

# **Department of Treasury**

## **Vendor Outreach and Communication Plan**

February 10, 2020

## Treasury Vendor Outreach and Communication Plan

Access to current market information is critical for Treasury program managers as they define requirements and develop acquisition strategies. Treasury encourages productive interactions between federal agencies and our industry partners to ensure a solid understanding of the marketplace and to negotiate and award contracts for effective solutions at reasonable prices. Early, frequent, and constructive engagement with industry is a fundamental practice when planning Treasury's high impact acquisitions. Conversely, inadequate industry engagement in the acquisition planning process can impact the clarity of Treasury's needs and the effectiveness of Treasury's contracts. Artificial barriers to engagement often stem from an abbreviated planning horizon or from misconceptions among members of the acquisition community about appropriate vendor communications.

This plan identifies the steps Treasury has taken and will continue to take to reduce any unnecessary barriers to vendor engagement, publicize opportunities for Treasury to communicate with industry, and prioritize engagement opportunities for Treasury's high impact acquisitions. Implementation of this plan will enhance communication with and engagement of industry, including small businesses and businesses not previously engaged with Treasury contracts, through a campaign to optimize acquisition planning, community awareness, and vendor outreach. Treasury is committed to the principles of openness and fairness and will work together with our industry partners to increase the transparency of the acquisition process while protecting non-public information. By enhancing vendor communication and engagement, and increasing the level of involvement of small and emerging businesses in Treasury contracts, this plan is intended to promote efficient and effective Treasury operations and reinforce public trust.

### *Transparency*

Transparency in Treasury's acquisition process serves to inform our industry partners, including those who have yet to engage in Treasury business, about our current and emerging needs. Information regarding Treasury contracts are published through the Federal Procurement Data System (FPDS) at: [www.fpds.gov](http://www.fpds.gov) and associated web sites. Treasury posts contract opportunities and requests for information related to contract requirements on the interactive Federal Business Opportunities page at: [www.fbo.gov](http://www.fbo.gov). In addition, the department publishes an annual forecast of planned acquisitions on [www.treasury.gov](http://www.treasury.gov).

Treasury is committed to adopt new and existing technologies to publish timely and meaningful information online, and to continually seek feedback regarding information of value to our strategic partners. During the recent financial crisis, in response to public concern for the oversight and management of Troubled Asset Relief Fund (TARP) contracts, Treasury took the extraordinary step of publishing all contracts and financial agency agreements, along with key information about these contracts, on the internet at: <http://www.treasury.gov/initiatives/financial-stability/procurement/>. Treasury invested in the rapid development of new technology applications and business processes to enable the collection, publication, and maintenance of contract information for public release under the TARP program. Treasury drew important lessons from that experience and plans to extend key aspects across the department.

### *Protection of non-public information*

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Treasury is committed to protect non-public information, including vendors' confidential information and the agency's source selection information. Two statutory principles limit government communications with industry in the acquisition cycle: preventing unfair competitive advantage through selective release of source selection information and preventing competitive harm to a firm through release of its proprietary information. Treasury takes these obligations seriously, and will use all available means to protect non-public information from unauthorized disclosure. For example, the publication of TARP contracts presented a risk of disclosure of non-public information. To insure such disclosure did not occur, Treasury incorporated a contract clause affording contractors the opportunity to review their contracts and propose redactions of non-public information prior to publication on the Treasury website. The contracts and proposed redactions were reviewed under the standards of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to ensure appropriate information was published.

### *Effective Vendor Engagement*

Collaborative Treasury-vendor engagement is crucial to enhance the effectiveness and quality of Treasury acquisition decisions. Technical expertise is dispersed across industry. Treasury officials need access to that expertise to make informed decisions. Among several contributing factors, limiting access to industry knowledge and expertise can result in contracts that are difficult to manage due to poorly-defined requirements. Enhanced communications between Government and industry are vital to define and convey requirements clearly and realistically within the market environment, appropriately assess and assign risk for the effort, and set respective cost, schedule, and performance expectations to ensure effective contract management.

The Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) authorizes a broad range of options for vendor communication throughout the acquisition process. Awareness of these options is all too often limited to a relatively small cadre of staff within procurement offices. Treasury has taken direct measures to engage the broader acquisition community, comprised of program managers and executives in addition to the formal procurement staff, to increase awareness of available avenues to best engage the private sector. This increased awareness enables the Treasury acquisition community and industry to optimize interactions, making the best use of available time and resources. Towards this end the department has developed a consolidated communication roster to regularly communicate acquisition-related issues and initiatives, and to build a sense of common cause and community. Treasury is committed to an active effort to educate and refresh the acquisition community regarding effective means of vendor engagement. This education campaign will enhance information exchange within the department and with the private sector to improve the quality and cost effectiveness of Treasury-acquired products and services.

Technology has enhanced the ability of Treasury contracting and program staff to engage industry in our acquisition process. Leveraging the use of industry association contact lists such as the National Association of Minority and Women Owned Law Firms (NAMWOLF) enabled Treasury to reach hundreds of firms previously not involved in government procurement, resulting in a healthy competition for the provision of legal services to Treasury. New agencies created within or temporarily supported by Treasury, such as the Consumer Finance Protection

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Bureau, have further leveraged internet communication platforms such as Twitter and LinkedIn to expand industry outreach and communication. Treasury is drawing on the creative energies generated through these experiences to identify and adapt effective innovative approaches to vendor engagement across the department.

### *Small and emerging business outreach*

Small businesses drive innovation throughout the economy. Treasury recognizes the reluctance of small and emerging vendors to engage due to the perceived complexities and cost of entry, and the need to overcome this reluctance to derive the best value from our acquisition portfolio. Unlike larger, more established firms, new entrants have limited stake in current systems and are more likely to produce the creative solutions needed for some of Treasury's most intractable problems.

The department has implemented an aggressive small business outreach program to bring new and emerging businesses to the table with Treasury. Treasury's Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) hosts monthly vendor outreach sessions to give small businesses an opportunity to meet with the respective small business specialist from each bureau and make contact with Treasury program offices with requirements related to their line of business. Information about these sessions is posted on our website at [www.treasury.gov/osdbu](http://www.treasury.gov/osdbu). The website also contains a wealth of useful information, including a step-by-step guide on "How to do Business with Treasury", our annual procurement forecast, a list of the small business specialists assigned to each Treasury bureau, and general information about the responsibilities of each bureau. The Treasury OSDBU maintains a list of small businesses interested in contracting with Treasury, and firms are encouraged to communicate their capabilities and interest by e-mail at: [TreasuryOSDBU@do.treas.gov](mailto:TreasuryOSDBU@do.treas.gov).

The Department of Treasury is committed to early, frequent, and constructive communication with our industry partners, including small businesses and those who have not previously engaged in Treasury contracts. Treasury plans to extend the techniques and tools effectively used to engage the small business community to the broader industry audience to facilitate the engagement of emerging firms offering innovative and niche commercial solutions to achieve Treasury objectives.

### *Treasury Action Plan*

To fulfill these commitments, Treasury reviews vendor engagement strategy as part of acquisition planning for the department's high impact acquisitions; assigned as ombudsman the Director of Acquisition Management responsible for the department's vendor engagement strategy; and is committed to improve the quality and accessibility of acquisition tools and information, leveraging traditional communication forums through the use of emerging social media.

Treasury high impact acquisitions include all planned or existing procurement actions that: have an estimated value greater than ten million dollars; support OMB E300 major investments; constitute competitive Sourcing actions under OMB Circular A-76; are controversial or otherwise sensitive such that they warrant the attention of the Senior Procurement Executive; or

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obligate American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 funds. Treasury conducts strategic review boards of targeted high impact acquisitions to ensure that acquisition planning includes adequate and appropriate industry outreach and communications consistent with law, regulation, and Treasury policy. The strategic review boards assess vendor engagement strategies to ensure optimal vendor engagement, ensure that sufficient time is allocated for meaningful communications prior to proposal submission, and meaningful discussions following receipt of vendor proposals.

Treasury created the position of Director, Acquisition Management to build a more cohesive acquisition community, increase the transparency of information regarding Treasury acquisition, and ensure high-impact acquisition strategies and contract performance align with Treasury objectives. The Director, Acquisition Management serves as the ombudsman for industry communications for the Treasury. Firms interested in doing business may submit inquiries, issues, or capabilities statements to the Office of the Procurement Executive at [acquisition@treasury.gov](mailto:acquisition@treasury.gov).

### *Training and awareness efforts for employees*

Treasury engages acquisition community members in targeted outreach and training events that include informational email and other communications, acquisition discussion forums, and formal course offerings related to vendor outreach and the conduct of market research. The department uses web-enabled technologies such as net meeting/WebEx, SharePoint, and other collaborative technologies to ensure a broad dissemination of information and collective engagement. The departmental offices host regular Contracting Officer Technical Representative (COTR) discussion boards and Acquisition Information Sharing Session to provide updates to policies and procedures, provide "How To" workshops on all aspects of the acquisition process and allow COTR's and program managers to ask questions and obtain feedback from colleagues around the department.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) hosts the Treasury Acquisition Institute (TAI) that provides ongoing training and development for the Department of the Treasury procurement and acquisition professionals. The TAI website at <http://www.irs.gov/opportunities/procurement/article/0,,id=125419,00.html> provides a wealth of information about issues and initiatives of interest to the federal acquisition community, and enables Treasury employees to review course offerings and register for courses. TAI delivers courses in-person and is expanding its use of the Saba Classroom feature in 2011 to enable 2-way video and full classroom participation by remote students. Saba Centra allows employees to create a virtual environment for delivering meetings, conferences and classes using different event types such as eMeeting, Conference and Symposium. This type of e-Learning product allows individuals from different locations to attend events from their offices or homes. Large groups of people can interact and learn real-time using Centra.

The Treasury Enterprise Content Management (ECM) is a set of web-based tools for collaboration and management of documents and data across Treasury utilizing multiple applications within the SharePoint 2010 Enterprise. ECM currently provides solutions for electronic collaboration, records management, correspondence tracking, evidence management, FOIA, and case management. Within ECM, the Treasury Acquisition environment located at:

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<http://thegreen.treas.gov/do/ope> incorporates wikis, document libraries, managed data, and integrated business services to both deliver and provide a collaborative workspace to further develop, refine and improve information of interest to the Treasury acquisition community. Treasury will continue to build-upon these successes to foster the sharing of information and ideas across the department.

### *Training and awareness efforts for industry*

Treasury will continue to engage interested firms through general and targeted outreach events. General outreach includes participation in government-wide outreach events such as the GSA Expo, FOSE, and industry association sponsored events. Communications at such events include general discussions on business opportunities at Treasury and information on how to contact the right Treasury program and procurement officials. Treasury will also continue to engage in targeted outreach activities, including hosting monthly vendor outreach sessions, solicitation-specific industry days, and pre-solicitation/pre-proposal conferences. Treasury is currently updating its web presence related to contracts and acquisition, and is implementing key enhancements highlighted throughout this plan through the Treasury website.

### *Implementation and Follow-up*

Treasury plans to reach out to government and industry representatives to refine and improve Treasury-industry communications. Follow-up may include surveys of Treasury acquisition community members assessing results of training and outreach activities, post-award surveys of contracting officers, program managers, and offerors on high impact acquisitions to assess the effectiveness of procurement-specific communications, focus group meetings to gather general feedback and recommendations for improvement, and similar activities as deemed appropriate by the implementation team.

### *Publication*

The final Vendor Outreach and Communication Plan will be published on Treasury's public-facing website. Instructional material for program and procurement staff will be posted to the Department-wide portal to highlight and expand on best practices in this area. Treasury Acquisition policies can be found on the Treasury website at: <http://www.treasury.gov/about/organizational-structure/offices/Mgt/Pages/ProcurementPolicy-Regulations.aspx>.

### *Attachments:*

Appendix A: Acquisition Community Members' Roles and Responsibilities  
Appendix B: Vendor Outreach and Communication instructional materials

The following appendices are included for purposes of review only – not included in actual plan

Appendix C: Treasury Procurement public-facing communication architecture  
Appendix D: Vendor Outreach and Communication Review Comments

## Appendix A: Acquisition Community Members' Roles and Responsibilities

Contracting Officer (CO) – Supports the program manager in the development of the acquisition plan. Provides guidance on effective vendor engagement strategies. Establishes and maintains the ground rules for information sharing and ensures high integrity and fairness during all phases of the acquisition process. Manages publication of acquisition information, vendor engagement events, and communications between potential contractors and the government related to a requirement from release of the solicitation until contract award.

Contracting Officer Technical Representative (COTR) – Often involved in early market research, contractor communications, defining requirements and supporting a sound acquisition strategy. Plans and coordinates communication exchange activities with the contracting officer. Attends vendor communication meetings to better understand industry capabilities and requirements in order to enhance the Government's requirements. Monitors contractor performance to ensure products and services conform to contract requirements. Provides technical direction to and communicates with contractors following contract award. Assesses and reports on contractor performance to the Contracting Officer and other Department officials as requested. COTRs are critical members of the acquisition team and are required to certify under the Federal Acquisition Certification for Contracting Officers Technical Representatives program.

Director of Acquisition Management – Oversees vendor engagement and related acquisition review programs to ensure Treasury objectives are addressed and commitments are met. Serves as the ombudsman for department-industry communication.

General Counsel / Ethics Attorney – Advises agency officials on issues related to contract law and interactions with industry. Provides periodic training on Procurement Integrity Act (PIA). Provides advice on the propriety of individual vendor contacts and potential conflicts of interest in relation to the PIA and other statutes.

Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) – Sets the Department of the Treasury socio-economic goals in coordination with the Small Business Administration. Conducts small business outreach conferences and meetings to assist businesses in understanding agency business practices and procedures and small business contracting opportunities. Reviews acquisition plans for adequate small business participation. Supports and provides leadership to department small business specialists.

Program/Project Manager – Initiates new projects or implements changes to an on-going project; maintains currency of market intelligence, conducts market research, and identifies known sources; develops the requirements documentation and other artifacts of the acquisition package; obtains program office approval; may lead Source Selection Evaluation Board and support, cost analyses and negotiations; and monitors contractor performance for achievement of program objectives. Uses information gained through the vendor engagement process to enhance the quality of agency requirements and budget estimates. The Program/Project Manager may also serve as the COTR during contract performance. Program/Project Managers, as critical members of the acquisition team, are encouraged and in many cases required to certify under the Federal Acquisition Certification for Program and Project Managers.

## Appendix A: Acquisition Community Members' Roles and Responsibilities

Small Business Specialist: Coordinates and conducts small business outreach events and initiatives for their bureau and in support of Departmental outreach efforts. Reviews acquisitions for adequate small business participation. Supports acquisition staff in the identification of qualified small businesses to support individual requirements.

## Appendix B: Vendor Outreach and Communication instructional materials

Communication with vendors runs along a continuum from relatively open communication to more formalized, written forms intended to protect proprietary or competition sensitive information from disclosure. Exchanges of information among all interested parties are encouraged to improve the understanding of Government requirements and industry capabilities.

An early exchange of information among industry and government participants in the acquisition process can help identify and resolve concerns regarding the acquisition strategy, including proposed contract type, terms and conditions, and acquisition planning schedules; the feasibility of the requirement, including performance requirements, statements of work, and data requirements; the suitability of the proposal instructions and evaluation criteria, including the approach for assessing past performance information; the availability of reference documents; and any other industry concerns or questions.

We are all buyers. We go to the grocery store for food, the electronics store for televisions, the car dealership for our automobiles, and so on. As private buyers we usually tend to perform some sort of market research for our personal purchases. For example, when shopping for food we may compare prices at different markets, we may consider sales, coupons, or rebates, or comparing the price of similar items against our personal preferences. We normally do these things in all purchases we make, either consciously or subconsciously. Market research is an important aspect of government-industry communications related to acquisition. The government relies on market research to gain a deeper understanding of the state and trend of the market and to assess the competitive environment in which goods are produced and services provided. While in the private sector this tends to be focused on the sell-side of operations in relation to a marketing plan, within the Government it involves gaining intelligence surrounding the conditions under which something can be purchased on the market. Are there seasonal price trends? Are there quantity breaks at which discount pricing will apply? What is the demand within or across federal agencies? What are our opportunities to increase leverage to get the best product or performance for our budget?

Market research involves general surveillance and targeted investigation. The former constitutes the activities government program managers undertake to maintain a currency of knowledge about their program or area of expertise, and is an effective tool to assist agency management in its strategic planning. Market surveillance is conducted by program/project managers and COTRs to incorporate existing and emerging product and market advances into their programs. In our daily work we read trade journals, join professional associations, monitor on-line social networking sites, and generally keep in touch with our colleagues to learn what is going on in our field. These types of activities represent general market surveillance.

Targeted investigation is required in response to particular need to gather information to help us move out smartly. Targeted investigation may involve a formal request for information (RFI) or a notice seeking potential suppliers or service providers (Sources Sought). RFI/Sources Sought notices, along with associated information about the specific requirement, are published on the Federal Business Opportunities website at: [www.fbo.gov](http://www.fbo.gov). Treasury program staff is encouraged to publish as available information about their requirement as early as practicable to ensure that any vendor interested in doing business with the department has the opportunity to engage and to foster a robust discussion with

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interested vendors to ensure the program obtains the products or services best able to fulfill the requirement.

The use of federal funds carries additional obligations to help support national socioeconomic programs such as those identified in the Small Business Act and other federal programs and initiatives. A number of tools are available to help with a targeted investigation, including:

- Central Contract Registry Dynamic Small Business Search – <https://www.bpn.gov/ccr/>
- Federal Procurement Data System – <https://www.fpds.gov>
- Federal Business Opportunities Page – <https://www.fbo.gov>
- GSA Advantage - [www.gsaadvantage.gov](http://www.gsaadvantage.gov)

Your procurement and small business team members will be familiar with these tools and can help you most effectively engage the vendor community.

The Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), as well as good business practices, requires the conduct of on-going market research of the industries that provide products and services that support Department of Treasury programs. The Acquisition Team should use market research information to:

- Refine a requirement to maximize the benefit of competitive market forces;
- Identify commercial products and services that may satisfy the agency's needs
- Establish the most suitable approach to acquiring and managing products and services from the best available source(s);
- Optimize achievement of federal and Department policies and initiatives;
- Reduce acquisition costs through negotiation of fair and reasonable prices; and
- Mitigate risks of doing business for the Government and the contractor.

Questions answered in earlier phases of an acquisition can save significant time and frustration during the evaluation phase when the communication process becomes more formal and controlled. General information about agency mission needs and future requirements may be disclosed at any time. After release of the solicitation, the contracting officer must be the focal point of any exchange with potential offerors. When specific information about a proposed acquisition necessary for the preparation of proposals is disclosed to one or more potential offerors, that information must be made publically available to all interested offerors to avoid giving any one offeror an unfair competitive advantage. However, information must not be disclosed if doing so would reveal a potential offeror's confidential business strategy.

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### Considerations in targeted market research

1. Determine if commercial products or services are available to meet the Government's needs or could be modified to the Government's needs.
2. Identify the capabilities of businesses in the market place, specifically including the capabilities of small businesses. The Small Business Administration (SBA), and US Treasury Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) are available to assist in identifying qualified small business concerns.
3. Search the General Service Administration (GSA) website at [www.gsaadvantage.gov](http://www.gsaadvantage.gov) to identify potential qualified sources on GSA schedules for the products or services required.
4. Review Bureau Contractor Capabilities Databases to identify potential sources who have expressed interest in working with your Bureau and/or the Department.
5. Employ other techniques as appropriate to the particular circumstances such as:
  - a. Contact subject matter experts and other federal agencies to determine how they acquired similar products or services.
  - b. Review trade periodicals, professional journals, and other sources of information regarding the qualifications of businesses within the business sector.
  - c. Attend trade shows, professional association meetings or small businesses conferences.
  - d. Contact your procurement office to publish a Request for Information (RFI) via [www.FedBizOpps.gov](http://www.FedBizOpps.gov) to receive written capabilities statements or statements of interest in the procurement. Consider posting a link to the RFI on an industry or association website or other social media or distribute through association mailing list(s). You may provide a questionnaire or draft documents such as a draft Statement of Work or a draft Concept of Operations document for review and comment.
  - e. Contact your procurement office to publish a Sources Sought Notice on [www.FedBizOpps.gov](http://www.FedBizOpps.gov) requesting interested vendors to describe their capabilities, similar projects they have conducted as a prime or subcontractor, socioeconomic status, available GSA schedules, etc.
  - f. Host an industry conference to provide contractor representatives information about the agency's needs or about a specific requirement. These conferences could be for a targeted market such as small businesses or to highlight a specific program requirement. Contact your procurement office for assistance with industry conferences.
  - g. Coordinate with your contracting officer to host a pre-solicitation or pre-proposal conference to promote an opportunity for exchange of information with and among

## Appendix B: Vendor Outreach and Communication instructional materials

industry participants prior to proposal submission. You may request industry comment on all or portion of a solicitation including pricing considerations, evaluation criteria, and alternative approaches.

- h. Conduct one-on-one meetings with interested/qualified firms or view demonstrations of offerors' capabilities. Any meetings that are substantially involved with potential contract terms and conditions should include the contracting officer.
  - i. Coordinate with your procurement office to host interested vendors on a site visit.
6. Document your research at a level of detail appropriate to the size and complexity of the acquisition in a market research report that identifies:
- a. The individuals participating in the market research
  - b. The dates that the research was conducted
  - c. The agencies, associations, firms, and individuals contacted
  - d. The results of the market research to include:
    - i. Whether adequate competition can be obtained under existing Treasury or Government-wide contracts, a GSA schedule contract, or on the open market and
    - ii. Whether qualified small businesses can provide the products or services; or if not whether small business subcontracting opportunities are available

### Considerations in transparency and preservation of confidential information

The following information is intended to provide a framework for appropriate communications with industry. This information is intended to support the engagement efforts of contracting and program staff to ensure that communications with industry are appropriate and in accordance with applicable federal laws and regulations. Prior to engaging industry, program staff should consider the prohibitions and restrictions that may apply to the situation, including restrictions contained in the Federal Acquisition Regulation and other laws and regulations such as the procurement integrity act and the freedom of information act. Contact a contracting officer or counsel for guidance if unsure about an appropriate response to a specific request for information or attendance at a meeting.

#### *Public Information:*

Program staff may share publically available information with industry. The following types of information are publicly available and are not considered confidential:

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- Information concerning the identity and scope of work of other Government contracts;
- Information that the contractor has previously disclosed to the public;
- Information reproduced from public documents, such as requests for information, sources sought notices, requests for proposal, or other publically available documents or publications; and
- information concerning the identity of the incumbent contractor and the aggregate cost for the Government contract, as such information is posted on the federal procurement data system.

### *Sensitive or Proprietary Information:*

The following types of information must be treated as confidential, assuming the information was not made public by the Government and disclosure is not otherwise required by law, statute or regulation:

- Information that would disclose a firm's approach to performing contract work;
- Information that would disclose a firm's plan to manage a contract, including subcontracting;
- information concerning a firm's relevant experience and expertise, except for general information regarding the firm's Government-sponsored contracts, grants or agreements that is public information;
- Information concerning the identities or qualifications of specific employees, consultants, subcontractors, and subcontractor employees that a firm proposes to use in performing the contract work;
- Information concerning a firm's proprietary processes, devices, software, organization of reports, analyses, etc.;
- Information concerning a firm's accounting methods or practices; and
- Information that would disclose a firm's labor rates, salaries, overhead costs, general and administrative costs, fee or profit policies, and amounts (unless otherwise publically available such as on a GSA Schedule or other publically-available contract).