



**Vendor Communication Plan
June 2020**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION VENDOR COMMUNICATION PLAN

Introduction

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) spends over \$6 billion annually on contracts for goods and services. Access to current market information is critical for agency program managers as they define requirements. Current market information access is also important for contracting officers as they develop acquisition strategies, seek opportunities for small business, and negotiate contract terms. Industry partners are often the best source of this information. Productive interactions between the Federal government and industry partners are encouraged so that the government clearly understands the marketplace and can award best value contracts. The Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) authorizes a broad range of opportunities for vendor communications and the Department will take full advantage of these flexibilities.

Purpose

The purpose of this Vendor Communication Plan is to promote collaborative communication between program offices, acquisition offices, and industry partners. This document outlines DOT's commitment, strategies and efforts to publicize communication opportunities, reduce unnecessary barriers, and prioritize engagement opportunities. Nothing in this document should be construed as authorization to violate applicable ethic rules, procurement integrity requirements, or other statutes or regulation that govern communication and information sharing.

I. The Department's Commitment

The Department is committed to:

- a) Communicating early, frequently, and constructively with industry to include small businesses, and subgroups of small businesses in communications with industry;
- b) Promoting the inclusion of new vendors to expand the Department's industrial base;
- c) Identifying procurements in the DOT Procurement Forecast that possibly allow for additional communication with industry; and
- d) Ensuring compliance with applicable Federal and/or Departmental regulations and/or laws with regards to procurement integrity and protection of information.

II. Identification of DOT Industry Liaison, Small Business Specialists, and Acquisition Innovation Advocate

A list and contact information for DOT's Industry Liaison(s) is maintained on its public-facing website, here:

<https://www.transportation.gov/mission/administrations/administration/senior-procurement-executive/dot-industry-liaison-information>

A list and contact information for DOT's Small Business Specialists is maintained on its public-facing website, here:

<https://www.transportation.gov/osdbu/procurement-assistance/talk-dot-small-business-specialist>

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A list and contact information for Federal Acquisition Innovation Advocate (AIA) Council members is maintained on the Acquisition Gateway, here:

<https://hallways.cap.gsa.gov/app/#/gateway/acquisition-innovation/7822/acquisition-innovation-advocates-aia-directory>

III. Efforts Undertaken or Planned to Reduce Barriers and Promote Engagement

An effective communication plan requires a balance between internal and external stakeholder interests. Such a balance is necessary to manage competing interests in operational security concerns, privacy matters; executive deliberative processes; compliance with statutes, rules and regulations, resource availability; and, "level playing field" environment for potential and incumbent contractors.

DOT will take the following steps (as appropriate) to reduce barriers and promote vendor engagement, and expand competition and transparency:

- Make available the names and contact information of the Department's Industry Liaisons and Vendor Communication Plan, which will be maintained on DOT's public facing website;
- Disseminate information contained in the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Myth-Busting memos to the Department's acquisition workforce;
- Provide useful/helpful resources for vendors on its public facing website, such as OMB Myth-Busting memos;
- Encourage DOT acquisition workforce members to utilize debriefing best practices contained in OMB Myth-Busting Memo No. 3, and the innovative business practices and strategies included in OMB Myth-Busting Memo No. 4.
- Sponsor vendor expos (including small-business-only expos);
- Hold vendor one-on-one matchmaking events with small businesses, agency buyers, and Federal prime contractors;
- Conduct industry days, reverse industry days, and pitch days;
- Host small business outreach sessions; and
- Use surveys to obtain feedback from vendors interested in doing business with DOT, current DOT contractors, and DOT acquisition workforce members on the acquisition process.

IV. Criteria for Identifying Which Acquisitions Should Include Vendor Input in the Pre-Award Phase

DOT's internal acquisition procedural guidance¹ – the Transportation Acquisition Manual (TAM) – requires that acquisition plans for all DOT acquisitions over the simplified acquisition threshold include a discussion that summarizes the results of market research efforts to include how many businesses² responded to RFIs, sources sought, indicated an interest in the

¹ Issued in accordance with FAR 1.301(a)(2).

² To include business size standard/socio-economic category for respondents.

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procurement, attended industry days, and/or any other Program/Project Management market research/reach-out effort.

While DOT’s internal acquisition guidance does not define a minimum dollar threshold for including comprehensive vendor engagement during the acquisition process, DOT acquisition professionals are encouraged to (and often do) engage industry for a wide range of procurement types and sizes, especially:

- Procurements with new requirements;
- Procurements that received limited responses to previous solicitations;
- High risk procurements;
- Complex and large-scale procurements; and
- Re-competitions.

V. Publication of Engagement Events

DOT events (industry days, small business outreach sessions, pre-solicitation conferences, etc.) are published publicly and strive to reach the maximum vendor engagement. Publications of events may utilize any one or a combination of the following sites:

- Contract Opportunities: <https://beta.sam.gov>
- DOT Social Media Sites (Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook)
- DOT Procurement Forecast: www.transportation.gov/osdbu
- DOT OSDBU News and Events: <https://www.transportation.gov>
- DOT Industry Liaison Information Page:
<https://www.transportation.gov/mission/administrations/administration/senior-procurement-executive/dot-industry-liaison-information>.

VI. Roles and Responsibilities

Official	Roles and Responsibilities
Contracting Officer/Contract Specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document industry engagement as part of each applicable procurement’s market research and acquisition planning per DOT policies and procedures; • Work with the OSDBU and small business specialists to identify the best ways to reach out to small businesses; • Participate in vendor engagement and outreach initiatives; • In coordination with the Small Business Specialist, update and maintain procurement forecast records. The forecast is used by many small businesses to determine where to invest bid and proposal costs so be as

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	<p>knowledgeable as possible about the content of the document;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dispel common vendor engagement misconceptions by reading, sharing, and employing/encouraging practices in OMB’s Myth-Busting memos; • When feasible, conduct pre-solicitation/pre-proposal conference; • Whenever feasible issue draft solicitation and solicit feedback from vendors; • Publish sources sought/request for information (RFI) notices, as appropriate; and • Publish timely notifications in accordance with FAR Part 5 in https://beta.sam.gov. • Conduct pre- and post-award debriefings/feedback sessions on competitive procurements using best practices outlined in OMB Myth-Busting No. 3 Memo.
Industry Liaison(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote timely responses to general vendor requests where appropriate, including from new entrants and small businesses; • Assist program and acquisition personnel develop strategies for engaging potential vendors that can provide capabilities necessary to achieve agency missions; • Maintain and update, as appropriate, the vendor communication plan to improve interaction throughout the acquisition lifecycle; • Work with the agency's Acquisition Innovation Advocate (AIA) and OSDBU to drive practices that improve communication with vendors; • Encourage vendor feedback on agency acquisitions, such as through use of Acquisition 360, and to the extent possible, monitor marketplace interest in agency requirements; and • Share stories on the Innovation Hub to promote adoption of good communication practices.
Program/Project Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with the CO and small business specialist in developing an appropriate vendor engagement strategy;

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the need for introducing new entrants to the market and recommend to the CO ways to do this; and • Perform timely market research to determine if there is an adequate number of vendors to ensure good competition.
Contracting Officer Representative (COR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify ways to improve communication after award, such as award kick- off events or vendor boards (for multiple award contracts); • Notify the CO of all vendor engagement activities and document as appropriate; and • Collaborate with the CO to provide informative/useful pre- and post-award debriefings/feedback sessions to vendors on competitive procurements.
Legal Counsel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage vendor communications to the maximum extent practicable; • Be available to advise the CO and team so they understand what is considered appropriate communications in terms of content, delivery methodology, etc.; and • Assist with training the staff on appropriate and permissible vendor engagement activities.
Ethics Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure ethics training clearly explains what communications are permissible versus prohibited.
Acquisition Career Manager (ACM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep acquisition workforce and program offices informed of training or related Opportunities; and • Provide COs, PMs, CORs, and others with information on training or awareness activities to improve vendor engagement.
OSDBU and Small Business Specialists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain and review the agency procurement forecast; • Ensure that the acquisition team understands what is in the agency 's procurement forecast and the importance of the forecast; and • Use the Small Business Central Event Listing on https://beta.sam.gov to publicize Opportunities - this functionality, recently released, helps small businesses find outreach events and promotes competition

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Chief Information Officer (CIO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CIO will review digital tools that could promote outreach; and • Develop rules and record keeping for digital engagements.
Competition Advocate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote competition; • Encourage industry outreach; and • Review and approve requests where competition is not in the best interest of the government.

VII. Training and Awareness Efforts for Employees and Contractors

The TAM provides specific guidance to contracting officers and requirements officials on engaging with industry. The TAM provides guidance on:

- Improving communication with industry and highlights misconceptions/facts regarding vendor communication; and
- Available training courses on effective vendor engagement (to include debriefing/feedback strategies).

In addition to these resources, DOT leverages internal working group and communication methods to disseminate information on additional opportunities to engage with industry.

VIII. Resources

Office of the Senior Procurement Executive:

<https://www.transportation.gov/assistant-secretary-administration/procurement/senior-procurement-executive>

Office of the Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU)/ DOT Procurement Forecast:

<https://www.transportation.gov/content/office-small-and-disadvantaged-business-utilization>

Grant Opportunities:

<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/search-grants.html>

Federal Acquisition Institute Periodic Table of Acquisition Innovations

<https://www.fai.gov/periodic-table/>

Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Myth Busting Memos

https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/management/office-federal-procurement-policy/#_Office_of_Federal_1

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IX. Follow-Up with Employees and Industry Representatives

DOT welcomes feedback on this plan from both industry representatives and DOT employees. Individuals are encouraged to provide feedback on the plan, as well as information on challenges and barriers that impede vendor engagement to the DOT Industry Liaisons at: industryliaison@dot.gov.