



# Air Force Life Cycle Management Center Business and Enterprise (BES) Directorate (AFLCMC/HI) Vendor Communication Plan



In accordance with the DoD Vendor Communication Plan upon which this document is based, the Air Force Life Cycle Management Center, Business and Enterprise Systems (BES) Directorate Vendor Communication Plan is designed to promote productive interaction between BES Divisions, BES Program Offices, and our Industry Partners. Our goal is to establish a process where effective and efficient procurements of goods and services for the Air Force can occur. BES shall do this by hosting events throughout the year and by posting relevant information on the Maxwell-Gunter Annex main and Vendor Communications webpages as well as other applicable social media outlets.

Communications with potential suppliers shall occur early and often to gain better product and service information. This is the subject of the Office of Federal Procurement Policy's guidance dated February 2, 2011. Acquisition plans for high-risk, large-dollar, and complex Information Technology (IT) programs and their subsequent re-competitions should include a comprehensive vendor engagement strategy.

While recent attention has been on expanding dialogue with the vendor community, this is not a new requirement. In fact, the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) 15.201 encourages such exchanges between the Government and interested parties from the earliest identification of a requirement through receipt of proposals.

Government officials are encouraged to engage in more frequent information exchanges with vendors, particularly during the pre-solicitation phase so long as the sensitive or proprietary information is protected on behalf of the government and vendors alike. Exchanges can be very beneficial and result in: (a) greater clarity of BES 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 available to BES; (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, to name a few.

Proper communication exchanges with vendors can add significant value to and create efficiencies in: requirements definition, solicitation development, proposal preparation, proposal evaluation, discussions, and contract award processes.

## **1. BES Commitment**

BES is committed to:

- a) Engaging in timely, constructive and professional information exchanges with the vendor community;
- b) Ensuring that small businesses and other businesses alike are included in communications related to BES requirements via BES postings and Vendor Outreach efforts/programs;

- c) Reducing unnecessary barriers to attract new vendors and enhance competition. General examples of barriers to competition in the federal government may include: (i) overly restrictive statements of work (SOW) and/or evaluation criteria and (ii) short proposal response times;
- d) Identifying BES procurement actions, which are likely to involve opportunity for additional communication with industry and publicizing communication engagement opportunities including pre-solicitation and/or pre-proposal conferences; and
- e) Protecting proprietary information contained in offerors' proposals and other information obtained during the source selection process, including preventing inadvertent release through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) process or divulging vendors' confidential information or source selection information to those without a legitimate need-to-know (Procurement Integrity Act, 41 U.S.C. 423; Trade Secrets Act, 18 U.S.C. 1905).

## **2. Senior BES Official Responsible for Promoting Vendor Engagement**

BES PEO handles promotion of vendor engagement and establishing process and policies.

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

BES will continue working collaboratively with industry to increase communication efforts and eliminate unnecessary barriers that otherwise prevent the directorate from engaging in meaningful and responsible dialogue with industry. BES officials are to use sound business judgment and adhere to regulatory and statutory requirements when engaging vendors (Federal Advisory Committee Act, 5 U.S.C. App.2). Communication with a wide and diverse audience, including businesses of all sizes, is often the best overall strategy to ensure fair and equal treatment while disseminating information and sharing ideas to serve mutual interests.

## **4. Vendor Engagement in Agency Acquisitions**

BES vendor exchange process incorporates into its acquisition cycle the opportunity to attract new vendors and ensure adequate competition. Communication method depends on the size or the purpose of the potential contract. It is vital that BES ensure fair and equitable treatment of all vendors.

BES Program Managers will incorporate in their respective acquisition schedules adequate time for vendor industry day(s) specific to the program (e.g. in person or other means), issuance of a Request for Information (RFI) and/or Draft Request for Proposal (DRFP), prospective offeror review and comment, and Program Management Office (PMO) evaluation and disposition of the comments. The RFP may be modified as a result of industry questions and comments provided in response to the RFI, DRFP, industry briefing, or as a result of PMO one-on-one meetings. Any information that is shared in response to exchanges prior to the RFP release will be given to all potential offerors to avoid providing any offeror an unfair advantage (FAR 15.201(f), Competition in Contracting Act, 10 U.S.C 2304).

BES often hosts a conference or site tour (i.e. Vendor Industry Day (VID) or Vendor Exchange Forum (VXF)) to facilitate the early exchange of information with prospective Offerors prior to the release of the RFP. 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.

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

Events to include VIDs, small business outreach sessions, pre-solicitation conferences, RFIs, DRFP question and answer sessions, etc., shall be posted and regularly updated using [www.fbo.gov](http://www.fbo.gov), AFWay, BES Vendor Communication website, <http://www.gunter.af.mil/events/businessandenterprisesystems/index.asp>, and Small Business Office website found at: <http://www.gunter.af.mil/units/smallbusinessprograms/index.asp>.

BES VID is held at least annually during the spring and features acquisition briefings on current and future BES opportunities. Individual program VIDs will be held throughout the year.

BES VXF is held at least annually with industry partners for business awareness, education, and policy updates. Industry partners have the opportunity to discuss problems and recommendations. This forum is in place to increase cross communication between BES leadership, BES PMOs, and industry partners regarding BES opportunities as well as to find resolution to IT challenges that both government and industry face.

## **6. Government and Vendor Roles and Responsibilities**

- a) Program Manager (PM): Responsible for and authorized to accomplish program objectives for development, production, and sustainment to meet the users' operational needs.
- b) Contracting Officer (CO): Authorized to enter into, administer, and/or terminate contracts and make related determinations and findings in support of the procurement. The CO is the Vendor's primary point of contact for all issues relating to specific contractual actions.
- c) Judge Advocate (JA): Provides advice on acquisition policy and contracting procedure, participates in planning, source selection, and execution and administration of programs, and provides oversight of contract-related litigation. The JA provides guidance and opinions to BES officials to ensure the proper conduct of interactions with industry.
- d) Office of Small Business Programs (OSBP): Facilitates, counsels, and mentors various types of small businesses on acquisition procedures; proposed acquisitions, and preparation of proposals via small business outreach conferences and meetings. This

support provides businesses an understanding of BES business practices and procedures and helps increase small businesses as prime contractors as well as subcontractors.

- e) Participating Vendors: Perform due diligence in advance of exchange and provide focused, salient and value added information for the requirement that is the subject matter of the exchange.

## **7. Training for Government Employees and Awareness of Upcoming Efforts for Contractors**

Training efforts for government employees will include the dissemination of internal guidance and feedback to ensure effective use of communication approaches with the vendor community.

Information to facilitate awareness for vendors will include postings on the Federal Business Opportunities website (<https://www.fbo.gov/>), BES websites, emails, or face-to-face meetings.

## **8. Links to Existing Policies and Guidance**

Policy and guidance along with this communication plan will be posted on BES Vendor Communication website, <http://www.gunter.af.mil/events/businessandenterprisesystems/index.asp>.

## **9. Plans to follow up with Government Employees and Industry Representatives within six months of posting the Vendor Communication Plan.**

BES will conduct a sample survey within six months of the posting of this plan with stakeholders to gauge the overall effectiveness of outreach efforts. Revisions to this plan will be made as necessary with continuous surveys.