

NOAALink User's Quarterly



*Service. Partnership. Commitment.
Where Business and IT Connect.*

A burst of activity completes another year in the NOAALink Program's mission to drive standardization, alignment, and cost-effectiveness in IT products and services at NOAA and across the Department of Commerce (DOC). The NOAALink community navigated the year-end rush of contract and task order awards for IT requirements and progressed enterprise-wide initiatives that streamline common needs and capture economies of scale.

Thank you for your support of NOAALink through all of those activities. Your patience during the recent heavy surge of requests is appreciated. Teamwork from many of you on high-impact projects also deserves recognition for continuing to modernize the agency's IT platform and secure better prices for products and services.

NOAALink transitions into FY13 with momentum. Improved process guidance and templates help customers submit thorough IT requirements that meet mission objectives and support the DOC/NOAA IT vision. Focused more broadly on high-impact opportunities, the NOAALink team is primed to deliver additional enterprise-wide initiatives through strong partnerships with project managers and advisory support to agency leadership. Whether it's a Blanket Purchase Agreement (BPA) that makes ordering software products easier or a consolidation of requirements that saves significant taxpayer dollars, each accomplishment fulfills the NOAALink program goal of smart IT planning and management.

BEST PRACTICES

Set Your Project Up for Success

Bold goals for transforming IT at NOAA mean many projects are in play at any one time. All that activity increases the number and complexity of contracts and task orders, which as always, must be fiscally responsible, follow regulations, and meet performance objectives. Below is a set of proven contract and task order management techniques to help you attain first-class results for your project.

Pre-Award

Engage Completely – The first step in getting exactly what you want is to be involved. Expend some effort early to write a solid requirements document, and work closely with the NOAALink Program Office (PO). Make decisions involving all relevant parties and ask about similar requirements within your Line Office/Staff Office and NOAA. You will also want to consult with end users to capture their perspectives as Subject Matter Experts (SMEs). Once a contract specialist has been assigned to your requisition, collaborate often to create a high-quality solicitation.

Use Templates – While the requisition process involves some paperwork, there is help. Always refer to the handy templates and checklists posted on the [NOAALink website](#) or ask the NOAALink PO about special circumstances. By using approved master documents, you get guidance on the appropriate details to include and it lessens the chance that some important information will be missed.

Rigorous Requirements – Doing a good job of describing what you want to accomplish – within IT standards – is the key to a smooth acquisition process. The federal government encourages agencies to focus on performance-based contracting as a way to obtain better

BACK TO BUSINESS AS USUAL

The redirection of requisitions under \$25,000 to field delegates was a temporary solution for processing the volume of requisitions submitted at the end of the fiscal year. The standard NOAALink policy will apply in FY13. All IT requisitions - with the exception micro-purchases, PC and accessories purchases that can be made through the DOC Portal, and items classified as office equipment – will be processed through NOAALink.

service at a more manageable cost, so make sure your requirements define what success looks like for your project. If you explain the desired outcome, the contractors will compete to determine the best way to achieve that outcome.

Design the Transition – If your requisition means IT requirements will be handled differently than before, or possibly by a different team, work out the details of that change using a transition plan. Map roles and responsibilities, update and create process and policy documentation, develop a schedule, and plan communications and training. And transition plans may help get better detail in your requirements document.

Post-Award

Kickoff – If your requirement includes contractor staff, get the team off on the right foot. In partnership with the Contracting Officer Representative (COR), conduct a formal orientation outlining the organization's goals, values, and history. Provide some insight into the organization's culture, its terminology, and way of doing business. Communicate how you will define success, clearly explain deliverables, and point to the project's performance metrics and associated remedies.

Communicate – Regular communication reduces the chance that something will 'fall through the cracks.' Maintain continuous oral and written communication with both the contractor and the COR. Good relationships make the work more pleasant and make it easier to stay in tune to delivery progress, contractor performance, and contract administration processes.

Constantly Track – Be diligent about gathering and tracking project data. Maintain insight into project spending and contract expiration, and always allow sufficient time to process product and maintenance renewals, task order modifications and options. Implement a strong change control process. Measure compliance and performance regularly and capture lessons learned including best practices to emulate, worst practices to avoid, and information about new processes, tools, industry contacts, and technology.

Wrap It Up – Follow the task order through to closeout by working with the COR and Contracting Officer (CO) to approve final deliverables, process invoices, off-board contractor staff, and wrap-up performance evaluation activities. If the work is continuing in a different form, closeout activities may help guide transition planning.

ON THE RADAR

Enterprise Initiatives

Red Hat – NOAALink is working to establish a consolidated purchase agreement for Red Hat software products, including operating system platform, cloud computing, virtualization, management, and service-oriented architecture solutions. Consolidated purchase agreements such as Blanket Purchase Agreements (BPAs) and Enterprise License Agreements (ELAs), which will be available to other DOC bureaus, offer significant cost savings and simplify the acquisition process. The project team, with representation from NOAA Line/Staff Offices, conducted its kickoff meeting and has begun verifying requirements that should be covered under the consolidated purchase agreement and developing the contract documentation.

Esri – A crucial tool for five NOAA Line Offices and the Census Bureau, Esri software is used for geographic mapping, analysis and visualization of data. NOAALink has established a working group of individuals from Line Offices and Census to finalize requirements and contract documentation for a consolidated purchase agreement.

Mobile Device Management (MDM) – An award was made for software and services to secure, monitor, manage, and support mobile devices that access government networks, data, and systems. MDM includes remote distribution of applications, data, and configuration settings for mobile devices, and is another solution available DOC-wide.

Service Desk Consolidation – An example of NOAALink's objective to help move NOAA toward common IT solutions, the NOAA National Service Desk (NNSD) establishes an enterprise-wide Tier 1 call center. Within the span of a year, representatives from Line/Staff offices and NOAALink gathered and validated requirements, developed documentation for the acquisition package, evaluated proposals, and made an award.

Data Center Consolidation – Developing plan to consolidate NOAA data center infrastructure.

FURTHER GUIDANCE

Desktops, Laptops, and Accessories

Desktop and laptop computers in a variety of configurations and other standard computer accessories should be ordered through the Department of Commerce PC and Accessories Acquisition Portal. The portal is a convenient online tool designed to save time and reduce acquisition costs.

For desktop, laptop, and computer accessories purchases that exceed purchase card limits and require a C.Request, we recommend that you create your shopping list in the portal, save it, and attach a copy of it to your C.Request. Make sure the cart number is shown in your shopping list. NOAALink is not involved in purchase card or C.Request orders through the PC and Accessories Acquisition Portal.

MEET THE FACES BEHIND NOAALINK

This quarter, meet Ash Dawood, Project Manager, NOAALink Program Office, and Mary Anne Young, Contracting Officer, Acquisition and Grants Office.

Ash works closely with enterprise-wide projects, either as the lead or as a representative of the NOAALink Program Office, and conducts IT project pipeline analysis for acquisition planning. During the requirements gathering and analysis stages of a project, Ash ensures that all meetings are held and documented, all parties are represented, and that the desired outcomes are achieved. Additionally, he leads development of project documents, monitors activities and progress against the project plan, and reports progress, issues, and risks.



Mary Anne is part of the acquisition management team. As the acquisition team leader, she is authorized by the government to publicize procurement opportunities, make contract awards, and modify contract terms or schedules. Prior to and throughout the acquisition process, Mary Anne provides valuable guidance to the NOAALink PO team and customers concerning unique acquisition needs. She assists customers with acquisition planning, assigns contract specialists to process acquisition packages, tracks the progress of purchase requests, monitors the program's 8(a) and small business utilization compliance, resolves contractor issues, and coordinates contract closeout functions.

If you are requesting desktops, laptops, or other standard computer accessories and not using those listed in the DOC PC and Accessories Acquisition Portal, you must attach documentation in C.Request explaining why the portal items do not meet your requirements and Line/Staff Office approval for not acquiring portal-listed items.

Also note that in accordance with HSPD12, all newly acquired workstations, laptop computers, and mobile computing devices used to access NOAA IT systems must be equipped with a smart card (DoD Common Access Card (CAC)) reader. Please ensure that your specifications include a smart card reader.

Make Plans for Training

The NOAALink Program Office is currently in the process of revising the NOAALink 101 FY13 training to include updated information and more tips that help you through the acquisition steps. The Program Office offers training on:

- Pre-award process for those who will be involved in completing a NOAALink request submission
- Post-award process for those who will assume the Task Manager role of monitoring all technical aspects of the contract and assisting in contract administration

Refer to the [Training page](#) on the NOAALink website to find training materials and the training schedule. Please check the website regularly for updates to the training schedule.

RESOURCES

Visit our Website

Visit our website for the most up-to-date NOAALink information. FAQs, required documents, and training information are routinely updated for your reference. In order to assure you are viewing the most recent information, be sure to access the site via <http://www.cio.noaa.gov/NOAALink/index.html>.

Email us

If you are unable to find the information you require on our website, or if you need further guidance, please feel free to contact us at NOAALink.Help@noaa.gov.

Join our Mailing List

To receive important updates on program requirements, required documents, and upcoming training sessions, please join our mailing list by sending an email to NOAALink.Help@noaa.gov.