

BettergovernmentIT

Summary Report

3/21/2011



This report contains a summary of the dialogue ACT-IAC hosted from February 7 -28, 2011 on improving the federal acquisition process. The dialogue was made publicly available to both industry and government.

Overview

The Obama Administration has embarked upon a 25 point plan to improve the management of Federal IT resources. A key part of this initiative is directed at improving collaboration between government and industry prior to – and throughout – the IT acquisition process. Towards this end, OFPP Administrator Dan Gordon released a memo of February 2, 2011, entitled "Myth-Busting: Addressing Misconceptions to Improve Communication with Industry during the Acquisition Process." At the request of OMB, ACT-IAC hosted an online, moderated dialogue to engage the government IT community in this initiative to improve communications between government and industry. To host this dialogue, ACT-IAC created a dedicated website at www.bettergovernmentit.org with links from the CIO Council website and the ACT-IAC website.

This dialogue ran from February 7 – 28 and was promoted to the entire government IT community. Promotional vehicles included several mailings to the ACT-IAC membership, media coverage through Federal News Radio and participation in community-wide events such as the February AFFIRM luncheon. The ACT-IAC Executive Director also participated in a session on Mythbusters at the recent IRMCO conference. (Note: although the official dialogue has concluded, comments are still being accepted.)

This paper summarizes some of the input from this information gathering initiative and provides some thoughts on next steps.

The dialogue hosted by ACT-IAC had four questions:

1. Please identify "myths" that government acquisition professionals may hold that inhibit their ability to communicate with industry during the IT acquisition process.
2. Please identify "myths" that industry may hold that inhibit their ability to communicate with the government during the IT acquisition process.
3. What are major impediments to improving government and industry's ability to communicate with each other? If you identify rules or regulations, please be as specific as possible.
4. Provide examples of Federal IT acquisitions that included good communication practices - by either government or industry - that resulted in better outcomes and better decisions. Explain what the practice or process was and why it was valuable.

Volunteers from ACT-IAC monitored the dialogue to ensure that the comments were relevant and appropriate. During the period from Feb 15 until Feb 28, the following statistics were recorded.

Total Visits (Since 2/15/11)	343 (257 Unique)
Total Ideas (Myths) Posted	43
Total Users Registered	62
Total Votes Cast	306
Total Comments	34

Overall BetterGovernmentIT Top Comments/Votes

Participants in the dialogue were able to add issues, comment on issues raised by other respondents and rank issues in terms of importance/agreement. Provided below are the five comments that received the most votes. Some thoughts on each comment are provided. A summary of all the comments is provided as an attachment to this document.

#1
Section: Government Communication Myths
Votes: 16
Myth: <i>Contractors are the enemy</i> (by Old Hand: lesa.scott@osd.mil)
Comments: -"Wow, it's back to the 80's. What did Yogi Berra once say "deja vu all over again." For years government has talked about establishing partnerships. Frankly, this usually is mentioned when the government agency wants the contractor to cut costs or provide something for free or on the cheap!! To be positive, however, some agencies who have acquisition thought-leaders actually embrace this concept of partnership to the benefit of the agency, industry and the taxpayer. Some unfortunately do not and believe that an "arms length" relationship is a one-way relationship. Not true. Government and industry can establish good, mutually beneficial working relationships. The challenge is like forming and maintaining any meaningful relationship, it takes time, willingness, dedicated effort and attention." (by Peter Tuttle: Petert@distributedinc.com)
-"The relationship between a federal contractor and the government should be viewed as a partnership. If both parties enter into the relationship with this attitude, it will be to the benefit of both sides." (by Tom Suder: tsuder44@gmail.com)
-"Government and contractors are just people trying to get a job done and, hopefully, do it well. Sadly, some folks do not understand this." (by Old Hand: lesa.scott@osd.mil)

Comments:

This is what the Myth-busters campaign is really all about. Improving communications between government and industry is a herculean task to change a culture, and will not happen overnight.

With the collaborative platform, industry and government have the opportunity to improve vital communications earlier in the acquisition process. Although a procurement and acquisition action may not materialize, it is these exchanges that improve the market research and

requirements development process. Further, it also allows for small businesses to get access and visibility into federal buying centers that they otherwise would not have without significant expenditures in marketing funds, which many small businesses simply do not have. This initiative has a vast opportunity for better communications, and it is this path that must be explored.

In regards to the development of consistent policies for communicating with industry, we agree that each agency should develop a high-level vendor communication plan. The plan should discuss the agency’s strategy for reducing unnecessary barriers, standardize the communication opportunities, prioritize engagement, and develop opportunities for larger participation among the small business community.

#2
Section: Government Communication Myths
Votes: 14
Myth: <i>Our needs are unique. They are not.</i> (by Daniel Turner: daniel.turner@tcg.com)
Comments: None

Comments:

A common issue raised by federal employees is that the mission of government is so unique that commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS) products are simply not a realistic option for performing the various missions across agencies. This myth is false.

The requirements phase identifies the needs and scope of a project, and thus becomes its blueprint. By encouraging more robust and active exchanges with stakeholders, which includes industry, proper requirements can be developed, thus increasing the opportunities for program successes which ultimately break down in the requirements phase.

When both government and contractors can focus on execution of common goals and objectives, based on designed metrics developed early in the program, they lessen the chances of costly change orders and foster better outcomes.

Many in government are concerned that the requirements process for the acquisition of services, the largest category of acquisition, is almost entirely ad hoc. This apparent process is what creates the disconnect of truly developing needs based requirements that allow for COTS usage, or for standard delivery of services that encompass industry best practices, standards, and methodologies.

Best practices on how industry develops requirements has been a focus of recent Government Accountability Office reports and testimony, and a focus area by ACT-IAC in its various activities on fostering government/industry relations. One mutual goal of both ACT-IAC and OMB for this initiative is to re-focus market research and needs identification in the acquisition life-cycle spectrum. With this approach, in addition to continuing efforts of using Requests for Information (RFI), Industry Days, One-on-One vendor sessions, etc., user requirements can be matched with customer needs and available resources. The result is programs that can be designed, delivered, and executed within cost, schedule, and performance goals.

ACT-IAC will continue developing these initiatives to help realize these communications potentials, in addition to offering suggestions through workshops and training to help users communicate and develop the industry best practices on requirements development and stakeholder analysis.

#3
Section: Communication Impediments
Votes: 14
Myth: <i>Eliminate the regulation that allows the protest of any IDIQ task order award in excess of \$10M. This regulation has led to an increase in protests (at least for organizations that routinely procure large dollar value IT services), which has had the unintended consequence of less information exchanges between the Government and Industry regarding award decisions. For example, the Government is fearful that even the slightest verbal or written feedback / criticism will spark negative reaction (and protests) from industry. (by Anonymous: NA)</i>
Comments: -"I regret that I only have three votes to give." (by Chris Hamm: chris.hamm@gsa.gov)

Comments:

This policy directive actually allowed procurement personnel the flexibility to award larger task order awards, up to \$10 Million, without the fear of protest. However, the greater issue here is the environmental factors that break down communication barriers and prevent the transparency in the contract award process from occurring in the first place.

It is through the Myth-Busters campaign, and the opportunity to actively engage with industry, that government has the best opportunities for success in program development. Although the need for requirements development reform has been discussed, the information that government solicits also has the opportunity for improvement.

Namely, the types of evaluation and selection criteria, and the processes used to award contracts, coupled with poor adherence to process and documentation has been a major factor in increased protest activity. This environment has also been made more difficult over the past

decade as increased contract actions, along with a strained acquisition workforce and tighter budgetary and competitive pressures on industry, have contributed to the growing fear of protests in general.

However, the communications process early in any acquisition activity is critical to ensuring the government adheres to policy, procedures, and allows for innovation and best value for the taxpayer. It is through this lens that ACT-IAC can continue to the dialogue, and help improve communications and lowering the barriers to contract protests.

#4
Section: Industry Communication Myths
Votes: 12
Myth: <i>Many in industry believe the Government does not know what they want, nor that they understand what industry has to offer. Therefore, industry must inform the Government of the right solution and, therefore, does not respond to the requirements put out by the Government, wasting everyone's time.</i> (by ScubaBuddy: Mark.Samblanet@ActiveNetwork.com)
Comments: -"I feel the problem is in the quality of RFP's. They are very difficult to write. Add to that the requirement on the IT program manager to write them as if IT were a firm fixed asset (like you are buying a PC, when you are really buying a complex system of hardware, software and services that is constantly changing over time), because the CO wants a ffp contract." (by Joan Golden: joangolden@ymail.com)
-"I tend to agree with ScubaBuddy's tag line. The government generally knows what it needs, but many times has trouble articulating their requirements in a manner that industry can understand and adequately propose to. We should know by now that composing totally understandable requirements using the written word is very difficult. Arriving at a common understanding therefore (especially of complex requirements) is also pretty difficult. So, what do we do? Well, one suggestion is to make time for the use of BAA, sources sought notices, RFI and draft solicitations. Another suggestion is to make time for industry days and meaningful market research activities. All this adds to the timeline of the procurement process and adds workload to the already over-burdened acquisition staffs, however, it may pay off in the end with less controversial procurements." (by Peter Tuttle: Petert@distributedinc.com)

Comments:

As previously mentioned, the requirements development process is critical to improving program outcomes. To that end, ACT-IAC strives to provide knowledge exchange with government to help them be better buyers, and understand the solutions and how those needs should be communicated in a manner that provides the best opportunities for program success and improved outcomes.

Many companies use a structured product development process to ensure that a high level of knowledge exists about a product or service during its development, similar to milestones or phased entry points in the acquisition lifecycle. It's through this is knowledge-based process that helps enable decision makers to be reasonably confident about product quality, reliability, and timeliness.

Through these interactive platforms, key decision makers, such as program managers, can develop the information they need before issuing a RFP. These activities help develop more meaningful and thorough markets research, and allows for industry comment on needs statements, draft requirements, and draft solicitation packages.

ACT-IAC is committed to improving this process, and will explore further avenues to work with OMB on developing this platform and continued dialogue to expand opportunities for more meaningful dialogue with industry consistent with guidance and regulations.

#5
Section: Government Communication Myths
Votes: 12
Myth: <i>Acquisition process is streamlined by limiting access to Program stakeholders by limiting opportunity to discuss program needs with industry, the government gets solutions that don't always answer needs.</i> (by Anonymous: N/A)
Comments: "So very very true! Every RFP should have an RFI period, with lots of opportunity for input. In fact, RFPs should all be at least partly open sourced, with the wording distributed to all with an opportunity to improve it in an open forum. There's always an opportunity for a single technology or organization to "stack the deck" at that point, but that is a fact of life anyway, and bringing the whole thing into the sunshine should often quash the impulse. If the Washington Post is watching, we're less (though hardly un)likely to try to impose our own brand of technology on a more open solution. And, more importantly, other brands will have the same opportunity. We could even vote on the results, like we're doing on this site." (by Daniel Turner: daniel.turner@tcg.com)

Comments:

This comment has already been previously discussed with the platform and the need to greater access and channels for meaningful communication with industry. We expect more opportunities for feedback and knowledge exchange with complete implementation of points #24 and #25 of US CIO Kundra's memo.

Conclusion:

The dialogue confirmed OMB's perception that there are a number of myths in the government IT community that inhibit effective communication between government and industry prior to and during the acquisition process. ACT-IAC believes that OMB actions to issue a policy letter and solicit community comments on this issue are important first steps towards improving communications. However, as indicated in our January 6, 2011 memo to OMB (attached), "Improving The Management Of Federal Government It Assets Through Better Communication With The It Industry," this is a continuing issue and will require additional actions in the days ahead. Merely urging agencies to do a better job of communicating with the private sector is unlikely to have a significant impact in and of itself. The agencies need additional guidance, management support and best practices to follow. ACT-IAC fully supports the Administration's initiative to improve communications between government and industry and looks forward to continuing to work with OMB. Although the dialogue captured in this BetterGovernmentIT pilot was valuable, the communication improvement process needs to be continued.

The dialogue and OMB memo are merely the first steps in improving communication. Only through continuous improvement and dialogue can this issue be improved. We look forward continuing our work with OMB, and finding ways to expand our improvement items and ultimately improving acquisition outcomes to help government become better buyers and stewards of taxpayer funds.

About ACT-IAC – Advancing Government Through Collaboration, Education and Action

ACT-IAC is a non-profit educational organization created to advance government in serving the public through the effective application of information technology resources. ACT-IAC advances the business of government through collaboration, education and action. The organization has been recognized as the premier public-private partnership in the government IT community and an example of how government and industry work together. Learn more about ACT-IAC at www.actgov.org or call (703) 208-4800.

Appendix:

The following pages include the full comments from the dialogue as of March 18, 2011.

1. Please identify "myths" that industry may hold that inhibit their ability to communicate with the government during the IT acquisition process.

Votes	Main Comment	Sub Comments	
12	<p>Many in industry believe the Government does not know what they want, nor that they understand what industry has to offer. Therefore, industry must inform the Government of the right solution and, therefore, does not respond to the requirements put out by the Government, wasting everyone's time.</p>	<p>I feel the problem is in the quality of RFP's. They are very difficult to write. Add to that the requirement on the IT program manager to write them as if IT were a firm fixed asset (like you are buying a PC, when you are really buying a complex system of hardware, software and services that is constantly changing over time), because the CO wants a ffp contract.</p>	<p>I tend to agree with ScubaBuddy's tag line. The government generally knows what it needs, but many times has trouble articulating their requirements in a manner that industry can understand and adequately propose to. We should know by now that composing totally understandable requirements using the written word is very difficult. Arriving at a common understanding therefore (especially of complex requirements) is also pretty difficult. So, what do we do? Well, one suggestion is to make time for the use of BAA, sources sought notices, RFI and draft solicitations. Another suggestion is to make time for industry days and meaningful market research activities. All this adds to the timeline of the procurement process and adds workload to the already over-burdened acquisition staffs, however, it may pay off in the end with less controversial procurements.</p>

Votes	Main Comment	Sub Comments	
9	<p>Selling to the Government is like selling to other customers. Too many companies try to take on a sales approach with the Federal Government and do not take the time to learn the rules (FARS), learn the process, and understand the requirements. This results in bad proposals, annoying Federal staff, and reflects badly on companies that do take the time.</p>	<p>I am not sure how widely believed this is, but I do think you need to be prepared for some different processes in selling to government.</p>	
6	<p>The process eliminates need to build a relationship prior to solicitation. A sound proposal absent any relationship has a low chance of winning because there is enough discretion in the process to select on subjective factors.</p>		
6	<p>Always start at the top when selling to the federal government. Companies trying to enter the federal market often try to start at the "top", with a Director, General or similarly titled person thinking that if he/she will give their OK, the purchase is guaranteed. This could not be further from the truth.</p>	<p>This does seem to be widely believed in the contractor world, when in fact there is a strict competitive process that needs to be adhered to. On the other hand, what Peter Tuttle says is also true -- if you have no budget authority you can't buy.</p>	<p>I think in many cases that industry attempts to find out who has budget authority and drive downward from there. Many times the "user" level has no money or authority to purchase anything (at least that's the story that folks are sometimes told).</p>
6	<p>Industry believes that in most cases they can ignore the Agency Enterprise Architecture. The EAs of the agencies contain a wealth of information that can add great insight to what agencies do and where they are with respect to technology deployments and understanding. Using these, segment and enterprise architectures, as input to proposals will greatly help industry and companies provide better more focused solutions.</p>		

Votes	Main Comment	Sub Comments	
4	<p>Since the government will share my inquiries with all other suppliers, it's better to remain silent.</p>	<p>I have heard this a lot. Contractors don't have an incentive to keep the playing field level, they have an incentive to win. As with any competition, the rules need to be clear. Everyone would benefit from making clear what the requirements really are, and the Q&A process is critical to this.</p>	
3	<p>Extension. Some in industry ask for a proposal due date extension even before reviewing the solicitation. Easily granted extensions can create a dead period where the vendors turn attention elsewhere and meaningful communication is delayed and the time left for KOs to answer meaningful questions later is even more limited. KOs should not grant extensions (especially beyond 30 days) without compelling cause - such as unanswered questions.</p>		
3	<p>Many IT contractors come in to see government IT program manager and when asked what they specialize they say, "What do you need?" That leaves the impression they will say whatever just to get a contract, and worry about actually being able to deliver later.</p>		

2. Please identify "myths" that government acquisition professionals may hold that inhibit their ability to communicate with industry during the IT acquisition.

Votes	Main Comment	Sub Comments		
16	Contractors are the Enemy	<p>Wow, it's back to the 80's. What did Yogi Berra once say "deja vu all over again." For years government has talked about establishing partnerships. Frankly, this usually is mentioned when the government agency wants the contractor to cut costs or provide something for free or on the cheap!! To be positive, however, some agencies who have acquisition thought-leaders actually embrace this concept of partnership to the benefit of the agency, industry and the taxpayer. Some unfortunately do not and believe that an "arms length" relationship is a one-way relationship. Not true. Government and industry can establish good, mutually beneficial working relationships. The challenge is like forming and maintaining any meaningful relationship, it takes time, willingness, dedicated effort and attention.</p>	<p>The relationship between a federal contractor and the government should be viewed as a partnership. If both parties enter into the relationship with this attitude, it will be to the benefit of both sides.</p>	<p>Government and contractors are just people trying to get a job done and, hopefully, do it well. Sadly, some folks do not understand this.</p>
14	Our Needs are unique. They are not.	<p>While true that many IT needs are not all that unique, industry responses approaches can vary from in perpetuity service contracts, to more technology driven approaches that greatly reduce the need for the quantity of staff and staffing contracts. In perpetuity service contracts are all too frequently perceived to be vastly lower risk by many... so the question is how can solutions that involve dramatic reduction in personnel requirements be brought to light, or brought to bear more without risking a career of government decision makers? This question should be considered in context of projects that are in process with existing staff augmentation contracts that could be a bit inefficient due to the absence of novel approaches / tools, as well as needs that are evolving.</p>		

Votes	Main Comment	Sub Comments		
12	<p>Acquisition process is streamlined by limiting access to Program stakeholders</p> <p>By limiting opportunity to discuss program needs with industry, the government gets solutions that don't always answer needs.</p>	<p>So very very true! Every RFP should have an RFI period, with lots of opportunity for input. In fact, RFPs should all be at least partly open sourced, with the wording distributed to all with an opportunity to improve it in an open forum. There's always an opportunity for a single technology or organization to "stack the deck" at that point, but that is a fact of life anyway, and bringing the whole thing into the sunshine should often quash the impulse. If the Washington Post is watching, we're less (though hardly un)likely to try to impose our own brand of technology on a more open solution. And, more importantly, other brands will have the same opportunity. We could even vote on the results, like we're doing on this site.</p>		
11	<p>Bad things will happen to me if I don't communicate the same thing to everyone at the same time. Maybe this isn't such a myth as I've heard it said on many occasions.</p>	<p>From my experience, this is widely believed to be true, and many contracting officers will tell you that it is true. I presume that what makes people say this is that vendors have successfully protested the results of competitive selections based on showing that different info was given to different vendors, but I personally never experienced this during my government career. However, I know that fear of protest is a common reason for CO's holding program managers to strict vendor-government communications constraints.</p>		

Votes	Main Comment	Sub Comments	
11	<p>The way Industry responds to an RFP is unimportant, only the result is important</p> <p>All government procurement people should have the opportunity to participate in the proposal development process. With appropriate safeguards for COI, this would be an invaluable learning tool for procurement officials (and, not incidentally, for small businesses lucky enough to have the support of more</p> <p>All government procurement people should have the opportunity to participate in the proposal development process. With appropriate safeguards for COI, this would be an invaluable learning tool for procurement officials (and, not incidentally, for small businesses lucky enough to have the support of such knowledgeable officials for a week or two). Seeing the process from the "other side" could make the difference between a successful RFP process and a failed one.</p>		

Votes	Main Comment	Sub Comments	
10	<p>Contractors can't review RFPs before they're issued</p> <p>While contractors who are bidding on RFPs cannot review them before they're released, there's no reason, with appropriate NDAs and protections, that RFPs cannot be reviewed by qualified contracting professionals. I'd love to see a</p>	<p>I think all parties would benefit from clearer rules around who can participate in the RFI to RFP process. The general impression I get is that anyone can respond to the RFI and the government can talk to vendors prior to the RFP being issued. But I have seen at least one RFI that said vendors were prohibited from talking to the program officials, all communications had to be through the CO.</p> <p>I think the solution is to have some clearer guidelines for CO's that allow more interaction to occur without the fear of protest. Everyone wants to avoid protests -- if we start with that end in mind and work backwards we will go a long way to opening communications.</p>	<p>Whoops, turns out you shouldn't vote until you finish creating your item.</p> <p>To continue: I'd love to see a group within ACT/IAC or in another group that reviews large (say, over \$5m anticipated) RFPs for sanity. By this I mean:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Adding up all the required items to make sure they do not go over the (often absurdly low) page limits * Checking the RFP for internal consistency * Drafting basic responses to ensure that the COTRs will get what they think they should be getting * etc.
8	<p>There's no incentive to communicate - it's only a risk</p> <p>I don't get in trouble if I don't communicate. But I could potentially if I do. Not worth the effort.</p>	<p>Any attempt to open up communications needs to look at the consequences. The above statement is absolutely true in my experience, unless you take into account the risk of getting a less than the best product for the government by not knowing the marketplace.</p>	<p>I agree with Old Hand. Quality communications really needs to occur throughout the acquisition process. As the process becomes more formal, the harder open & honest communications will be due to the sense of increased risk for both industry & government.</p> <p>For government personnel, the quality communication needs to occur in the Market Research phase where we are searching for products and services. We can talk and look up to the point where we start deciding what will and won't work. Once we start making decisions, we need to become careful and let communication occur through the contracting specialist/officer.</p>

Votes	Main Comment	Sub Comments		
6	<p>Unfair Competitive Advantage</p> <p>If I talk to the contractor - I cannot let them bid. Although incorrect, many do not understand FAR 15.201</p>			
6	<p>large prime contractors keep their mid and small partners informed</p> <p>So, as a CO, I don't need to talk to the mid & small guys, even if they're the ones with the expertise;</p>	<p>Problem for government program managers is that they just have time to talk to all the vendors who want an audience. I often thought about having a vendor day once a month to let people in to show their wares. I know some big agencies do this (e.g., USDA Technology Day, and other privately sponsored shows that Gov't folks attend, but I'm not sure those really satisfy the small vendors desire for one on one communications.</p>	<p>Wow, I love this one. In the real world, prime contractors only communicate what they want their subcontractors to know. This should be expected and anticipated. CO's obviously don't want to bust privy of contract with their primes, but they should have no delusions that everybody is "on the same page." ScubaBuddy is on-target...primes triage the incoming work and decide who is best to perform it. Many times their decision is to the detriment of small and mid-sized partners. Remember - subcontracts follow the principles of the UCC and state law...not the FAR. The rules are different.</p>	<p>This is the theory behind many large GWAC and IDIQ contracts. Small and mid-sized businesses are constantly told to "talk to the primes". Unfortunatley, the primes have their own agenda and try to keep the best work for themselves and to isolate their subcontractors from the Government. As a result, small and mid-size businesses do not get the exposure and are filtered in both directions. This is not only inefficient, but ends up costing the Government a lot more money and does not always yield the best results.</p>
6	<p>Government IT is unique and each agency/department/bureau is unique.</p>			

Votes	Main Comment	Sub Comments		
6	<p>Industry partners cannot be made to have qualified architects on projects.</p> <p>Actually the marine Corps is now requiring for most all of its major IT acquisitions that the industry partner provide a qualified DODAF certified enterprise architect on the delivery team. This ensure that the governments artifacts are understood and properly interpreted and later that they are upd more</p> <p>Actually the marine Corps is now requiring for most all of its major IT acquisitions that the industry partner provide a qualified DODAF certified enterprise architect on the delivery team. This ensures that the governments artifacts are understood and properly interpreted and later that they are updated appropriately.</p>			

Votes	Main Comment	Sub Comments		
6	<p>Industry just wants to "sell," so as a government official, I gain nothing by meeting with them.</p> <p>Market research through interactions with industry is valuable but frequently underutilized. Some government officials proudly say, "I don't talk to contractors."</p>	<p>I have been around long enough to see "drive by selling", and see genuine interest in sales people providing value.</p> <p>As an industry person I can see how the "I don't see contractors" mentality came about. There is a minority of "drive by sellers" out there that the government should quite honestly be wary of.</p> <p>The mentality of course is not justified, but rather, there needs to be a better way for officials to better selectively meet with a broad range of potential suppliers while distancing themselves from companies that routinely do not provide value.</p> <p>Does this somehow relate to "if I meet with you then I must meet with companies or people that cannot provide value" ?</p>	<p>This is pretty much the same as the "contractor is the enemy" myth. IT is one part of the government service that really benefits from the expertise that vendors can bring in but the government can't keep on payroll -- they can command too high a salary in the private sector.</p>	
6	<p>The companies that are serious about bidding on an RFP will get the information regardless.</p> <p>This approach will contribute to business as usual within agencies and stifle access to fresh, innovative and/or lower cost options, due to a lack of information flow from the Government.</p>			

Votes	Main Comment	Sub Comments		
5	<p>I can be more efficient when I expect all the requirements up front.</p> <p>Waterfall SDLC is dictated by the procurement process, yet is super high risk for many software projects. Corollary myth is "if I let one group plan and another group implement, the chance of success improves."</p>			
3	<p>Disqualifying based on assumptions</p> <p>The Government sometimes disqualifies bids based on well-stated assumptions that are not in obvious contradiction to solicitation information. This sets up protest situations. KOs should re-engage offerors on the assumptions that unduly complication evaluation with clarification and a request to resubmit.</p>			

Votes	Main Comment	Sub Comments		
3	We won't get economies of scale cross-entity because it's too complicated, so why bother?			
2	IT projects fit nicely into the Base Year / Option Year model.			
1	<p>TLA has problems communicating within itself; reqs to BPA's take as long as any other req!</p> <p>TLA has problems communicating within itself; requisitions to Blanket Procurement Agreements take as long as any other requisition! If the agency can't rubber-stamp and expedite BPA (me too's), there's something wrong.</p>			

Votes	Main Comment	Sub Comments		
1	<p>Nobody looks at the Federal Contracting Opportunities</p> <p>Acquisition professionals do not always publish their upcoming opportunities, which then creates a limited pool of viable solutions. Vendors do review the FCO lists for their customers to determine where to focus efforts, but when the acquisitions are not published, the government is losing out on more</p> <p>Acquisition professionals do not always publish their upcoming opportunities, which then creates a limited pool of viable solutions. Vendors do review the FCO lists for their customers to determine where to focus efforts, but when the acquisitions are not published, the government is losing out on potentially viable alternatives.</p>			

3. What are major impediments to improving government and industry's ability to communicate with each other? If you identify rules or regulations, please be as specific as possible.

Votes	Main Comment	Sub Comments		
14	<p>Eliminate the regulation that allows the protest of any IDIQ task order award in excess of \$10M</p> <p>This regulation has led to an increase in protests (at least for organizations that routinely procure large dollar value IT services), which has had the unintended consequence of less information exchanges between the Government and Industry regarding award decisions. For example, the Government is fearful that even the slightest verbal or written feedback / criticism will spark negative reaction (and protests) from industry.</p>	I regret that I only have three votes to give		
11	<p>Lack of open discussion often occurs after a Draft RFP is released.</p> <p>Is this supported by a FAR rule?</p>	My impression is that agencies could talk with interested vendors about the draft RFP, but CO's don't want them to because they are afraid of protests.		

Votes	Main Comment	Sub Comments		
8	<p>If I meet with you, then I MUST meet with everyone who calls.</p> <p>This is not an "idea", but a request for information to advise CO's or PM's on this common concern.</p> <p>How can a CO, or program manager realistically select folks that seem to have unique approaches or novel approaches to a challenge without some mandate to meet with everyone who decides to call?</p>			
8	<p>Publish all agency current architectures(solutions, segments and EAs)</p> <p>Failure of bidders to get consistent and full information about the agencies and their program solutions needs hampers their abilities to propose in-line of sight solutions that are incremental, modular, scalable and flexible. The architecture would enhance communications greatly.</p>			

Votes	Main Comment	Sub Comments		
8	<p>The "institutional" belief that less communication reduces risk of protest</p> <p>Silence is not always golden in the federal procurement process. Many times, however, organizational contracting officials believe that only communicating the minimum required by regulation will insulate them from protest or increased risk. This may or may not be true. Many of the problems in the federal procurement process are only increased by lack of meaningful communications. Lack of clarity, understanding, specificity, responsiveness, etc. will only frustrate the parties involved and increase difficulties as the procurement progresses.</p>	<p>People in the program with the requirements are often instructed by Procurement not to discuss. If some discussion is allowed, then there should be a one page standard "dos and don'ts" that can be provided to the program managers.</p>		
4	<p>The Obama Administration regulation that says its an OCI if your pre-rfp briefing idea gets into rfp</p> <p>The Obama Administration regulation that says its an OCI if your pre-rfp briefing idea gets into rfp. This regulation stopped companies from presenting product or solution ideas to the government for fear that a losing bidder would claim that the winner had an OCI under FAR Part 9. It stopped companies from submitting whitepapers with proprietary tailored content for a specific agency need.</p>			

4. Provide examples of Federal IT acquisitions that included good communication practices - by either government or industry - that resulted in better outcomes and better decisions. Explain what the practice or process was and why it was valuable.

Votes	Main Comment	Sub Comment	
11	<p>Ensure that the Information and business/mission needs are well architected and modeled.</p> <p>When the enterprise requirements are depicted in an architecture that can be made a part of the acquisition process the communications as to what is needed are greatly clarified and all bidders have the same picture.</p>	<p>It is a myth that many of the initiatives in the 25 pt plan can just be executed, acquired or implemented without any architecture or planning.</p>	
11	<p>Conduct "Due Diligence". Have one on one meetings with Interested Parties to clarify requirements.</p>	<p>One way to have dialog is to involve industry groups such as ACT-IAC or TechAmerica. These groups can organize dialog, though it won't be one-on-one.</p>	<p>Dialog with industry experts would be very helpful. Problem is who to invite without having to invite everyone.</p>

Votes	Main Comment	Sub Comment	
9	<p>Providing post-award debriefings even when not required by FAR</p> <p>When a member of industry loses in a competitive procurement, they want to know why. The FAR contains instructions for post-award debriefings under certain circumstances, but not all circumstances (some acquisitions conducted under Part 8 for example). It is critically important to vendors, especially small business, to learn why they were unsuccessful. They can then reflect, change, resolve, or whatever, in order to make themselves more competitive for the next opportunity. Government contracting officials simply stating that they are not required to provide debriefs since they are not required by the FAR is an avoidance of responsibility and an injury to the viability and competitiveness of industry, especially small business. Frankly, the failure to provide debriefings will create doubt in the minds of unsuccessful offerors that the evaluation process was fair and above-board. Once industry believes that something is unfair about a procurement, they usually do something about it if they have the resources. It's better to let them know they failed based on the merits (or lack of them) of their proposal than to leave them guessing and suspecting.</p>	<p>I would second Peter Tuttle's comment and also suggest that CO's invite the Program Manager to participate with them in the debriefing. The Program Manager general understands the requirements more directly and so their presence may be more convincing to the bidder.</p>	<p>I completely agree. It is becoming harder and harder to win government business and when you lose an RFQ and are never provided a breakdown of the issues with the delivered RFP—you can't feed that information back into the RFP development process. I also believe that statements like "...to expensive", "...did not understand" on their own do not assist the contractor in understanding what went wrong. A small paragraph on the issues which lead to the non-select is very important to a small business.</p> <p>The government can take from 4 to 12 weeks, or longer, to even announce the contractor that prevailed in the RFQ. Someone must be taking notes as to what is good/bad for every proposal. I have had a proposal in to one agency since November of 2010 and every query to the evaluation team is met with "Still under evaluation". The RFQ was very narrow in scope and really only wanted an enhancement to the current operating software. And they still have not made an award. Try keeping folks on the bench for that long with no income to pay them.</p> <p>In short, the government should be required to provide a complete breakdown of the contractors RFP, when that contractor fails to win the award.</p>

Votes	Main Comment	Sub Comment	
7	<p>Use Requests for Information, Advanced notice SOOs, Draft SOWs as far in advance</p> <p>Use Requests for Information, Advanced notice SOOs, Draft SOWs as far in advance as practical. Encourage detailed feedback.</p>		
6	<p>Ensure that the Information and business/mission needs are well architected and modeled.</p> <p>When the enterprise requirements are depicted in an architecture that can be made a part of the acquisition process the communications as to what is needed are greatly clarified and all bidders have the same picture.</p>		
5	<p>Incorporate demos and orals into evaluation process. The use of orals and demos allows bidders who are in the competitive range to present their capabilities better and to explain how they can serve better. Written proposals do not always communicate the capabilities of the product or staff. Further, demos and orals should include two-way discussion more. The use of orals and demos allows bidders who are in the competitive range to present their capabilities better and to explain how they can serve better. Written proposals do not always communicate the capabilities of the product or staff. Further, demos and orals should include two-way discussions, not just a presentation by the bidder.</p>	<p>Demos and orals are great for large projects. For small projects these requirements add a great deal of expense and could drive out smaller competitors.</p>	<p>Have seen too many very large IT projects awarded without orals. CO's seem to see orals as just another thing to be protested. I think well conducted orals and debriefings would actually help reduce protests, as the bidders will have a chance to be hear, and not just judged on paperwork.</p>

Votes	Main Comment	Sub Comment	
2	Think small & iterate Understand the larger scope of the work that is required but parse it out in ways that are manageable and mitigate risk.		