



Delivering the Goods

News from the U.S. Coast Guard Acquisition Directorate

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Coast Guard Releases Request for Proposal for Next Response Boat-Small

By Linda M. Johnson

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Coast Guard recently released a request for proposal (RFP) for the next version of the service’s Response Boat-Small (RB-S). This is part of an ongoing effort to replace all of the Coast Guard’s small boats as they reach the end of their service lives. The RB-S was procured to standardize all non-standard boats and meet the need for additional homeland security assets in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

“The existing RB-S has served the Coast Guard faithfully for many years, but in 2012, the first boats will reach the end of their service life, which is about 10 years, so it’s time to replace them,” said Dominique Bee, project manager for the RB-S project. “Acquisitions take time, so you have to start in advance. If you need to replace a boat once it reaches its 10th year of service, you really need to start in the eighth year to be prepared.”

The Coast Guard issued a request for information from prospective RB-S builders last February and determined that there is “very healthy competition,” he said. “There are plenty of boat builders who’ve expressed great interest in bidding on this. We’re very confident that we’re going to get some very good proposals and we’re going to have some very nice boats to select from.”

Responses to the Coast Guard’s Aug. 20 RFP are due Oct. 15. “Our strategy is to do a down-select



The Coast Guard’s Response Boat-Small helps meet the service’s need for additional homeland security assets and has proven to be an excellent vessel for conducting tactical operations. *U.S. Coast Guard photo*

process where we’re going to evaluate the paper proposals and based on those, we will award up to four contracts to build boats,” Bee said. “Then we’re going to do a boat-off, where we test the boats [in the water] and out of the four, pick a winner and that will be our RB-S.”

Bee explained that the Coast Guard expects to award the contracts in late December. Once the contracts are awarded, each builder will have “up to 150 days to deliver a boat and then a couple more months to conduct testing and evaluation,” he said. “If everything works out well, the plan is to award the first production boat contract in late fiscal year 2011.”

With contract options for up to 500 boats, the RB-S replacement is one of the largest boat buys of its type for the Coast Guard. That figure includes 470 boats for the Coast Guard, 20 for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) Customs and Border Protection and 10 for the U.S. Navy, depending on need and funding.

continued on page 2

inside:

Bridging the Acquisition Workforce Gap	p3
Master Chief Q & A	p4

continued from page 1

As the first non-major acquisition managed by the Acquisition Directorate, the RB-S is a pilot project to implement the Coast Guard's new non-major acquisition process.

"One of the exciting things is the fact that we're trying to implement the new policy and as a result, we're having some impact on what it's eventually going to be through trial and error," Bee explained. "We're trying to establish best practices and find the right balance between moving out quickly and getting stuff done, while still having good documents, good processes and the appropriate level of review and oversight."

An acquisition project is typically considered non-major if its lifecycle costs are projected to be less than \$300 million. Although the lifecycle costs for the RB-S are projected to be more than that, the Coast Guard received approval to designate the RB-S a non-major acquisition due to a number of factors, including "the reduced risk that comes from using a parent-craft or proven-hull design since current boat builders are building boats that are like the RB-S," he noted.

RB-S Requirements

"When you do acquisition, you often find that you have some constraints and criteria that you have to use that are going to drive your solution," Bee said. "The boat that we've specified is, by and large, similar to the existing RB-S boats," except for a possible small increase in length.

The original Defender-class RB-S boats have a length of 25 feet, two 225-horsepower outboard engines, a cabin and gun mounts both forward and aft. Procured in 2002 under an emergency acquisition



The Coast Guard recently published an RFP for the next version of the RB-S. Responses to the RFP are due Oct. 15. *U.S. Coast Guard photo*

authority after Sept. 11, the existing RB-S boats have proven to be excellent waterborne assets for conducting tactical operations.

The new RB-S requirements, which were approved in February, include a length of between 25 and 27 feet, the ability to go at least 40 knots and a minimum 150-nautical-mile range. The RB-S must also be transportable by an HC-130 aircraft. It will still have gun mounts and a four-person crew with room for up to 12 people.

The new RB-S will also have an upgraded communications and navigation suite, along with an increased emphasis on ergonomics, crew comfort and visibility. "It will be a better platform with state-of-the-market, shock-mitigating seats, which is a big plus in a small boat," Bee said.

"Our objective is to deliver a boat that will meet or exceed the sponsor's requirements but beyond

that, a boat that boat crews will want to drive and feel confident using in carrying out their Coast Guard missions," he noted. "As a former boat coxswain myself, I want to put out a boat that I would want to drive if I were still doing that."

The RB-S project has been "a team effort from the get-go. Our approach to this project was a collaborative effort between all the stakeholders, and those include the sponsor's representative, Office of Boat Forces, technical authorities, small boat product line, asset project office and contracting," Bee said. "We're very excited about delivering a new RB-S to the Coast Guard that we think is going to serve well when it finally gets delivered." ■

Bridging the Acquisition Workforce Gap: The Contracting Career Opportunity Program

By Michael Valliant

Senior Chief Michael Bumgardner had been in the Coast Guard for 18 years, working as a radioman and an information systems technician. Looking at retiring in the near future, he thought about trying to get his certification as a contracting officer. Chief Alan Boucher had worn the Coast Guard uniform for 24 years in the medical field and was in a similar situation, facing retirement and wondering what might come next.

For both men, the Coast Guard's Contracting Career Opportunity Program (CCOP) came along at the perfect time. The CCOP provides retirement-eligible military personnel with the training and experience necessary to join the Coast Guard's civilian contracting workforce.

Genesis

"We were looking through some of the capabilities of the workforce and knew that there were procurement professionals within the uniformed community who held contracting warrants, usually within the simplified acquisition procedures or SAP threshold [\$100,000 or less]," said William Yeager, who oversees the CCOP.

"While SAP skills and procedures are a little more streamlined than those of formal contracting procedures, these highly skilled Coastguardsmen shared similar training and experiences to their formal contracting counterparts," Yeager said. "In early 2009, we started looking into how we could engage this section of the workforce and provide them with exponentially greater skills and responsibilities to bring them to the formal side of contracting."



Chief Alan Boucher (left) and Senior Chief Michael Bumgardner (right) are among the first participants in the Coast Guard's Contracting Career Opportunity Program.
U.S. Coast Guard photo by Isaac Pacheco

CCOP began with interest from Yeager and support from the Acquisition Directorate's senior leadership, including the Assistant Commandant for Acquisition, then Rear Adm. Gary Blore and now Rear Adm. Ronald Rábago, as well as Master Chief Brett Ayer. They chartered a team to look into the needed contracting competencies and matched those competencies with the qualifications necessary to earn a Level II Federal Acquisition Contracting Certification (FAC-C).

"We figured out a way to help align their training plans, bring them on board for a couple years, and give them the experience and training to get them FAC-C Level II certified, which obviously makes them more competitive when applying for a position," said Yeager.

Now in its second year, the CCOP is a two-year training program of

rotational assignments targeted to active duty personnel with varying degrees of contracting experience.

In the Real World

That's where Bumgardner and Boucher come into the picture; they are two of the first class of five CCOP participants. Selected in the summer of 2009 for the 2010 program, Bumgardner and Boucher were the first to arrive in Washington, D.C., to start their training. The other participants in the inaugural class are Chief Warrant Officer Jeffrey Storey, Chief Warrant Officer Duncan Whiteside and Chief Michael Baltzgar.

In the various jobs they've held so far, Bumgardner and Boucher have been developing skills and experience that are useful in the contracting field.

continued on page 4

continued from page 3

"Working in project management, you draw up a lot of statements of work and create documents for solicitations for contracts with the contracting division," Bumgardner said. "So I was more on the user side of it, providing them with the documentation to solicit the contracts."

The years of service that Bumgardner and Boucher bring to the table add a level of familiarity with the Coast Guard that someone straight out of college or from a different field wouldn't possess.

"I was purchasing items for a small boat training team and one of the questions that came up was, 'Is this something that is really needed?'" Boucher said. "And just from my experience of being on small boats

for several years, I can say, 'Yes, it is.'"

Not only do CCOP participants bring real world Coast Guard experience, but they also bring something more that comes with their service and their uniform. Bumgardner and Boucher have seen it in their interactions with teammates and others in the Coast Guard contracting field.

"I realize that these are really basic concepts, but I've had people ask me, 'Now if I see a guy with a gold clover leaf, what do I call him?'" Boucher noted. "So a lot of these little idiosyncrasies, they're utilized frequently to help them understand. It's about simple respect, common courtesies, things like that; understanding the uniform and understanding roles."

Moving Forward

With the 2010 CCOP participants in place and working on their contracting teams, the focus has begun to shift to the 2011 CCOP participants, who were selected this summer and will report to Washington next summer. There has been substantial interest in the program from a cross section of active duty men and women—including those with backgrounds in purchasing, human resources, medical, finance and supplies, information technology and aviation.

These diverse backgrounds speak to the need for the program and its effectiveness in helping alleviate a potential contracting officer shortage and supplementing the current contracting workforce. And that's what CCOP was designed to do. ■

ASK THE MASTER CHIEF

MASTER CHIEF AYER,

Q. I understand that the Offshore Patrol Cutter (OPC) will not have gas turbine engines. Why is that?

A. Although I can't say that for sure because the OPC, which is the planned replacement for our current medium endurance cutters (WMECs), has not been designed yet, you may be correct.

Gas turbine engines have many advantages. They offer a very high horsepower-to-weight ratio, which allows a ship to go significantly faster than other vessels of similar size that are powered only by diesels. However, they also come with a significant cost both in dollars and impacts to other operational requirements.

Current gas turbine engines are expensive to buy, expensive to maintain and expensive to feed. The fuel consumption of a modern gas turbine engine is exponentially higher than a modern diesel engine. This increased fuel consumption is not just a factor in operational costs; it is a significant factor in the operational range of the cutter. It also may mean greater maintenance costs over the lifecycle of the cutter. In shipbuilding, every decision results in tradeoffs. Our goal is to meet the operational requirements while at the same time providing an economical, reliable and sustainable vessel.

The question we need to ask ourselves is, can the designer meet our operational requirements with or without a gas turbine engine? The good news right now is that our current acquisition strategy allows for significant flexibility and innovation in the design of the cutter. This means if a new and innovative design is proposed or if new technology is introduced to the market, these will be evaluated based on their merits and their ability to meet our operational requirements.

— MCPO Brett F. Ayer, Command Master Chief, Coast Guard Acquisition Directorate

[To submit a question for an upcoming Acquisition Directorate newsletter, please e-mail Master Chief Brett F. Ayer directly at: Brett.F.Ayer@uscg.mil or acquisitionwebsite@uscg.mil.]

