

Vendor Communication Plan

U.S. Department of State

December 15, 2011

1) Introduction and Statement of Commitment

Communications with potential vendors must occur early and frequently to ensure complete understanding of the Department of State's (DOS) requirements and vendor products and services availability. Vendor communication is vitally important as DOS employs both foreign and domestic vendors to accomplish our worldwide mission.

Increased emphasis on frequent information exchanges with industry is intended to improve the quality of State's market research efforts, and is conducted in a fair, level, and transparent manner. While recent attention has been on expanding dialogue with the vendor community, this is not new to State. The Department encourages such exchanges between our program offices and contracting activities and vendors from the earliest identification of a requirement through contract award.

Department officials are encouraged to engage in more frequent information exchanges with vendors, particularly during the pre-solicitation phase, especially for high dollar, more complex procurements, so long as sensitive or proprietary information is protected on behalf of the Government and vendors alike. Exchanges with vendors is beneficial and results in: (a) greater clarity of agency requirements; (b) increased awareness of industry products and services; (c) better business decisions made by vendors about their private sector investments in products or services; (d) increased competition, including greater use of small businesses in subcontracting opportunities; (e) greater use of small business set asides; (f) more favorable pricing; (g) increased cost savings; (h) more realistic expectations about marketplace capabilities; (i) higher quality contract deliverables; and (j) fewer performance problems.

Proper communication exchanges with vendors adds significant value to and creates efficiencies in: solicitation development, proposal preparation, proposal evaluation, discussions, and contract award processes.

The Department of State is committed to:

- Communicating early, frequently, and constructively with industry;
- Including small businesses and subgroups of small businesses in communications with industry;
- Including vendors that State has not worked with in the past;
- Identifying, in the DOS published procurement forecast, which procurements are likely to involve opportunity for additional communication with industry; and
- Protecting non-public information including vendors' confidential information and the DOS source selection information.

2) Senior Official Responsible

The DOS senior agency and bureau official responsible for promoting vendor engagement is:

Ms. Catherine Ebert-Gray
Deputy Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Administration, Logistics and Management

3) Efforts Undertaken or Planned to Reduce Barriers and Promote Engagement

DOS engages in significant outreach to industry as part of its acquisition process and this will continue. The Department provides opportunities for vendors to participate in pre-award conferences, ask questions and network with other vendors who are potential teaming partners. We also post Request for Information (RFIs) seeking vendor ideas and input to assist us in our procurement initiatives. Major acquisitions will include pre-solicitation conferences and site visits to promote communication and mutual understanding. Where time permits, DOS issues draft solicitations to encourage vendor comments before requirements are finalized.

Additionally, the Department engages the small business vendor community through a robust schedule of outreach events to include individual consultations, meetings with prime contractors and DOS program managers, and participation in outreach events sponsored by Congressional members and industry associations. Senior Department officials regularly participate in Industry Conferences to disseminate information and listen to contractor concerns. Attachment 1 shows recent Senior Official conference participation.

a) Reduce Barriers

1. Vendor engagement for State's security related procurements are streamlined through the "One Major" program. This program is very specialized with vendors qualified and capable of performing unique security related services. The requirements for in-country licenses and the significant risk of undertaking armed security in hostile environments limits the number of willing vendors. Pre-proposal conferences, draft solicitations and site visits are regular occurrences with this program.
2. The Department has a robust and effective vendor outreach strategy that ensures the State's IT requirements are completely understood. These crucial elements ensure successful partnerships between State and the vendor community. State created a Strategic Planning Office (SPO) responsible for managing IT outreach to the vendor community. SPO responsibilities include:
 - Working with leading vendors to ensure that the Department's IT Strategic Plan (ITSP) meets Department requirements and goals and is aligned with industry direction.
 - Regular consultation with industry leaders to ensure that IT strategies are synchronized with trends and product/solution availability.
 - Wide dissemination of the ITSP to inform the Department and vendor community. The ITSP is posted on the Internet so that vendors can better understand where IT in the Department is headed.

- Regular interaction with domestic bureaus and overseas posts to ensure that the ITSP and tactical plans support mission and business goals of modern diplomacy, and to enable SPO to represent these goals to the vendor community.
- State works closely with the Federal Business Council to host theme-based quarterly IT Expo & Educational Symposiums that focus on high profile technical issues for the Department. Symposiums provide an excellent opportunity for practitioners, users, and vendors to meet, interact and collaborate. Recent symposiums addressed Cloud and Mobile Computing, both of which are core components in the Department's ITSP. The Symposiums include vendor presentations and lively panel discussions with industry participants discussing current and future technologies. Symposiums also provide opportunities for vendors to learn about future plans, initiatives, and priorities of US diplomacy; a recent topic was the "Untethered Diplomat." State's commitment to the symposium process is demonstrated by the extent of senior-level participation by State officials, including the CIO, which in turn attracts senior level participation by industry partners.
- Major IT acquisitions are prefaced by RFIs which lower the risks associated with large acquisitions and ensure greater coordination between the Department and vendors. State benefits from the responses which draw on the expertise of the vendor community, and from the increased understanding on the part of potential bidders. An RFI benefits the vendor community by providing opportunities to showcase their core competencies as well as providing an advance notice of a possible acquisition.
- Our IT professionals work closely with small business advocates within the Department and the Small Business Administration to ensure maximum participation by small and small disadvantaged businesses in IT acquisitions.
- DOS uses FedBid, a reverse auctioning tool, for a majority of our procurement where goods are being sought. Through the FedBid tool, vendors are automatically notified of Department of State procurements. In FY 2011, the average number of vendors that were notified of procurement opportunities was 4,100.

b) Promote Engagement

1. With over 260 posts worldwide, the embassy construction program is a vital branch of the Department. State solicits continuous industry input through an Industry Advisory Panel chaired by a senior level director and consisting of representatives of the overseas construction industry. The Advisory Panel meets at least once each year to discuss issues impacting overseas projects. Inputs from the Panel influence embassy design and construction worldwide. The purpose of the Industry Advisory Panel is to serve the Department in an advisory capacity with respect to industry and academia's latest concepts, methods, best practices, innovations, and ideas related to site acquisition and building design, construction, operations, and maintenance. Individual embassy construction projects are preceded by a pre-proposal conference, site visit, and vendor pre-qualification. All three of these events are structured to maximize contractor understanding of requirements and to allow vendor feedback. The Department also created a briefing for vendors as a method of introducing new construction contractors to the DOS overseas construction environment. This

briefing is a discussion session with individual contractors interested in getting involved in State's overseas construction program. Contractors receive an overview of DOS construction history, and upcoming requirements. Discussions include project planning, security management, construction management, as well as the construction contracting process.

2. The Department engages in outreach to the small business community. We incorporate multiple methods in providing outreach, education and counseling to small firms in the Department's business practices with the ultimate goal of expanding the base of small businesses participating in State's acquisition process. Some methods include:

- Regular one-on-one meetings with small business vendors. This allows for a highly individualized experience tailored for that business. Vendors may ask questions regarding Department culture and policies, upcoming acquisitions, current contracts, points of contact, acquisition vehicles; small and large prime contractors, etc. Of course, these meetings are also focused on the capabilities of the vendor and best next steps for marketing to DOS.
- Coordinate and host annual Department small business outreach events. These events offer small business owners the opportunity to meet Department program officials, contracting personnel and large prime contractors. These initial meetings provide small firms with an opportunity to market their goods and services and ask questions regarding upcoming Department opportunities.
- Speak at a variety of local, regional, and national small business vendor outreach events to discuss "best practices" in marketing to the Department.
- Participate in small business outreach events such as trade shows, matchmaking events, and networking sessions, focusing on those events with Congressional or Gubernatorial support or those sponsored by Chambers of Commerce, trade associations, etc.
- Speak at large business outreach events to discuss Department subcontracting requirements and achievements.
- Planning is underway to incorporate additional vendor outreach activities such as webinars and teleconferences that will allow small firms outside the Washington D.C. area to save money on travel costs while still introducing their firm to the Department and providing those vendors specific information on marketing to State.

4) Criteria for Identifying Acquisitions Needing a Communication Strategy

a) Acquisition plans for high-risk, large-dollar value (**\$10 M and over**), and complex acquisitions of products and/or services must include a comprehensive vendor engagement strategy that:

- Includes at least one industry day or a pre-solicitation or pre-proposal conference;
- Allows for a reasonable amount of one-on-one engagement;
- Allows time for discussions, as needed and in accordance with FAR Part 15, during the proposal evaluation process; or

- Requires a written justification to the file as to why those steps are unnecessary.

Contracting Officers (CO) may apply any or all of the techniques indicated above (below the \$10 M threshold) if the CO determines that the acquisition warrants or may benefit from increased vendor engagement.

Engagement strategy will include industry days, small business outreach sessions, pre-solicitation, and pre-proposal conferences advertised via FedBizOpps.gov. Solicitation question and answer sessions will be posted and updated regularly, typically but not exclusively, using the existing “special notices” function on the FedBizOpps.gov website <https://www.fbo.gov/>.

b) Acquisitions where the Department seeks vendor input include RFIs, re-competitions of prior procurements where (1) the requirement did not provide the solution needed, either due to nonperformance of the awardee (especially if it led to termination) or due to inadequate definition of the requirement; or (2) a competitive solicitation was issued but only one offeror responded, and market research suggests more than one vendor is available to perform the requirement.

5) Publication of Engagement Events

The DOS currently uses fedbizopps.gov to publish pre-solicitation conference notices and Request for Proposal (RFP) question and answer responses. Industry days and small business outreach sessions are also posted and distributed to trade associations and are currently listed on Department websites.

Outreach, marketing and other small business related information is posted on the Department’s web site. While this may duplicate some of the postings on the FedBizOpps.gov website, it does provide information that is of concern to the small business community who access the DOS website. Postings are supportive of small business marketing and aid in communicating procurement related information to firms who otherwise would have to exit the Department’s web site to learn of outreach events.

6) Brief description of roles and responsibilities

- a) Contracting Officer: Serves as the primary vendor interface once procurement is initiated to ensure that all offerors receive the same information. The Contracting Officer performs market research to identify potential sources, publicizes the procurement with pre-solicitation notices and solicitation notices, schedules and leads pre-proposal conferences and site visits, and responds to vendor questions.
- b) Program Manager: Responsible for initial market research which provides the first opportunity for vendor communications. Attends industry events and meets with industry representatives to identify product and service trends, features and availability. Determines contract requirements and specifies the Government’s minimum needs.
- c) Contracting Officer Representative (COR): Focus on post-award opportunities; identify ways to improve communication after award, such as award kick-off events, and vendor boards (for multiple award contracts). Keep the CO informed and document vendor interaction as appropriate.

d) General Counsel: The acquisition function is supported by the Department's legal office. That office provides advice to Contracting Officers and CORs regarding legal issues; including release of contractor information, evaluation criteria, requirements specification, and acquisition strategy.

e) Ethics Officers: The ethics office provides guidance, training and individual advice to all participants in the acquisition process to ensure relationships with vendors are not tainted with conflicts of interest or the appearance of conflicts.

f) OSDBU: Serves as the primary point of contact with the small business vendor community. Schedules outreach events to bring the viewpoints of small businesses into the Department of State. Attends outreach events such as Congressional and trade association meetings to enhance communication with vendors.

g) Other Officials: State's senior procurement executive develops training and policies that clarify the importance of maintaining good vendor communications.

7) Training and awareness efforts for employees and contractors

The Department of State's Contracting Officer Representative (COR) training course includes a module on market research and the importance of early communication with vendors. State distributed the OMB guidance on vendor communications to contracting offices.

8) Links to Existing Policies

Use of Subcontractors:

<http://aoepd.a.state.gov/Content/documents/pib2001-20.doc>

Central Contractor Registration:

<http://aoepd.a.state.gov/Content/documents/pib2004-2.doc>

Online Representations and Certifications Application:

<http://aoepd.a.state.gov/Content/documents/pib2005-18.doc>

Electronic Subcontracting Reporting System (eSRS)

<http://aoepd.a.state.gov/Content/documents/pib2008-2.doc>

Transitioning Direct State Contracts with Small Businesses to Government-wide Acquisition Contracts (GWACs)

<http://aoepd.a.state.gov/Content/documents/pib2008-5.doc>

Socio-Economic Programs Under GSA Schedules

<http://aoepd.a.state.gov/Content/documents/pib2008-18.doc>

Enhanced Competition for Task and Delivery Order Contracts

<http://aoepd.a.state.gov/Content/documents/pib2008-19.doc>

Socio-Economic Programs Under GSA Schedules

<http://aoepd.a.state.gov/Content/documents/pib2009-18.docx>

9) Plans to Follow-Up

The State Department will review this Plan to gauge the overall effectiveness of outreach efforts. Revisions to this Plan will be made as necessary.

ATTACHMENT 1

Senior Official Speaking Engagements for FY 2011

- Logistic Management Inc. (LMI) Visit – December 8, 2010
- National Contract Management Association Government Contract Management Conference – Dec 9, 2010
- Office Supply Vendor Open House – March 5, 2010
- Speaking Engagement at the Navy Yard – Vendor Outreach, sponsored by Wisconsin Congressional Members - June 10, 2010
- NOBLIS Corporation - January 6, 2011
- FedBid – Acquisition Executive Roundtable – May 20, 2011
- Florida Minority Supplier Development Conference, Orlando, August 12, 2011
- Annual Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting - September 2011

ATTACHMENT 2

Small Business Outreach for FY 2011

DATES	DESCRIPTION/SPONSOR	LOCATION	SENAT/ Cong./ Gov.	SB 1x1
October 5-7, 2010	NorthEast Regional Council Matchmaker/DoD Northeast Regional Council	ME	N/A	40
October 19-21, 2010	23rd Annual Procurement Opportunities Fair/California University of Pennsylvania	PA	N/A	20
October 22, 2010	15th Annual Subcontracting Training and Networking Session	VA	N/A	150
October 27, 2010	19th Annual Baltimore Washington Regional Government Procurement Fair/Baltimore Washington Corridor Chamber.	MD	Senator Mikulski	30
October 28, 2010	U.S. General Services Administration Access to success Conference	DC	N/A	25
November 3, 2010	2010 Veteran's Extravaganza Panel/nVideoCONFERENCES (a non-profit division of nVideoNOW)	MD	N/A	N/A
November 4, 2010	22nd Idaho Business Opportunity Conference, Coeur D'Alene, Sponsored by ID Dept. of Commerce PTAC and Governor Otter of Idaho	ID	Gov. Otter	25
November 10, 2010	Opportunities & Resources for International Trade (Presentation)/Maryland Small Business Development Center.	MD	N/A	N/A
December 2, 2010	Small Business Industry Day held by large prime contractor SERCO	VA	N/A	10
December 7, 2010	Alliance South, Small Business Conference and Trade Show/Showworks	GA	N/A	15
January 25, 2011	Fairfax County Chamber Of Commerce - Fort Belvoir Procurement Forum	VA	N/A	30
January 26-27, 2011	National SB Contracting Summit/U.S. Women Chamber of Commerce	FL	N/A	40

January 28, 2011	Winter Showcase Matchmaker/GovConnects	DC	N/A	20
January 31 - Feb.3, 2011	Winter Conference/National 8(a) Association	FL	N/A	40
Feb.22-24, 2011	Annual GRO-BIZ Conference/Senator Enzi	WY	Senator Enzi	30
Feb.23-24, 2011	Business Matchmaking 2011/Business Matchmaking	FL	N/A	60
February 24, 2011	Vermont Matchmaking/Senator Patrick Leahy, U. S. Small Business Administration, Vermont Agency of Transportation, Vermont Department of Buildings, General Services, Vt. Procurement Technical Assistance Center, Vermont Manufacturing Extension Center, Vermont Small Business Development Center, Vermont Chamber of Commerce	VT	N/A	22
March 1-2, 2011	23rd Annual High Tech Conference/The Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).	CA	N/A	27
March 2, 2011	Women Impacting Public Policy Small Business Luncheon	DC	N/A	N/A
March 10, 2011	10th Annual Alliance Mid-Atlantic 2011, Small Business Matchmaking and Conference	NJ	N/A	35
March 14-17, 2011	25th Annual reservation Economic Summit & American Indian Business Trade Fair/The National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development.	NV	N/A	30
March 16, 2011	Small Business Initiative Matchmaker Procurement Day/Prince George County, Maryland.	MD	N/A	25
March 30, 2011	National Small Business Contracting Summit/U.S. Women's Chamber of Commerce	DC	N/A	
March 30, 2011	Federal Agency Procurement Matchmaking/U.S. Hispanic Chamber of commerce	DC		

April 7, 2011	5th Annual Small Business Conference/American Council for Technology and Industry Advisory Council	DC		
April 14, 2011	Federal Agency Procurement Briefing and Reception/The National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMDC)	DC		
April 20, 2011	Northeast American Indian Economic Development& Procurement Conference/Turtle Island PTAC & The American Indian Economic Development Fund	NY		
April 28, 2011	Arkansas procurement Opportunities /Senator Mark Pryor, Senator John Boozman, SBA and Score	AR	Senator Mark Pryor, Senator John Boozman,	
May 4, 2011	South Carolina District Premier Procurement Matchmaker Event/U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)	SC		
May 24-35, 2011	Business Matchmaking/California Disabled Veterans Alliance	CA		
May 24-25, 2011	East Coast Service Disabled Veteran Owned Business Conference & Expo 2011/The Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business Council in cooperation with the City of Hampton and Old Dominion University Business Gateway	VA		
May 23, 2011	Latino Coalition Conference- National B2B Procurement Matchmaking Session/The Latino Coalition and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce	DC		
May 23-25, 2011	CelebrAsian Business Opportunity Conference 2011/ US Pan Asian American Chamber of Commerce (USPAAC)	CA		

June 1, 2011	Marketplace 2011 Small Business Conference/Rep. Brad Miller and Rep. David Price	NC	Rep. Brad Miller and Rep. David Price	
June 6, 2011	Johnstown's Fourth Annual Government Procurement Expo/Johnstown Area Regional Industries (JARI) Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) and Greater Johnstown Chamber of Commerce.	PA		
June 22-23, 2011	National 8(a) Association Summer Conference	AK		
June 27-30, 2011	Veteran Entrepreneur Training Symposium/The National Veteran Small Business Coalition	NV		
July 06, 2011	White House Initiative Small Business Outreach Event - hosted by the City of Alexandria	VA		
August 15-18, 2011	National Veterans Small Business Conference and Exposition /U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs	LA		
August 12, 2011	Florida Minority Supplier Development Council Trade Fair	FL		
September 14, 2011	25th Annual Entrepreneurial Woman's Conference/Women's Business Development Center	IL		