be able to win a bid competition by: (1) achieving the results in a shorter period of time, (2) offering a lower price, (3) persuading the customer that your technical solution will increase the certainty of achieving the specification (thereby reducing risk), and/or (4) using your past performance data on other contracts to document that you can achieve compliance with specifications.

Under acquisition reform, the whole idea is for the government to buy carefully-defined results on the most advantageous terms.

Performance measurement is the objective methodology used to determine the degree to which a contractor achieves the performance specifications. In many cases, the government defines these in **Quality Assurance Surveillance Plans** (QASPs), which are being attached to many Requests for Proposals. The QASP defines the measures to be used as well as the frequency. Under the QASP, the government is responsible for inspecting the results on a predefined frequency… which may range from random sampling …to daily, weekly or monthly inspections…to 100 percent inspection. In many

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President's Corner   by Carl Dickson

People sure do move around a lot. One of the largest challenges in managing APMP is keeping the mailing list up-to-date. People move and don't tell us. Each month, up to 15 percent of the e-mail we send bounces back.

For many months now we've had our e-mail mailing list online. You can add yourself to it with a simple point and click. But the postal mailing list was another issue. We send the newsletter in the mail, and if the address is bad the mail comes back to us. We like to send the newsletter in the mail because it provides a backup for people who have changed their e-mail addresses.

In the past we've mounted monumental efforts to call everyone with bad contact info. This can take **hundreds** of hours. Sometimes it can be hard to find people who have moved. Sometimes people stay lost. We currently have about 150 bad addresses in our list.

We've made some enhancements to NCA's Web site that we hope will help solve this problem. You can now directly update your contact information in our database. Every time we send out an email, it will include a special URL. Click on the URL, enter your e-mail address, and you'll be shown your record in our database. All you have to do is make any changes needed and click update. Changes made to NCA's database are forwarded to APMP National as well.

In addition, we made the following changes:

• You can decide whether your contact information should be visible so people can "look you up" on our site.

• You can add a "bio" describing yourself.

• You can join or leave a Special Interest Group (SIG)

• Each SIG now has its own page, showing who is interested in that topic and providing a place for SIG leaders to post articles, news, and information. Users can post comments on the articles.

• You can verify that you're in our database, and can re-add yourself to the mailing list if you've moved or been dropped from the list.

• You can enter the e-mail address of someone you think might be interested in APMP and the site will send them an invitation and instructions for how to add themselves to our mailing list.

• You can delete yourself from our mailing list if you are moving out of the area or just need a break.

All you have to do, is look at the bottom of an NCA e-mail and click on the link. Now for the bad news–not all of the old data has been brought forward. When you get the next e-mail from NCA, please make sure you click on the link so that you can put your information in.

These new features should not only make it easier to keep the mailing list up-to-date and increase turnout at our events, but the new SIG pages provide ways address topics that are too specific for a roundtable. When you log into the site and update your information, be sure to join the SIGs that interest you and find out who else shares your interests. ✍

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cases, the contractor is responsible for maintaining the recordkeeping and tracking systems that the government uses to execute its QASP.

Project Management

Project managers should pay strict attention to performance measures, because these are becoming the basis for successful contract performance. Focusing on how to meet all performance standards at a managed cost can increase profitability, provided that you continue to maintain positive customer relations. What's more, a project manager who meets or exceeds performance standards will also generate past performance history that can help win future contracts.

PWS, SOO, and Other Procurement Documents

There are plenty of traditional Statements of Work being issued by government agencies, but the trend is toward Performance Work Statements (PWS) and State-

ments Of Objectives (SOO). A friend… Jerry Klever (GKlever@PEC.com) has been on a team that has converted over 200 HUD procurement documents into Performance Work Statements. This year, I have been using PWS and SOO formats for almost all of the procurement documents at the Executive Office of the President. All of these newer formats are oriented toward performance criteria. Even traditional Statements of Work are weaving in performance standards…frequently linked to QASPs. Most have positive and negative incentives…that is, rewards and/ or punishments depending on how well the contractor performs. Some RFPs also require bidders to propose metrics for contract performance. This is a *contractor proposed/government approved* approach to defining and monitoring performance. A proposal with a credible approach to defining, recording, and reporting quantitative performance indicators may have an edge on winning the contract.

Bottom Line

The government wants to buy results. Bidders must be prepared to propose and manage contracts that achieve the defined performance standards. A good project manager will achieve the performance standards, make a profit, and leave a "past performance" track record that can be used to win future contracts. Of course, all of this is easier said than done. ✐

Interested in your association?

Have you considered **attending an NCA** Board Meeting?

Your input and ideas are important to your **committee!**

For further information, **please contact NCA** President Carl Dickson at **703-898-4932 or e-mail** carl.dickson@proplibrary.com

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Calendar of Events

The purpose of the calendar is to apprise NCA members of upcoming events of interest to proposal professionals.

SEPT	11	NCA Board Meeting	• Topic: General Business
	20	NCA Roundtable	• Topic: The Other Side of the Fence; Speaker: Jim Kendrick
OCT	2	NCA Board Meeting	• Topic: General Business
NOV	6	NCA Board Meeting	• Topic: General Business
	15	NCA Roundtable	• Topic: TBD

How to Manage Resources

By Rich Freeman

Effective proposal teams need access to the resources: talent, leadership, information, time and energy, money, work space, and tools. Some of these resources will be more or less abundant than others. It is often possible, in fact necessary, to substitute abundant resources for those less abundant or perhaps even unavailable.

There are six types of resources:

1. talent
2. information
3. time and energy
4. money
5. work space
6. tools

TALENT

We want everyone on the proposal team to be talented. When we refer to this "talent" we generally mean several things at the same time. There are parts or aspects of talent that have to be considered:

1. **innate ability**–what you are naturally good at doing.

2. **education**–what you have been taught by others.

3. **experience**–what you know because you've done it before.

4. **drive or motivation**–what you "love" to do

5. **response-ability**–seeing something in the environment, and knowing how, when, and why to respond (better known as an inclination for "making things happen")

6. **timeliness**–there is no talent in being too late in a proposal

7. **being cool**–being calm, collected, adult.

Our talent's are closely associated with our egos. A team of talented people can work at very high rates of productivity in one environment, and descend into chaos in another. A good facilitator must know when to and how to deal with "talented" people. Criticism, or even the fear of criticism, can discourage talent. Too much praise, or praise of the wrong kind generates cynicism. If you don't know about

or disregard an individual's specific talent or ability to participate, you may create a feeling of loss of empowerment.

To avoid this we use special methods of feedback to improve, correct or enhance someone's work. Don't believe for a minute that we won't remove someone from the team quickly and effectively if it's required, but this is rare since we use special screening and testing up front when building the team.

TIME AND ENERGY

We often think of time as a diminishing resource–"We have only 30 days to complete the proposal." We often think of time as an enemy. Yet we simply and continually waste time. (Perhaps not so much "waste" as "mis-spend.") The duration of time and the decision about how to spend the time are both resources for the facilitator. We stress that time is important and measure how much is left, but do not measure the time it takes to do things.

It is amazing that we do not keep more records on how long things take to do, and further, that we believe numbers we are told to believe instead of measuring reality. How many copies per minute does your copier make? Many people quote the manufacturer's advertising piece. How long does it take to print one copy of that beautiful piece of corporate artwork? With proposals, the more metrics about specific tasks you have, the more time you have because you're paying attention to the best use of time.

It is amazing to find people who believe that working more than 10 hours a day in a highly complex task is productive. It is amazing to see, again and again, how we begin to deplete our energies just at the very moment in time when we should be conserving our energies.

THE PROOFREADER AND THE EDITOR

Here is an example of a proofreader work-

ing with an editor in a mentor/apprentice relationship. We have slightly broadened the task of both during the thirty-day process.

The editor, in addition to editing, is to teach specific things to the proofreader, and teach them at specific times during the process. At the end of each day of editing, the editor briefs the proofreader on the problems of the day.

The proofreader is responsible for a number of things including cataloging and defining all acronyms as they develop and updating the response's outline (Table of Contents). At the end of each day of proof-reading, the proofreader briefs the editor on the problems of the day.

This leads to having a proofreader, well-schooled in appropriate portions of the editorial process on a "Just-In-Time" schedule, and an editor with a finger on the pulse of acronym proliferation. It leads to better teamwork, and certainly leads to more accurate levels of communication between the two and a proposal of a much higher quality.

INFORMATION

Information is the body of knowledge describing the facts, organizational structure, and processes associated with the content and context of the entity being designed. Good information reduces risk. Without it we are left to the mercy of our guesses and ill-founded opinions. With the complexities of computers, with the complexities of government bureaucracy, teaming agreements, communications systems, and many other factors comes another problem and that is access to information. Obtaining information is one thing. Distributing that information, or providing access to that information is an important factor in proposals. We've seen proposal efforts wasted, not because of the lack of information, but rather the lack of appropriate and timely access to that information.

The key to information access seems to reside in things as simple as file-naming conventions and folder naming conventions and agreements between individuals

to communicate at regular intervals. The key to information access resides in someone's special knowledge of, control of, and maintenance of the information generated during the design process. Someone on the design team must be the team's information "librarian."

The Librarian

This is such a critical part of the proposal process, that we include the following task description:

1. controls information and information conventions:
   - file naming
   - folder naming
   - file management
   - metric reporting (e.g., there are so many files, these have been completed, this has not been turned in, etc.)
2. maintains and provides access to the proposal files
3. maintains and provides access to the acronym list
4. maintains and provides access to the style guide
5. maintains and provides access to the compliance matrix
6. maintains and provides access to marketing and customer information
7. maintains and provides access to design process documents
8. maintains and provides access to schedule and progress metrics
9. ensures against parallel development
10. ensures successful contingency plans
11. ensures successful disaster recovery

How to Acquire Money and Motivation

The power or energy for proposals comes in two basic forms:

1. Money
2. Motivation of Individuals

Money is the capital available for the project. The proposal designer must make sure of an adequate supply of money and the power or influence over decision-makers to spend the money or ask for more. A formal written budget, along with a spe-

cial set of milestones or spending decision nodes are basic to a good proposal effort. Throwing lots of money toward a proposal does not make it a good proposal. Throwing too much creates severe credibility problems within the team. Not enough money and the quality suffers.

Money and motivation (or influence) are typically used to acquire other resources. Influence is often more important than money, but most important is the energy of the individual and the team–without it all else is generally wasted.

Motivation

1. the combined team's general spirit
2. the energy of an individual

The vitality of all design team members is affected by the amount of time they spend on the project. Too little time spent and the individual's effort does not provide much new energy to the project and the effort is not focused. Too much time spent and the individual's capabilities decay and the vitality of the effort suffers.

The Work Space

The team's physical environment includes the work space, furnishings, equipment, and supplies. It covers a wide range of individual human needs: ventilation and lighting, to monitors and keyboards. One must fully consider the physical environment against the needs of every individual who works in that environment. Without this attention to detail the physical

environment may cause the team's attention to drift from satisfying the needs of others (the client or client's evaluators) to satisfying its own needs.

The environment needn't be lavish, but must be sufficient. If you empower the individuals on the team to select their own preferred styles and options of hardware, software, furniture, lighting, etc. you can increase productivity. The details for the physical environment are small and often overlooked. These can be as mundane as how the software is configured on the LAN. Sometimes, overlooking or ignoring these small details can affect proposal outcomes to a degree far greater than their apparent importance.

The Tools and The Skills to Use Them

No matter what, the information age has created a proliferation of hardware and software. Change is driven by two things: competition for new markets, and trying to stop copyright infringement by locking a market segment and making it too expensive to change.

We used to speak "resistance to change." Now, it seems, we can't wait for the next level, or version. We seem to live on the Edge of Chaos–too close to the edge and you fall off. Too far away from the edge and you lose your ability to adapt.

The basic routine for selecting tools and tool skills follows.

1. Select a single, independent, dedicated hardware platform
2. Have a disaster recover plan
3. Select a single software for each type of task (bear in mind the end product)
4. Test everyone who is going to use the hardware or software to determine their true skill levels–teach them what they don't know
5. Configure the software to the task
6. Make the software configuration uniform.
7. Don't allow games, screen savers, special passwords, etc.
8. Measure the performance of the hardware and software. ✍

More sites I stumbled across when I didn't feel like working.

Here are some sites I found interesting and thought I'd share. If you've got a site that you think is interesting, send me a review at carl.dickson@proplibrary.com and maybe I'll include it in a future list.

Federal government sites

http://www.peoarbs.navy.mil/ea21/ea21home.htm

EA21 is responsible for developing and implementing a Department of the Navy Paperless Acquisition system

http://www.fedbizopps.gov

Government-wide electronic posting system for business opportunities.

https://www.fastlane.nsf.gov/fastlane.htm

NSF's paperless procurement site

Joint Electronic Commerce Program Office

http://www.acq.osd.mil/jecpo/

E-GOV

Agencies showcase e-government initiatives–
   http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0700/071400j1.htm

Federal e-government efforts lagging, officials say–
   http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0500/052300k3.htm

Efederal.com Dives Into Portal Pool
   http://www.washtech.com/news/govtit/2668-1.html

E-Gov Startup Offers Citizens Personal Touch–
   http://www.washtech.com/news/govtit/2288-1.html
Dot-coms try to cash in on government marketplace–

   http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0500/051600k1.htm

E-Invasion. Dot.coms swarm into the government market–
   http://www.govexec.com/features/0600/0600s1.htm

FedBid.com Unveils Gov't Auction Site–
   http://www.washtech.com/news/govtit/2435-1.html

Interagency office set to create "g-bay" site–
   http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0600/060800j1.htm

GSA closing in on WebGov portal–
   http://www.fcw.com/fcw/articles/2000/0508/web-gov-05-12-00.asp

GSA moving to open WebGov portal–
   http://www.fcw.com/fcw/articles/2000/0619/web-webgov-06-23-00.asp

President announces creation of new federal Web portal–
   http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0600/062600j2.htm

Federal leaders call for e-government coordinator–
   http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0600/062600j1.htm

Fed search engine won't come cheap–
   http://www.fcw.com/fcw/articles/2000/0821/web-portal-08-22-00.asp

Partners Web-enable public services–
   http://www.fcw.com/fcw/articles/2000/0821/web-sci-08-21-00.asp

Procurement articles

Big contracts may not be so bad for small businesses–
   http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0500/052300k1.htm

July Roundtable

FOR THE JULY ROUNDTABLE, the speaker was Doug Alston, the President and Cofounder of Advantage Consulting. The topic was What It Takes To Win New Business. He presented a number of important insights into the business development / proposal process that are not widely known.

He has done surveys to determine how the Government performs evaluations. Some of the findings are:

- The Government almost never use the compliance matrix in a proposal.
- Most members of Source Selection Boards (SSB) do not want to be there.
- 75 percent of the members of SSBs do not understand the proposal.
- 98 percent of the members of SSBs use a checklist to perform the evaluations.

With these facts in mind, the basic approach to developing proposals changes.

- The Technical Approach must be simple.
- There must be an emphasis on past performance.
- The proposal must be easy to read.
- There must be a lot of marketing and capture activity before the proposal.

One expert opinion he gave, that is very controversial, has to do with the development of the technical sections of the proposal. Doug feels that the Technical Geeks should write these sections and the have a good editor clean them up. He says that only the Geeks really understand the technical solutions and only they can accurately present them.

Procurement execs consider reverse auctions–
http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0800/080400j1.htm

DoD plans for future procurement workforce–
http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0500/051800k1.htm

GSA offers new contracts for personnel services–
http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0600/061600k1.htm

Web resource open for minority businesses–
http://www.fcw.com/fcw/articles/2000/0619/web-mbda-06-22-00.asp

Startups seek lift in aerospace arena–
http://www.zdnet.com/eweek/stories/general/0,11011,2589427,00.html

Group Proposes Defense Industry Portal–
http://www.zdnet.com/intweek/stories/news/0,4164,2569000,00.html

House approps chief fights tide of 'lockbox government'–
http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0500/051200b2.htm

Navy merges paperless initiatives–
http://www.fcw.com/fcw/articles/2000/0619/web-sps-06-19-00.asp

New rules make electronic federal documents official–
http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0500/050300b1.htm

Officials mull future of Trail Boss–
http://www.fcw.com/fcw/articles/2000/0508/web-boss-05-11-00.asp

Panel bars delinquent taxpayers from federal contracts–
http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0600/062300k2.htm

Pentagon official named federal procurement chief

http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0600/062100m2.htm

Award-Winning Acquisition. Government is changing what it buys, how it buys, and who is doing the buying–
http://www.govexec.com/top200/2000top/00tops1.htm

Business Solutions in the Public Interest Awards–
http://www.govexec.com/procure/award/

Government-wide online procurement system announced–
http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0800/082200k1.htm

Single face to vendors advances–
http://www.fcw.com/fcw/articles/2000/0821/web-fedbiz-08-22-00.asp

Retooling the federal desktop: A decade-long PC binge gives way to a diet of specialized buying–
http://www.fcw.com/fcw/articles/2000/0821/cov-retool-08-21-00.asp

Help desks front and center–
http://www.fcw.com/fcw/articles/2000/0821/tec-help-08-21-00.asp
http://www.gbuys.com
Federal Computer Week will launch a web service in early September that will allow government organizations to pool their buying power to obtain lower prices on technology products. ✐
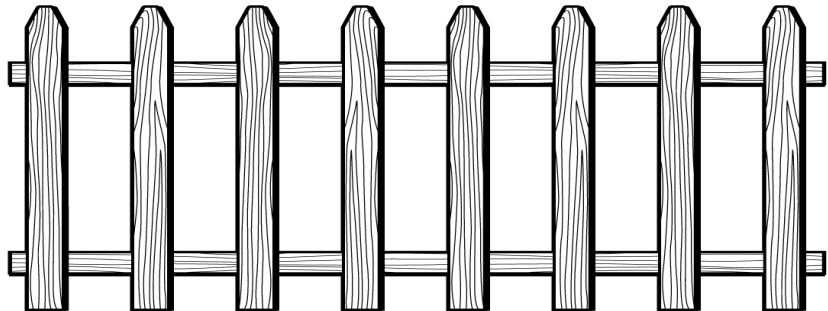
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