**U.S. Small Business Administration**

**Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) Acquisitions Division**

**Vendor Communication Plan**

The Small Business Administration’s (SBA) Vendor Communication Plan (VCP) is a reference to provide clear and consistent direction to our workforce when communicating with our industry partners. This VCP is intended to serve as a high-level plan and to be general in nature. The SBA will continue to work with the Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) in the development of best practices, training opportunities, and other communication avenues that may present themselves.

# Statement of Commitment:

SBA is committed to communicating early, frequently, and constructively with industry and in particular, small businesses. As the agency responsible for tracking and reporting on the Small Business Utilization Goals for federal contracting, SBA has a keen interest in enhancing communication and developing the pool of existing and potential government vendors. The agency is always looking for new ways to identify opportunities for promoting our mission. In doing so, SBA remains committed to protecting non-public and confidential information gathered, generated, or acquired during the acquisition process.

# Senior Agency Officials Responsible for Promoting Vendor Engagement:

SBA’s Chief of the Contracting Office (COCO) is ultimately responsible for vendor engagement and is assisted by the agency’s Senior Procurement Executive (SPE) and other senior agency stakeholders.

# Efforts to Reduce Barriers and Promote Vendor Engagement:

The Acquisition Division maintains an on-going training program for Agency personnel. This includes both specialized topics for the operational contracting workforces as well as the non-acquisition personnel who make up the overall acquisition team. Instruction has been and will continue to be provided as to how and when to conduct market research and engagement, what constitutes market research and engagement, as well as clarification as to what topics are appropriate in communicating with prospective vendors. Information, training materials and guidance is continually being developed and made available to all Agency personnel.

# Criteria for Vendor Engagement in Large, Complex Acquisitions:

SBA engages in some unique endeavors such as disaster response, small business loans and associated services, and special research topics are areas where the Agency could benefit from industry outreach. Also, all long-standing awards which have not seen extensive competition should be considered for early outreach. Understanding that the planning and execution of an acquisition can cross fiscal years, it is optimal to begin outreach early and even in the idea stage of a program/project lifecycle. Agency Offices should identify potential candidates for outreach on their FY 2020 and future AAS’s, and then work closely with the Acquisition Division on an outreach strategy. These strategies can include but are not limited to Request for Information/Sources Sought (RFI/SS), scheduled and advertised forums to address a particular program challenge, as well as generating a public discussion on the SBA public website.

In FY 2020 and forward, the Acquisition Division will continue to work with its Agency partners to further refine Procurement Administrative Lead Times (PALTs). Current plans do not include time for pre-award discussions or conferences. That time would need to be accounted for and included in any developed milestones. For the identified, more complex or unique projects Agency partners should work with the assigned Contracting Officer to plan for extended lead times for discussion and information exchange.

# Improved Publication of Engagement Events:

SBA routinely advertises, promotes and engages in events such as small business outreach in regards to our mission of promoting small businesses and small business utilization. In discharging these responsibilities Agency personnel should be attuned to directing potential vendors to the internal needs of the Agency. Most Government-wide outreach events provide opportunity for vendor/Government engagement and these opportunities can be used to facilitate the internal needs of the Agency. Publication of various engagement events and internal Agency needs are currently posted and updated on the following websites:

* + Federal Business Opportunities (https://beta.sam.gov/)
  + Grants.gov ([http://www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov/))
  + The Federal Register (https://www.federalregister.gov/)
  + SBA external webpage (www.sba.gov)

Examples of previous and ongoing outreach/exchanges include: annual agency co-sponsored Small Business functions focusing on small business accomplishments, including disaster recovery, exporting, mentor/protégé, procurement and entrepreneurial success. During such events attendees had the unique opportunity to participate in meetings with corporate and Federal buyers who had contracts to be filled by small businesses; along with OMB and the Department of Commerce developed the Interagency Task Force on Federal Contracting Opportunities for Small Businesses; and participation in conferences such as the OSDBU Procurement Conference, Small Business Week Conference, National Ombudsman Meetings and Conferences, and the Annual National Veteran Small Business Conference and Expo and the Minority Enterprise Development Conference.

# Roles and Responsibilities:

As per Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) Subpart 1.602-2 – Responsibilities: Contracting officers are responsible for ensuring performance of all necessary actions for effective contracting, ensuring compliance with the terms of the contract, and safeguarding the interests of the United States in its contractual relationships. In order to perform these responsibilities, Contracting Officers should be allowed wide latitude to exercise business judgment.

Contracting Officers shall:

1. ensure that the requirements of [1.602-1](http://farsite.hill.af.mil/reghtml/regs/far2afmcfars/fardfars/far/01.htm#P800_40045)(b) have been met, and that sufficient funds are available for obligation;
2. ensure that contractors receive impartial, fair, and equitable treatment; and
3. request and consider the advice of specialists in audit, law, engineering, information security, transportation, and other fields, as appropriate.

As can be developed, more definitive guidance will be generated, published and briefed. From an overarching perspective and particular to vendor communications:

* + Senior Procurement Executive (SPE) – Responsible for developing overall policy, procedure and guidance regarding outreach parameters and objectives.
  + Contracting Officers (CO) – Advise and assist in the execution of the policy, procedure and/or guidance, in particular they advise non-acquisition staff regarding parameters for

engagements and from Program/Project Manger or Contracting Officer Representative (COR) provided data/information, prepare and publish outreach information and depending on medium used for outreach, consolidate and distribute information received. Contracting Officers serve as the source selection authority when awarding contracts and facilitate most communication engagement activities. CO’s use information gained through the vendor communication exchange process to plan acquisition methodology including contract type, level of small business participation, and appropriateness of multiple awards, payment structure, and evaluation criteria. CO’s generally advise other members of the acquisition team on parameters of vendor exchanges.

* + Program Managers and CORs – Develop objectives and topics for outreach as well as plan exchanges into published PALTs.
  + Industry Liaison – Small Business Specialist - The role of the Industry Liaison is to serve as an entry point to SBA stakeholders and contractors assisting to connect, engage, and equip entities that want to conduct business with the Government and specifically SBA. The SBA Headquarters Small Business Specialist (HQSBS) shall function as the Industry Liaison concerning matters of acquisitions coordination with industry. The Industry Liaison will promote timely responses to general vendor requests where appropriate, including from new entrants and small businesses; assist technical and acquisition personnel to develop strategies for engaging potential vendors that can provide the capabilities necessary to achieve SBA's mission. Vendor Capability Statements can be emailed to: [IndustryLiaison@sba.gov](mailto:IndustryLiaison@sba.gov).
  + General Counsel’s Office and Ethics Officers – Advise and assist with the development of policy, procedure and guidance to assist the acquisition department fulfill its mission effectively. These offices provide guidance and opinions to agency officials to ensure the proper conduct of interactions with industry.
  + OSDBU and Office of Government Contracting and Business Development- Assist in promoting and conducting outreach, particularly to small businesses. Conducts small business outreach conferences and meetings to assist businesses in understanding agency business practices and procedures and small business contracting opportunities.

# Training and Awareness for Employees and Contractors:

SBA is firmly committed to providing adequate training to the agency’s employees and contractor augmentation staff. The SBA OCFO office does not have a Director of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) however, training and guidance will be provided to acquisition personnel concerning required small business acquisitions practices, small business alerts, industry correspondence, and updates as they become available. In FY 2020, transition of the operational Acquisition staff will continue to conduct recurring training for Program/Project Mangers, CORs and all persons involved with acquiring goods and/or services for the Agency.

Additionally, SBA’s office of Government Contracting and Business Development (GCBD) is in constant contact with private small businesses nationwide to ensure access to federal contracts. GCBD coordinates the certification piece of major small business programs such as 8(a) and HUBZone, these programs provide the small business community with critical information and priority access to federal contracting dollars.

# Links to Existing Policies:

* SBA’s Contracting Webpage

<http://www.sba.gov/category/navigation-structure/contracting>

This website has additional information on certification under specific small business programs and general information on SBA’s procurements.

* Strategic Plan

<https://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/2018-06/SBA_FY_2018-2022_Strategic_Plan.pdf>

This document outlines the agency’s strategic goals and objectives, including the role played by SBA’s acquisition division.

* Federal Acquisition Regulations

<https://www.acquisition.gov/content/regulations>

A database of all FAR regulations is available online at the above address.

# Follow-up Plans to Refine and Improve Vendor Communication:

SBA will re-visit this Vendor Communication Plan six (6) month after it is posted to gauge its effectiveness on reaching stakeholders, including COs, Contract Specialists, CORs/POs and vendors. SBA will be able to better identify the overall effectiveness of outreach efforts at that time. Revisions to this VCP will be made as necessary.