

Agency builds rapport with contractor community

Matthew Sablan | Staff Writer

Government agencies form a core part of the acquisition enterprise; however, to maximize the benefits warfighters receive from the enterprise, the government must work in tandem with industry and non-government organizations. The Defense Contract Management Agency recently kicked off two initiatives to help build the agency's relationship with industry. The first is the revitalization of a previous practice, contractor training symposiums, which have started in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. The second initiative is the creation of an online Connect Point for Industry/Contractor Concerns.

BRINGING DCMA TO INDUSTRY

"We felt the need to reconnect with our local contractors," said La Tanya Kelley, DCMA Dallas industrial specialist. "We reached out to find what topics were of interest to them and structured the training symposium around those topics."

Taking that information, the contract management office began to pull together targeted training sessions that could be used to address contractors' concerns. "We can tailor different training symposiums for different contractors, based on their geography or their needs," said Ed Aranda, DCMA subject matter expert for the Defense Priorities and Allocations System and Engineering and Manufacturing, or DPAS, group.

"For example, we had a high volume of delinquencies within DPAS, so this training helped us get information to contractors' in-house teams and learn the problems they were having so we could better help them," Aranda said.

The April symposium focused on DPAS,



Defense Contract Management Agency Dallas personnel pose for a photo after the April contractor training symposium, from left: Manual Chavez, DCMA quality supervisor; Jim Treadwell, DCMA industrial specialist supervisor; Cheryl Pailin, DCMA Dallas contracts director; Dennis Hunt, DCMA Dallas deputy director; Ed Aranda, DCMA subject matter expert for the Defense Priorities and Allocations System and Engineering and Manufacturing group; Katherine Beal, DCMA Contracts SME; Bradley MacPherson, DCMA Transportation Officer. DCMA Dallas representatives and presenters gave contractors information on the changing world of contracting, evolving business rules and helped to repair the communication link with industry. (Photo courtesy of DCMA Dallas)

transportation, new business rules and quality assurance requirements.

Since each symposium is tailored for the specific contractors the CMO serves, they can also train contractors on changes to business systems, like Wide Area Work Flow and evolving regulations. Each symposium can feed into the next. For example, Kelley learned from the April symposium that contractors had more questions on quality assurance, so she and her team are looking to schedule a symposium focused solely on QA.

Symposiums also allow the agency to bring industry up to speed with changes to regulations and DCMA's business practices. They also serve as forums to share information that contractors may not have been receiving in the past. "Training needs to be ongoing for contractors," said Jim Treadwell, DCMA industrial specialist supervisor. "We also

had contractors saying they didn't know who their administrative contracting officer or quality assurance representative were. Once we knew about it, we were able to repair that communication link."

"The event was a great opportunity to not only provide valuable information on how to deal with the government, but also to reinforce our desire to assist our industrial base participants with the tools necessary for continued success and viability as a supplier," said Dennis Hunt, DCMA Dallas deputy director.

CONNECTING WITH INDUSTRY ENTERS TRIAL PERIOD

DCMA and industry also jointly recognized the need to connect with each other on cross-cutting policy matters during a February 2011 Council of Defense and Space Industries Association

crosstalk, or CODSIA. During that crosstalk, DCMA learned industry felt their issues were not always adequately addressed through DCMA's current infrastructure.

CODSIA consists of six industry trade associations representing thousands of federal government contractors nationwide, with a focus on federal acquisition policy issues. It is also part of DCMA's ongoing campaign for better communications with industry. Ultimately, the two organizations decided to add to the communications tools available for information exchanges and try a Web-based system that came to be known as the Connect Point for Industry/Contractor Concerns.

Following the crosstalks, CODSIA remains optimistic about their relationship with DCMA. "DCMA was very cooperative, and CODSIA had been discussing ways to further open up mechanisms for connecting with DCMA," said Alan Chvotkin, executive vice president of the Professional Services Council, which is a member of CODSIA. "We've been very pleased with the long-standing relationship between CODSIA and DCMA."

"Crosstalks include frank and open discussion in a round table setting," said Sharon Osborne, DCMA Contracts Directorate communicating with industry subject matter expert. "Mr. Williams truly looked to find a mutual understanding and a win-win scenario for all stakeholders."

"The crosstalks provided the information we needed to address industry's concerns," said Hycentha Hodge, DCMA West Region deputy director, who previously provided oversight to the Connecting with Industry program. Hodge said Williams is committed to addressing the concerns expressed by industry. "He wants industry to know we are listening and we want to know about any issues that cannot be resolved between the contractor and the CMO."

During one crosstalk, industry expressed frustration at being unaware when



Top: The image users see when accessing the Connect Point Web site. Connect Point provides a direct communication link to the agency and industry. (Image courtesy of DCMA Carson)

Middle: The Department of Veterans Affairs hosted the annual National Veteran Small Business Conference and Expo in Detroit, in June. The conference was an opportunity for veteran-owned small businesses to maximize opportunities in the federal marketplace. (Photo courtesy of the National Veteran Small Business Conference)

Bottom: Dennis Hunt, Defense Contract Management Agency Dallas deputy director, opens the training symposium by introducing the contractors to DCMA. Topics for the symposium were based on the requests from contractors and what the CMO noticed as deficiencies or delinquencies in the reporting programs, such as Wide Area Work Flow and the Defense Priorities and Allocations System. (Photo courtesy of DCMA Dallas)

“We want our working relationship with contractors to be productive. We want to acknowledge when they have unresolved concerns about the administration of their contracts by offering a venue in which to voice their unresolved concerns to the headquarters.”

—Hycentha Hodge, DCMA West Region deputy director and former Connecting with Industry program manager

changes were made in DCMA policy, mirroring issues the training symposiums also address. In response to this concern, Williams tasked the Contracts Directorate to devise an industry connect point to facilitate communication with industry. The Contracts Directorate has worked in collaboration with the Office of General Counsel, and Information Technology Directorate to develop a means by which it can communicate with industry and contractors to ensure industry receives responses back in a timely manner.

The pilot program for the Connect Point for Industry Concerns was briefed at the April CODSIA roundtable and is currently in a trial period. Hodge and Osborne both said the program’s capabilities will receive further enhancements, including a real simple syndicate, or RSS, feed to alert industry when the agency’s policy instructions are revised, rescinded or new policy is released. The RSS feed alert will provide registered industry users with more timely notification about changes to mission support policy instructions.

“Once the RSS feed is active, industry will have the opportunity to subscribe through the feed to get policy updates and information directly from DCMA,” Osborne said. “On the other hand, the connect point gives industry the opportunity to express their needs and concerns to DCMA.”

The feed will bring DCMA into the modern, digital world by simplifying how industry can get information about the agency. “This is really a great place to start,” said Anthony Dingman, DCMA Information Technology Directorate program manager. “Policy changes that directly impact industry can be loaded onto the RSS and give industry insight into

the changes in DCMA policy.”

The Web portal has been constructed and is active. Portfolio Management and Integration Directorate monitors incoming emails, allowing a central repository to receive communications from industry/contractor. PM&I has updated their concept of operations to include this function as a normal part of their operations. They will maintain a log of concerns and issues raised by industry/contractors and direct the message to appropriate Operations group (Chief Operations Officer, International or Special Programs) for immediate action and response. “PM&I collects info from the Ops Group and responds to the requestor,” Hodge said. “PM&I can use the data collected from the logs to perform trend analysis to share with the operations groups.”

“The Connect Point for Industry/Contractor Concerns is a gutsy move on DCMA’s part and DCMA is really putting itself out there,” Chvotkin said. “It is a good initiative and demonstrates that DCMA is willing to be open with industry.”


PM&I’s goal is to process the requests from start to response in 15 days. “We’re ready to support DCMA-AQ,” said Annie Ma, PM&I performance advocate, who will be one of the individuals monitoring the connect point. “The word is out, and we expect to see more emails from industry soon.”

INDUSTRY RESPONSES

Both the Connect Point for Industry/Contractor Concerns and the symposiums have received positive feedback from industry.

Some of the praise that the symposiums received expressed industry’s appreciation: “The training was very informative and thanks for reaching out to us.” Written responses to the symposium stressed that industry felt it was a “great idea” filled with “excellent topics.” Another response stated: “(The DCMA team was) very knowledgeable and energetic about the topics presented.”

These efforts are only some of the ways that the Contracts Directorate and the agency are working to build the Acquisition Enterprise by improving their relationship with industry. “These symposiums are going to help our relationship with the contractors. We want them to know that we are not their enemy; we need to work together,” Treadwell said.

Hodge agreed, saying, “We want our working relationship with contractors to be productive. We want to acknowledge when they have unresolved concerns about the administration of their contracts by offering a venue in which to voice their unresolved concerns to the headquarters.” 

Contractors provide the information below when using Connect Point:

- Contract number
- Contact information
 - Name
 - Company name
 - Telephone
 - Email address
- DCMA CMO information
 - CMO name
 - Name of CMO functional contact
- Detailed description of concern
- State whether the concern was elevated through the CMO chain of command