



Project Columbia NASA's Newest Supercomputer

By Marie Dorish, Ames Research Center

NASA unveiled its newest supercomputer during a ribbon-cutting ceremony October 26, 2004, at Ames Research Center. Project Columbia was built and installed at the NASA Advanced Supercomputing (NAS) facility at Ames in less than 120 days. With Columbia at its core, the NAS facility provides an integrated computing, visualization, and data storage environment to help NASA meet its mission goals and the Vision for Space Exploration.

One of the groups critical to the success of Project Columbia at Ames, was the acquisition team, which included a lead contracting officer and contract specialist. In early June 2004, the Acquisition Branch for Center Operations and Space (Code JAC) branch chief received a call from the facility manager of the NAS and requested a meeting to discuss the upcoming procurements and leases. The requirement, estimated at over \$28 million, was described as one of the fastest, largest, and most productive supercomputers in the world. It

would provide an estimated 10-fold increase in NASA's supercomputing capacity. In order to meet the project milestones, three phases of procurements for delivery orders and leases through the SEWP 3 contract were planned.

The procurement and technical teams met almost daily



ARC/Tom Trower

A view from the top Bridges connect nodes of the 20-node SGI Altix supercomputer housed at the NASA Advanced Supercomputing facility.

with center management and the chief counsel's office to discuss the schedule and the status of the procurements, as well as to maintain communication. The procurement team worked with the chief counsel's representative to draft the terms and conditions of the leasing agreements well within the required lead times. As part of the acquisition planning, it was

determined that the purchases be placed as delivery orders against the SEWP 3 contract with the ServI (computer and computer-related supplies and services buying) team at ARC assisting in placing those orders. Within three weeks, all manner of acquisitions were completed, and the supercomputer (consisting of 20 interconnected SGI® Altix® 512 processor systems, for a total of 10,240 Intel® Itanium® 2 processors) was on its way to making NASA history.

The lead contracting officer, Carlos Torrez, and contract specialist, Lana Jones Clemon, worked expeditiously to meet the July 2004 deadline for the procurements. Many long hours were spent determining the acquisition strategy, drafting terms and conditions for software and leasing agreements, and placing the delivery orders in a timely manner. Their dedication to support the customer is to be commended. So when you hear of the great things that NASA is doing because of Project Columbia, remember the procurement team at ARC that helped make it a reality.

Highlights...

See how one center dealt with the need for training less formal than the CON classes, page 2.

RFP schedules can have a dramatic affect on contractors. Learn what you can do, page 4.

Meet Kari Alvarado from Dryden who made a major career change and came into procurement, page 5.

There are major changes coming down the pike for the required contracting classes. Learn how these might affect you on page 7.

What's it all about:

A Dream Come True (or Contracting Officer Training/Mentoring Initiative)

By Lisa Phillips and Roberta Beckman, Johnson Space Center

In retrospect, it started out poolside at the 2003 Procurement Policy Conference in Florida, while waiting for lunch. The discussion centered around the idea that current training methods for contract specialists (CSs) could be augmented to provide the skills and resources for them to attain journeyman level proficiency in a more on-the-job manner. This situation had become even more acute lately because of the many new hires and the influx of NASA Contracting Intern Program (NCIPs) and Coops that are ripe to learn the profession.

Problem Background

As new contract specialists enter the organization, it requires a significant amount of training, both formal classroom and on-the-job training, to develop the capabilities that are needed to function independently at the journeyman level. Procurement's future success in meeting customer expectations requires that we make this transition as quickly as possible; all new people brought into the organization must be properly mentored so that they can perform to the best of their abilities.

Historically, the Projects and the Institutional Procurement Offices (at JSC) have been a "training ground" for new hires and cooperative education students. This calls for effective training tools for our contracting officers (COs) and CSs as well as establishing expectations that all personnel have acceptable mentoring skills.

While all contract specialists attend the required CON training, there is a gap between that formal training and other information needed to get the contracting job accomplished. The formal training covers what needs to be done but there is little information on why or how to do what needs to be done—what forms do you need, how do you fill them out, who do you send the completed form to for approval, who might you call for problem resolution? When is the right time to bring an issue to management and how to do it in a productive manner? These are a few examples of information not covered in the CON training classes.

There are few resources available to cover the "how" issues. While NASA's Virtual Procurement Office (VPO) is a start in the right direction, it doesn't cover JSC specific forms, guidance and procedures. Contract specialists also need to be trained in the "why" of procurement actions and documentation. This serves to give them understanding of the context of the action, so that they can potentially formulate their own solution the next time, and will serve to enhance the quality of the procurement products. As a result each procurement office pieces together what it needs on an ad hoc basis. The result is a lot of wasted energy reinventing the same products repeatedly with mixed quality of products produced. Also new people are not always given the help they need at the time they need it, so they

become frustrated at their lack of progress toward completing assignments.

Proposed solution

At the start of 2004, a group of JSC procurement team leads began meeting and discussing a solution. They are Carrie Mulholland of Projects Procurement, Delene Sedillo and Lisa Phillips of Institutional Procurement, and Roberta Beckman and Nancy Liounis of Procurement Policy & Systems. They arrived at a two-pronged approach.

First, develop a one-day training workshop with all COs to raise their awareness of concepts such as learning styles, situational leadership, etc. The need for this course came from the reality that not all contracting officers are proficient at training and mentoring other employees. With improved skills in this area COs would be more competent in meeting the challenge of getting the new employees to the desired goal of being fully functioning journeymen contract specialists as efficiently and effectively as possible. It also has the advantage of improving the skill level of future team leads. The JSC Human Resource Training and Development office worked to facilitate this workshop, which turned out to be a two-day event after we determined all the topics that should be covered. At this time, three of the training sessions have been held, and almost all the COs, with both full and limited warrants, have attended.

The second part of the approach is to develop a handbook

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People on the Move

ARC

Congratulations: The following people were recently promoted: Alma Garcia; Deb Glass; Natalie LeMar; AnJennette Rodriguez; Starr Strong; Naomi Castillo-Velasquez, and Gail Woll. Congratulations go to Acquisition Division Peer Award (2004) recipients Rachel Khattab and Natalie LeMar; and to Ames Honor Awards (2004) recipients Ronnee Gonzalez (Mentor); Deb Glass (Administrative Professional); and Nellie Powell (team member of the Advanced Air Transportation Technologies). Carlos Torrez received the NASA Minority Business Advocate of the Year Award (Procurement). Well done all!

New Faces: A warm welcome to Scott Malsom; Eileen McGough; Ameka Chapman; and Mary Perez. Scott transferred to the Acquisition Division from the Aviation Systems Division here at ARC. Scott is in the Acquisition Branch for Business and Policy and is the COTR for the CCI Contract for Closeout. Eileen came from the Deputy Center Director's office here at ARC and is currently supporting the Procurement Officer. Ameka is a second year NCIP. She came to us from JSC and is working construction contracts in the Acquisition Branch for Aeronautics. Mary Perez worked at Ames under a student program and after she graduated she returned under the Federal Career Intern Program. Mary is supporting contract management for the SOFIA Project Office in addition to

working small contracts and simplified acquisitions in the Acquisition Branch for Center Operations and Space.

Farewell: Nonnie Braxton, grants specialist; transferred to the Human Resources Directorate. Sabrina Rucker, contracts specialist; left Ames to accept a position at the Lawrence Livermore Lab in Livermore, CA. We said a sad good bye to our first year NCIPs: Justin Pane, Dunamis Pedraza, Maria Hooks, and Charlotte Mitchell. Justin and Dunamis are continuing their internships at KSC, while Maria Hooks is continuing hers at JSC. Charlotte Mitchell recently left the NCIP program and the Agency to seek her fortunes with private industry.

Students hold a special place in our hearts here at Ames. We said good-bye to Robin Wong, Chase Bradshaw, Yan Gudanets, and Mark Gee. A warm welcome to Amine Hambaba, Steven Yee, Donella Franks, Theresa Vu, Megan Tatman, and Hanan Kim.

GRC

Congratulations: Michele Richter graduated in June 2004 from Strayer University, Washington, DC, with a Master of Business Administration degree.

HQ

New Faces: Jamiel Commadore and Marilyn Seppi have joined us from Goddard. Jamiel is on the NSSC team. Marilyn is working in the Contract Management Division. Monique Sullivan joined us from Dryden and is continuing her work on the NSSC.

KSC

Congratulations: Dudley Cannon is now the Director of Procurement at KSC.

Cheryl Hurst has been promoted from chief of Mission Support to Deputy Director of Procurement. Bob Pirkle has been promoted to chief of Mission Support. Congratulations to the following people who received promotions: Joyce McDowell; Jamie Carter; Linda Ranow; Justice Harvey; Regina Clifton; and Chris Canary.

New Faces: KSC extends a warm welcome to our newest employees. Tyrone Frey comes to us from the Army Corps of Engineers with several years of experience and is assigned to the Engineering Support Office. Emily Unbehaun received a Bachelors degree in Actuarial Science from the University of Wisconsin and was an NCIP for the past three and a half years. She is now assigned to the Operations Support Office. Tina Landes spent 20 years with the Army Corps of Engineers and is now a contract specialist assigned to Launch Services. Robert Swett previously worked for the Air Force in contracting as well as at Sverdrup Technology before coming onboard. He is currently assigned to the Engineering Support Office.

A new employee has arrived under the Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP): Tiffany Lackey recently graduated from Bethune-Cookman College with a Bachelor's degree in Computer Information Sciences and is assigned to the Acquisition Management Office. We also have several NCIPs that have arrived. Dunamis Pedraza graduated from Florida International University and comes to us from Ames Research Center. She will be here for a rotational period of

The list of **People on the Move** only includes those names that were submitted to the *Procurement Countdown*. If you know people who should be listed in this column, contact your center *Procurement Countdown* point of contact, or send the names to the editor, Susie Marucci, on (202) 358-1896, or e-mail at susie.marucci@nasa.gov.

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People on the Move

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18 months. Geoffrey Sage is a graduate of Drexel University. He was previously at Langley Research Center in the Supply and Simplified Acquisition Contracting Branch for 13 months. He is now working in the Construction Administration Branch of Engineering Support. Justin Pane is a graduate of Florida International University with a Bachelor's degree in Management Information Systems. Justin was previously assigned to Ames Research Center for one year and is now working as a contract specialist in the Operations Support Office.

Farewells: Jeanette Platt retired in September 2004. Jeanette was a contracting officer administering ELV launch services and payload processing contracts. In December 2004, Teri Jackson, a contracting officer in the Mission Support Office, accepted a job

with the General Services Administration in Atlanta, GA. In January 2005, Quentin Worthy, Clarence Floyd, and Pat Beall, all long-time KSC procurement office employees, retired. Quentin Worthy was the chief of the Engineering Support Office responsible for award and administration of all construction-related contracts. Clarence Floyd was a contracting officer responsible for administration of various construction contracts. Pat Beall was a lead cost/price analyst in the Acquisition Management Office and had served on numerous Source Evaluation Boards. Each of these individuals will be missed.

SSC

Congratulations: Susan Dupuis who became the new SSC Procurement Officer in October. She moves over from the SSC

AMO Support Services team lead position. Becky Dubuisson leaves SSC AMO to take on new challenges as SSC's Integrated Financial Management program manager. Nick Etheridge remains as Deputy Procurement Officer and takes on the role of Acting Support Services team lead. Betty Jo Santibanez was promoted to senior contract specialist. Congratulations to the following people who received Acquisition Improvement Award: Susan Dupuis and Robert Harris for the Test Operations Contract. James Huk and Richard Mann for the ITS/Laboratory Services Contract.

New Faces: Warren Wood has been recently hired as a contract price/cost analyst.

Farewells: Delma Moore transferred to GSFC and is working in West Virginia.

Keep Contractors Informed of Schedule Slips

By Anne Guenther, HQ Program Operations Division

A recent Freedom to Manage submission highlighted a concern felt by many of our contractors. When the scheduled date for release of an RFP changes, contractors are often not notified of the new release date. The submitter pointed out that schedule slippages cost contractors time and money to keep their proposal teams in place. The problem is exacerbated when they aren't told what the revised date is.

The release of the RFP is sometimes unavoidably delayed. This is usually due to the government's effort to clearly and accurately define the requirements to avoid misunderstandings,

potentially affecting an offeror's proposal. The need to work through a large number of comments received in response to a draft RFP can also delay issuance of the final RFP.

It isn't practical to arbitrarily mandate firm timeframes for RFP



release. That would risk, in some cases, poorly crafted solicitations and requirements. However,

although delays can be unavoidable, the impact on potential offerors could be mitigated by letting them know as soon as possible when RFP issuance is delayed and what the new date is. This could be done by issuing a second synopsis. Also, when a website has been established for an acquisition, posting a notice at the website of any delay in release of the RFP would be of benefit to potential offerors.

Please remember to keep potential offerors informed of schedule changes in a timely manner. This will enable them to plan for your solicitation, thereby maximizing the chance that they will submit a proposal.

Getting the Job Done:

New Opportunity in Procurement

By Kari Alvarado, Dryden Flight Research Center

In 2002, I made a life altering decision to change my career path. As I weighed the pros and cons between maintenance and procurement, my husband reminded me that either choice was full of opportunities. After 15 years of working in the Aircraft Maintenance arena, I decided the career move to procurement would be the most beneficial to me, my family, and NASA.

In 1987, I began my federal career in the United States Air Force. Hoping to embark on an exciting yet challenging journey, I chose a career path in aviation maintenance. I missed my hometown of Salisbury, MD, and requested orders back to the east coast; however, that was not an option! They say military assignments are made with darts and a wall map. I guess my dart landed in Southern California!

A Career in Aviation

After working on MC-130H aircraft at Edwards AFB for four years, I chose not to re-enlist. In 1991, I was hired at NASA Dryden as an aerospace engineering technician (aircraft mechanic). I worked with a great crew and quickly came up to speed on various fighter, research, and training jets as well as general aviation aircraft. In 1994, I obtained my Airframe and Powerplant (A&P) license through the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). I worked on various research and development programs, some of which include the SRA F-18 project and the CV-990 project. Although I enjoyed the work, I knew this was not what I wanted to do for the rest of my career.

In 1995, the Aircraft Documentation Office requested the assistance of aircraft maintenance personnel to provide subject-matter expertise for the development of an automated aircraft-maintenance-tracking database. I volunteered. In 1999, I was promoted to office lead. My team worked to centralize information regarding maintenance operations and over time the office was realigned as the Maintenance Operations Office. This was challenging, but it was still not quite where I wanted to be...although I really didn't know where that was!

Eventually, I was delegated as contracting officer technical representative (COTR) for the Aerospace Ground Equipment (AGE) contract. Suddenly—I got the bug!! Contracting sparked my interest, and I couldn't get enough. I began to ask my contracting officer questions about becoming a CO. She was extremely helpful in providing information and introduced me to the Dryden Deputy Procurement Officer (DPO). We discussed the formal and informal training requirements for becoming a contract specialist (1102 series), and I learned that I needed to obtain my Bachelor's degree.

Going Back to School

I was a successful competitor in Dryden's Continuing Education Program (CEP), and enrolled in Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, under the BSMTO program (Bachelor of Science Management of Technical Operations). This degree met the

business requirements for the 1102 position and complimented the position I was currently holding as Maintenance Operations Office lead. I continued to learn through guidance from my CO and in my role as a COTR. I participated in the Source Evaluation Board for the AGE contract re-compete in 2000. Upon the DPO's request, I provided technical responses during source selection debriefs, which further exposed me to acquisition processes and procedures.

Eager to work in the Acquisition Management Office, I kept the DPO informed on progress towards my degree. While attending the MIP (Managing the Influence Process) program held at Wallops Flight Facility in Virginia, a program analyst position was posted for the Dryden Acquisition Management Office. This was the opportunity I had been waiting for, however it was closing the following day! I called our Human Resources Department and requested an extension. I then asked my husband to fax my resume information, and I began getting it together immediately. Upon returning from MIP, I submitted my resume. I was terrified. What if I really get it? What if I'm bored, it's just paperwork...(Ha!) What about all the initial training and time away from my family?

A Life in Procurement

I got the job! I began working as a program analyst in the Acquisition Management Office in May 2002. The DPO assigned me a mentor and we worked together on the AGE contract and the

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Kari Alvarado

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Aircraft Support Contract, which was a perfect fit for my background. My initial duties included simplified acquisitions, funding modifications, analysis of low-dollar proposals, and non-voting participation on a Performance Evaluation Board.

My technical background and twelve years at Dryden played a key role in filling my new responsibilities. I knew who to call for answers and had pre-established customer rapport. I also had an appreciation of center missions and familiarity with aircraft terminology, all of which contributed to understanding the contract requirements. The greatest advantage my technical experience provided was a better

understanding of what questions I needed to ask my customers.

My greatest challenge has been the huge learning curve. Moving from a career where I had a high knowledge level to a career where I am starting from the ground up can be quite frustrating. At first I had not even a baseline understanding of procurement regulations, contract administration, proposal analysis, or negotiation techniques. Now, over two years into my new career, I have successfully worked through many learning-curve challenges. I just take it day by day because I have finally found my “niche.”

I am very appreciative of the Dryden Acquisition Team. They have helped me grow and learn. As for my previous concerns, I know now that boredom is not an

issue in this job! My family has been extremely supportive throughout the two years of Level I and II contract certification training, as well as my continued efforts towards my BS. After completing my Level II training and my Bachelor’s degree this past summer, I was congratulated by friends, family, supervisors, and colleagues who assisted me while I tried to “do it all.” However, no one could have been happier than me (except maybe my husband)! Shortly after graduation, I was converted to the 1102 series.

My transition into the Acquisition Management Office has been an enlightening experience of growth and development. All that lies ahead is opportunity, with everything to gain.

Dream Come True

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of sample documents and checklists of the most frequently used forms and processes. These include a purchase order checklist, voucher processing checklist, and the forms needed to complete the checklists. This is an online, ready reference that could be accessed to provide immediate information about how to do tasks. The advantages of this are: it’s always available, it provides current and correct information, and it would mean each of the offices within the JSC Procurement Organization would be conducting business

in a more consistent manner. To ensure accuracy and currency, it is envisioned that this handbook will be updated semi-annually, with feedback from the procurement users.

Conclusion

The Director and Deputy Director of Procurement ensured the implementation of this Contracting Officer Training/Mentoring Initiative. They have been extremely supportive in expressing that mentoring is a part of the job requirements of the

contract specialists and contracting officers and that these skills are critical to our success as individuals and as an organization.

Early feedback from the COs and CSs has been positive, and they’re looking forward to implementing their new-found skills as well as improving upon the tools available. This will focus more productive time on fulfilling mission goals and meeting customer requirements rather than re-inventing the wheel or floundering for a lack of training.

The Times (and Courses) They are a Changin'

By Deborah O'Neill, HQ Contract Management Division

As everyone in the contracting profession is aware, the qualification standards are here to stay. These requirements prove that a contracting professional has a certain level of knowledge and skill. Not only must one have a four-year college degree from an accredited institution, one must complete 24 semester hours of courses in specific business-related fields in order to be eligible for a GS-13 position. This education standard is accompanied by completion of a particular training curriculum. This curriculum is divided into certain courses which generally are taken at certain grade levels. Certifications are awarded at the successful completion of specific courses.

For anyone who has been keeping up with the world of procurement training, you will notice that there are some changes taking place. The curriculum and courses are changing. Gone are the four-week Basics to Contracting and the three-week Principles of Contract Pricing Parts A and B. These courses were revised last year. NASA will be offering the new courses this fiscal year.

Level I Includes All New Classes

CON 100 – Shaping Smart Business Arrangements, a five-day class for new contracting professionals to increase understanding of the acquisition environment. Included in this course is the development of professional skills for making business decisions and advising other acquisition team members in successfully meeting customer needs.

CON 110 – Mission Support Planning, 40 hours of online, self-

paced instruction. This course will introduce contracting professionals to their role as business advisors including understanding customers' missions and their ability to plan successful mission support strategies based on knowledge of the contracting environment and their customer needs. The course includes using the FAR, learning effective market research, developing alternative acquisition strategies, and understanding how socioeconomic programs support the acquisition planning process.



CON 111 – Mission Strategy Execution, 40 hours of online, self-paced instruction. This course focuses on executing acquisition planning through soliciting industry and awarding a contract. It provides students with the knowledge necessary to execute an acquisition that optimizes customer mission performance. This includes the techniques for early industry involvement in shaping requirements. This course covers basic procedures for acquisition of both commercial and noncommercial requirements and how to effectively conduct price analysis and determine when a price is fair and reasonable. It also includes how to conduct basic competitive acquisitions, process awards, and handle protests before and after contract award.

CON 112 – Mission Performance Assessment, 20 hours of online, self-paced instruction. This course builds on the earlier courses and provides students with the knowledge necessary to identify and utilize appropriate

performance metrics when evaluating contractor performance. This course includes assessment strategies and performance remedies. It also covers how to make and price contract changes after award, handle disputes, and close out completed contracts.

CON 120 – Mission Focused Contracting, 10 classroom days. This course engages students in the entire acquisition process from meeting with customers to completing contract closeout. Students will learn and apply leadership, problem-solving, and negotiation skills in an integrated case study approach using the knowledge and skills learned in the previous four courses.

The 200-level contracting courses are currently being revised and will be available in late FY 2006.

Why Are There Changes?

The changes are necessary for several reasons. First, more coursework will be conducted online. This will reduce the time that a professional must physically be away from home and out of the office. Second, the courses are now focused more on the mission that the contracting professional is supporting and less on the contracting "process."

When will we be able to take the courses?

That is a very good question. At press time, the Office of Procurement still did not have its FY 2005 training and accompanying travel budget. Each year, the Headquarters Office of Procurement provides a proposed training

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NASA Training Classes

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and travel budget to Headquarters Training and Development.

Usually by the middle of the first quarter of the new fiscal year, we are notified what our training and travel budgets are for the year. At that point, we contract to have NASA's procurement courses taught by the Defense Acquisition University (DAU) or a commercial provider certified by DAU. We issue a training schedule of courses at our training website, so everyone has an opportunity to see what and when classes will be offered. Headquarters then provides each

center with funding for travel to the courses depending on each center's needs and past history.

A year ago, we requested a budget to offer several sessions of each course. In January, with significant budget cuts looming, we were requested to review our budget request and resubmit a budget including only those courses that we could not do without and would "shut down operations" if they were not held. With that in mind and with input from all the center training coordinators, we resubmitted a smaller budget based on the minimum needs at the

centers. We are still awaiting a response on our revised budget.

Is Formal Training Enough?

While the contracting courses are designed to provide contracting professionals the knowledge, tools, and skills to perform their jobs, the best teacher is experience. This comes from hands-on, on-the-job experience that is monitored by more experienced professionals. The courses are the foundation upon which to build a center professional's body of knowledge; experience is the best teacher.

Center and Headquarters Training Points of Contact

If you have any further questions about training and how to sign up for classes once a schedule is announced, please contact your center training coordinator. A list of the coordinators is below.

Center	Name	Email	Phone
ARC	Aida Villagrancia	A.Villagrancia@nasa.gov	650-604-5082
DFRC	Brian Bowman	brian.bowman@dfrc.nasa.gov	661-276-3329
GRC	Angela Pierce	Angela.L.Pierce@grc.nasa.gov	216-433-2813
GSFC	Rex Elliott	Rex.Elliott@nasa.gov	301-286-0034
JSC	Suzi Penn	mary.m.penn@nasa.gov	281-483-8801
KSC	Gladys Escobar	Gladys.Escobar-1@nasa.gov	321-867-3035
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Procurement Countdown

Procurement Countdown is published by NASA's Office of Procurement.

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