



DEFENSE ADVANCED RESEARCH PROJECTS AGENCY
3701 NORTH FAIRFAX DRIVE
ARLINGTON, VA 22203-1714

March 5, 2014

DARPA Proposer Communication Plan

Statement of Agency Commitment:

- DARPA personnel will communicate early, frequently, and constructively with industry. DARPA's communication and outreach efforts shall include not only those businesses that traditionally do business with DARPA, but they shall also extend to other commercial large businesses, small businesses, universities, non-profits, and vendors with whom DARPA has not worked in the past.
- DARPA will endeavor to communicate with industry, academia, and the not-for-profit community regarding all Research and Development (R&D) opportunities. Likewise, DARPA will communicate with industry regarding its supplies and services acquisitions to the maximum extent practicable.
- DARPA will protect non-public information including proposers' confidential information and the agency's source selection information.

Senior Agency Official Responsible for Promoting Proposer Engagement:

Scott Ulrey, Deputy Director
DARPA's Contracts Management Office
Competition Advocate

Efforts Undertaken or Planned to Reduce Barriers and Promote Engagement:

Program Managers are encouraged to conduct group and one-on-one communications with proposers before, during, and after the solicitation process. The following are examples of acceptable forms of communicating with potential proposers:

- *Proposers' Days*: It is common practice at DARPA to conduct Proposers' Days in conjunction with the release of BAAs and Requests for Proposal (RFPs). Program Managers are encouraged to continue this practice and to broadly publicize these events to include announcements at FBO.gov and/or Grants.gov as well as at other venues that will access non-traditional proposers.
- *Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)*: It is a best practice to permit proposers to ask questions following the release of a BAA or RFP. When the question is unique to a

specific proposer, the answer should be provided directly to that proposer. However, often the questions are of such a nature that the response will be informative to all proposers. In these cases, the question and the response should be shared as a FAQ. FAQs should be posted together at a URL that was published in the BAA or else be posted together with the BAA at FBO.gov and/or Grants.gov.

- *Proposal Abstracts:* Oftentimes, BAAs will request proposers to submit proposal abstracts. These short, summary-level snapshots of the research the proposer intends to undertake should their full proposal be accepted for award are reviewed by the PM prior to the due date for full proposals. The PM then provides comments to the proposer and either encourages or discourages the proposer to submit a full proposal. It should be noted in the communication to the proposer, that even if a full proposal is discouraged, nothing precludes the performer from submitting its full proposal; such proposals will be given the same level of review as all others.
- *Oral Presentations:* Solicitations may request the proposer provide an oral presentation to the panel of government reviewers as part of its proposal. Questions and answers are encouraged as part of the oral presentation process.
- *Communication during the Scientific Review Process for BAAs and Research Announcements (RAs):* Further guidance is available in DARPA Instruction 20, “Soliciting, Evaluating, and Selecting Proposals Under Broad Agency Announcements and Research Announcements” and the accompanying “Guide to Broad Agency Announcements and Research Announcements.”
- *Discussions during RFP Source Selections:* Discussions are permitted to be conducted during FAR Part 15 source selections. DARPA personnel are encouraged to conduct discussions as necessary to inform the source selection process. The contracting officer for each procurement effort will determine when discussions are necessary and appropriate.
- *Informal Feedback Sessions:* Proposers submitting BAAs and RAs may request informal feedback once the scientific review process is completed. Such sessions will be conducted in accordance with DARPA Instruction 20 and the accompanying guide.
- *Debriefings after RFP Source Selections:* In accordance with the provisions of FAR Subpart 15.506, an offeror may request a debriefing to discuss the basis for the selection decision and contract award.
- *Ideas Solicitation from the Research Community:* DARPA is soliciting unique ideas from the research community. Communication with proposers may be used to describe the strengths and weaknesses inherent in the proposed solution; however, never should anyone within DARPA help a proposer improve its proposal by articulating alternative technical solutions. Likewise, DARPA personnel shall not provide feedback that has the effect of transferring proprietary information from one proposer to another.

- *Exceptions to Communications:* If a PM should determine that no communications with proposers shall take place relative to his or her BAA or RFP, then he or she must justify in writing the rationale supporting the ban on communications, and such written justification must be approved by the DARPA Deputy Director prior to the release of the BAA or RFP.
- *Small Business Outreach:* The Director, Small Business Programs Office, is charged with outreach to small business. Such outreach is conducted through attendance at small business conferences and events as well as one-on-one communication with individual small businesses.
- *Classified Information:* Nothing within this Proposer Communication Plan obviates the need to protect classified information.
- *Industry and FFRDC Summits:* The DARPA Director and DARPA Deputy Director conduct R&D community outreach on an ad-hoc basis. These events are venues for information sharing and idea propagation and are advertised at the FBO.com and/or Grants.gov and through other appropriate channels to encourage maximum participation.

Training and Awareness Efforts for Employees and Contractors:

This Proposer Communication Plan shall be widely promulgated throughout DARPA to all employees, support contractors, and agents. The Plan will also be made available on the DARPA webpage for all potential proposers to read. Training in proposer communications shall be incorporated into the introductory Program Manager's course.

Six months after the publication of the Proposer Communication Plan, the Senior Agency Official Responsible for Promoting Proposer Engagement will follow-up with DARPA employees and the DARPA research community to further refine and improve communication. Such follow-up may include written surveys, one-on-one interviews with personnel, and/or audits of DARPA solicitations to ensure they provide adequate opportunities for proposer communication.

Key Roles and Responsibilities:

Contracting Officer: The Contracting Officer (CO) is responsible for ensuring that all requirements of the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement (DFARS), Department of Defense Grants and Agreements Regulations (DoDGARS), and all other pertinent acquisition and assistance regulatory and policy guidance are adhered to during the scientific review and source selection processes. The responsibilities ascribed to the CO also apply to all support contractors working with him or her.

Program Manager: The Program Manager is charged with giving all proposers a fair opportunity to communicate. The PM must avoid technical leveling during communications, i.e. the PM must not share any aspect of one proposer's technical solution with any other proposer. The PM must uphold the highest standards for safeguarding proposer data in his or her care. Likewise, all source selection sensitive data must be protected. The responsibilities ascribed to the PM also apply to all support contractors working with him or her.

COR/COTR: The Contracting Officer's Representative has the unique responsibility of communicating performer concerns to DARPA and DARPA's concerns to the performer. In cases where the COR is responsible for multiple contracts, grants, or agreements under the same program, he or she must be careful not to reveal proprietary information from one performer to another during the course of his or her communications.

General Counsel (GC): GC must be consulted in the case of any inadvertent release of contractor proprietary information. GC is available to provide advice relative to any question regarding the proprietary nature of data.

Director, Small Business Programs Office (SBPO): The Director, SBPO, leads DARPA's outreach efforts to small business. The Director, SBPO, is the small business advocate within DARPA and ensures that all BAAs and RFPs provide adequate opportunities for small businesses to communicate and participate.

Links to Existing DARPA Instructions and Policies:

DI 20 "Soliciting, Evaluating, and Selecting Proposals Under Broad Agency Announcements and Research Announcements":

www.darpa.mil/Opportunities/Contract_Management/Solicitation_Policy_and_Procedures.aspx

DARPA Guide to Broad Agency Announcements and Research Announcements:

www.darpa.mil/Opportunities/Contract_Management/Solicitation_Policy_and_Procedures.aspx