

National Aeronautics and  
Space Administration

**Headquarters**

Washington, DC 20546-0001



## **National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Vendor Communication Plan**

### **Agency Commitment**

This Vendor Communication Plan represents a commitment by the NASA to promote increased dialog with the vendor community prior to awarding contracts.

Since its inception, NASA has been closely linked with the private and academic sectors. Historically, this Agency has contracted with the private sector for most of the products and services it uses and produces. Over eighty percent of the Agency's authorized funding and the resultant direct employment is dispersed widely in the national economy through NASA contracts and grants.

Early, constructive communication with industry, including small businesses and new businesses will enable NASA do to more with less, improve the health of our aerospace industrial base, and advance the United States' capabilities and systems for space exploration. This is vital for the development of new vendors and partners as NASA focuses on innovations to acquisition approaches, requirements, specifications and management processes. NASA is committed to a transparent acquisition process, while ensuring the protection of vendors' confidential information and the Federal government's source selection information.

As required in NASA FAR Supplement (NFS) 1807.72, it is NASA policy to prepare an annual acquisition forecast and semiannual update of expected contract opportunities for each fiscal year. Their purpose is to alert Industry of upcoming acquisitions. The acquisition forecasts for each Center are available on the NASA Acquisition Internet Service website at <http://procurement.nasa.gov/cgi-bin/nais/forecast.cgi>.

The acquisitions, which are defined in very general terms, are placed on each Center's acquisition forecast where they may be viewed by representatives of industry and Government.

## **I. Senior Agency Official(s) Responsible for Promoting Vendor Engagement**

NASA's Senior Procurement Executive is responsible for promoting vendor engagement, together with the NASA Center Procurement Officers.

## **II. Efforts to Reduce Barriers and Promote Engagement**

NASA must develop new human spaceflight systems in an affordable manner. The agency continues to promote industry engagement in an effort to remove barriers and increase innovation. In FY 2011, NASA invited industry through an announcement in the Federal Register to schedule a 30-60 minute meeting over a 3-day period to communicate ideas on how to make human spaceflight programs more affordable. Also requested were actions that they had taken as a company, and suggested improvements for NASA to make in our contracting relationships. More than 25 companies provided their ideas to NASA in person, and several organizations submitted their ideas in writing. The organizations providing input on improving affordability covered the spectrum in size and role – including prime contractors, subsystem, component, and entrepreneurial commercial providers, as well as non-profit organizations. Industry input and NASA studies and analysis led to the identification of multiple opportunities for improvement that broadly fall into three areas: acquisition approaches, requirements/specifications, and development processes. These ideas are being considered as NASA formulates its acquisition strategy for future human spaceflight development programs. Industry feedback is vital to development of the acquisition strategy for future spacecraft programs.

NASA plans to benchmark with other Agencies on their acquisition forecasting and explore ways to improve providing information to potential offerors.

## **III. Criteria for Vendor Engagement in Agency Acquisitions**

NASA has a comprehensive vendor engagement process that has been incorporated into acquisitions to attract new vendors and ensure adequate competition. Although communications vary, depending on the size or the purpose for the potential contract; it is crucial that NASA ensures fair and equitable treatment of all offerors:

- In accordance with NFS 1815.201, a draft RFP (DRFP) is issued for all competitive acquisitions expected to exceed \$10 million except for announcements of opportunity, NASA Research Announcements, SBIRs, STTRs, and Architect-and-Engineering services, unless the NASA Contracting Officer determines in writing that a DRFP is not beneficial to the acquisition. When a DRFP is issued, it must specifically request that potential offerors identify unnecessary or inefficient requirements. If the DRFP contains Government-unique standards, prospective offerors are invited to identify voluntary consensus standards that meet the Government's requirements as alternatives to Government-unique standards cited as requirements, in accordance with FAR 11.101. Comments also are requested on any perceived safety, occupational health, security (including information technology security), environmental, property,

quality assurance, export control, and/or other programmatic risk issues associated with performance of the work.

- NASA Contracting officers plan the acquisition schedule to include adequate time for issuance of the DRFP, prospective offeror review and comment, and NASA evaluation and disposition of the comments. The RFP may be modified as a result of industry questions and comments provided in response to the DRFP, in response to the industry briefing, or as a result of NASA's internal reviews.
- In accordance with Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) 15.201, NASA often also finds it advisable to host a conference or site tour to facilitate the early exchange of information with prospective offerors before receiving proposals. Such events provide a means of exchanging information to improve potential offerors' understanding of the Government's requirements; to enhance the Government's ability to obtain quality supplies/services; and to increase efficiency in proposal preparation, evaluation, negotiation, and award.
- A preproposal conference to brief prospective offerors may be conducted after a solicitation has been issued, but before proposals are received, in accordance with FAR 15.201. NASA Contracting Officers, in coordination with management and the source evaluation board, make a determination, prior to issuance of the RFP, as to whether a preproposal conference is required. Generally, these conferences benefit both the Government and prospective offerors in complex acquisitions where it is necessary to explain or clarify complicated specifications and requirements. A preproposal conference is likely to be most beneficial in situations where there have been major questions about a solicitation or in situations where the final solicitation incorporates significant changes from a previously released draft solicitation.
- Upon issuance of the final RFP, a formal blackout period starts; whereby NASA personnel, other than the NASA Contracting Officer; are directed to refrain from formal or informal discussions with industry regarding the procurement. All questions/inquiries must be directed to the Contracting Officer.
- Lastly, NFS 1805.303-71 establishes that a NASA Headquarters public announcement and a NASA Administrator notification are required for award of a contract action that has a total anticipated value, including unexercised options, of \$5 million or greater. A contract action requiring notification to the Administrator and/or a NASA Headquarters public announcement are not distributed nor is any source outside NASA notified of the award status until the procedures of NFS 1805.303-72 are accomplished.

#### **IV. Plan for Publication of Engagement Events**

NASA posts vendor engagement events on FedBizOpps (<https://www.fbo.gov/>) and on the NASA Acquisition Internet Service ([http://prod.nais.nasa.gov/cgi-bin/nais/link\\_syp.cgi](http://prod.nais.nasa.gov/cgi-bin/nais/link_syp.cgi)).

These events include industry days, small business outreach sessions, and pre-solicitation conferences. In addition, Federal agencies have been directed to post Small Business Events such as conferences and training on FedBizOpps using the Special Notice capability. NASA has already made use of this capability.

- Examples of a recent such small business engagement event follows:
  - NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center (GSFC) 2011 Small Business Conference hosted and produced by the Industry Assistance Office within the Procurement Operations Division at NASA's GSFC was held June 9th from 7:30 am – 4:30 pm at the GSFC campus in Greenbelt, Maryland.
  - NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center (MSFC) 2011 Small Business Conference hosted and produced by the Industry Assistance Office within the Procurement Operations Division at NASA's MSFC and was held September 29 from 9:00 am – 1:00 pm at the Davidson Center for Space Exploration in Huntsville, Ala.

As NASA seeks partnerships with the private sector to enable safe, reliable, and cost-effective commercial spaceflight capabilities and services for the transport of crew and cargo to and from the International Space Station in accordance with the 2010 National Space Policy of United States of America, there have been several outreach events.

- Commercial Crew Program (CCP)

NASA's Commercial Crew Program (CCP) hosted a Requirements Workshop on May 24, 2011 in Cocoa Beach, Florida. CCP provided an introduction to the Program's requirements and discuss key features. The event was widely attended by spaceflight industry. The agenda included discussion of projected implementation approach, oversight methodology, and safety review process, evaluation of technical standard, concepts and practices.

CCP held the Requirements Workshop to discuss possible collaboration with participants who are actively developing a viable Crew Transportation System or element of a system (i.e., launch vehicle or spacecraft) with significant and recent flight history. The purpose of the collaboration was to conduct market research under FAR Part 10. The Workshop included:

- Feedback from industry on requirements
- Technical feasibility
- NASA's preliminary evaluation of the system
- Areas or specific requirements that significantly impact the viability or are major cost drivers to Industry
- No exchange of funds between the parties.

NASA is particularly interested in Industry's identification of any unnecessary, overly burdensome, and/or overly prescriptive requirements. The agency also actively seeks to determine if requirements in NASA solicitations provide enough detail to design, develop, produce, and operate the articles to be procured.

- Other sites used by NASA to publicize events include:
  - <http://www.sbir.gov> - Government portal for Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) Information
  - <http://sbir.gsfc.nasa.gov/SBIR/SBIR.html> - NASA SBIR portal
  - <http://www.sba.gov/> - US Small Business Administration
  - <https://www.fbo.gov/> - Federal Business Opportunities

## V. Role and Responsibilities

**Contracting Officer** – A person with the authority to enter into, administer, and/ or terminate contracts and make related determinations and findings. Establishes and maintains the process for communication with vendors throughout the acquisition. Attends vendor communication meetings to better understand industry capabilities and requirements. Uses information gained through the vendor communication exchange process to develop the solicitation requirements, source selection process, etc.

**Contract Specialist** – A person responsible for administering contracts. Supports the Contracting Officer in carrying out the vendor communication process to include attending meetings, providing information, taking minutes in meetings, etc.

**Program Manager** – A person who has oversight of a program. The program manager takes care of budgets, schedules and ensures accountability of program contractual requirements. Participates with the Contracting Officer and Contract Specialist in exchange activities. Uses information gained through the vendor exchange process to gain a better understanding of industry capabilities and requirements in order to enhance the Government’s requirements that will be reflected in the solicitation.

**COR/COTR** – Qualified individuals appointed by Contracting Officers to assist in the technical monitoring and administration of a contract. Participates with the Contracting Officer and Contract Specialist in exchange activities. Uses information gained through the vendor exchange process to gain a better understanding of industry capabilities and requirements in order to enhance the Government’s requirements that will be reflected in the solicitation.

**General Counsel** – General Counsel is responsible for providing legal advice and review of acquisition plans; and ensuring acquisitions are legally sufficient. Provides guidance to agency officials to ensure proper conduct of interactions with industry.

**OSDBU** – The Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization is responsible for coordinating reviews between the acquisition team and the Small Business Administration (SBA) Procurement Center Representative. OSDBU is also responsible for collaborating with the acquisition team to maximize small business participation in prime and subcontracting opportunities. Conducts small business outreach conferences and meetings to assist small businesses.

Budget and Finance Personnel – A person responsible for validating availability of funds. Provides support to the Contacting Officer and Program Manager throughout the communication process.

Senior Executive – A person with overall responsibility of a program.

Industry Assistance Office – Provides outreach to private industry and serves as a primary source of information for firms seeking business opportunities within the agency.

## **VI. Training and Awareness Efforts for Employees and Contractors**

SEB Training – provided to NASA’s program offices and source evaluation boards as just in time training; in addition, NASA takes advantage of other learning events scheduled by the Defense Acquisition University, and the Federal Acquisition Institute. Johnson Space Center, through their local National Contract Management Association (NCMA) Chapter, has hosted SEB training for contractors interested in learning the SEB process.

Acquisition Learning Seminar – The Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI) hosted an Acquisition Learning Seminar on Effective Vendor Engagement in Washington, DC in July 2011. At this seminar, participants will understand the contribution of effective vendor engagement to an improved acquisition outcome.

Market Research Training – sponsored by the NASA Office of Small Business Programs and the Office of Procurement. Effective market research enables NASA to shape procurement packages to fit market conditions and encourage responses from the sources most capable of meeting the requirement. NASA personnel are trained to use readily available, easily accessed sources that provide product and industry data for market research. The following information sources and search techniques have been found to be beneficial:

- Presolicitation notices in the FedBizOpps and the NASA Acquisition Internet Service.
- Review of acquisition history and exchange of acquisition information, including source lists.
- Solicitation mailing lists, qualified products lists, and qualified bidders lists.
- Review of the results of recent market research undertaken to meet similar or identical requirements.
- Contacting industry regarding specific market capabilities. Including obtaining capability packages from all interested small business firms including, Small Disadvantaged, 8(a), Woman-Owned, Economically Disadvantaged Woman-Owned, Veteran-Owned, Service Disabled Veteran-Owned, and Historically Underutilized Business Zone (HUBZone) businesses for the purposes of determining the appropriate level of competition and small business subcontracting goals.

Continuous Learning Courses – NASA offers continuous learning courses that emphasize communication with vendors and establishing/maintaining good partnering relationships. The

emphasis is on positive interactions with vendors, and an emphasis on how the pre-award communication and continuing good relationships after contract award.

## **VII. Links to Existing Policies**

Links to NASA policies regarding information to industry are below:

- NASA FAR Supplement (NFS) 1807.72, Acquisition Forecasting: [http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/procurement/regs/1807.htm#7\\_72](http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/procurement/regs/1807.htm#7_72)
- NASA FAR Supplement (NFS) 1815.201, Exchanges with industry before receipt of proposals: [http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/procurement/regs/1815.htm#15\\_201](http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/procurement/regs/1815.htm#15_201)
- Procurement Notice (PN) 04-50 Source Selection Process Improvements and Other Changes: <http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/procurement/regs/pn04-50.html>
- NASA Procurement Library (NASA Only): <http://prod.nais.nasa.gov/portals/pl/index.html>

## **VIII. Follow Up**

NASA regularly publishes a survey to be used by the NASA Assistant Administrator for Procurement to assist in evaluating the degree to which the NASA field center procurement offices are communicating and interacting with entities outside the Agency. This will enable the procurement offices to develop improvements in an efficient and effective manner. The survey was last sent out electronically in April 2011, and results will be consolidated later this year. NASA plans to survey stakeholders, including vendors, and will refine the plan based on results of the survey.

Questions regarding this plan or related topics may be directed to Bill McNally, Assistant Administrator for Procurement, on (202) 358-2090 or [Procurement@hq.nasa.gov](mailto:Procurement@hq.nasa.gov).