



US Army Corps of Engineers,  
Albuquerque District (SPA)  
Training Session  
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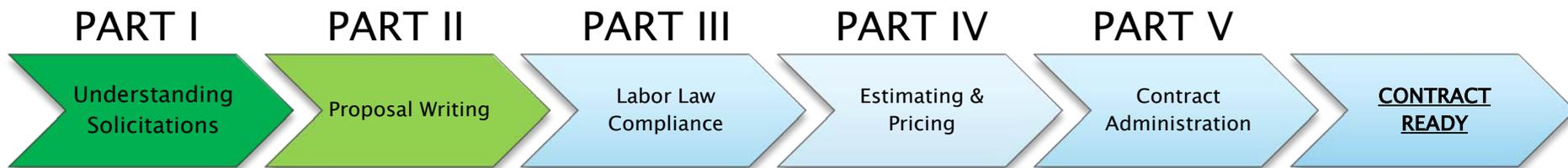
Responding Effectively to Request for Proposals

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# Today's content is from the PTAP “Contract Ready” Series

- ◆ The five part (10 hour) series is a comprehensive PTAP course that prepares contractors for doing business with the Federal government.
- ◆ Today\* we will hit highlights on some of the most important points on the first two modules in the series – this will not teach you **how** to write a proposal, but if you **should** submit a proposal.



\*The complete series is available from PTAP beginning April 2016. One on one counseling is available at any time on any topic related to proposal responses.

# Today's Objectives

- ❖ Understand the components of solicitations used by governmental entities.
- ❖ Understand the importance of Past Performance.
- ❖ Be able to, relatively quickly, scan a solicitation to make a well informed bid/no bid decision.

# Topics

- ◆ Topic 1: Parts of a Solicitation
- ◆ Topic 2: Solicitation Review Process
- ◆ Topic 3: Tips and Tricks for understanding solicitations
- ◆ Topic 4: Past Performance

# Topic 1: PARTS OF A SOLICITATION

Section Letter (Fed only)	Section Title	Description	Contract Ready Module that covers
Section A.	Information to Offerors	Identifies POC, how to acknowledge amendments. This section is usually SF-1449.	I.
Section B.	Supplies or Services and Price/Costs	Provides contract type, place for pricing Contract Line Items (CLINs), Subcontract Line Items (SLINs), and all other billable items. Gives period of performance, and potential option periods (if any).	IV.
Section C.	Statement of Work (SOW)	Describes what the government agency wants you to do, or supply. In your proposal you will address each item and customize your proposal by creating your “approach”.	I.
Section D.	Packages and Marking	Defines how contract deliverables (e.g., reports) need to be packaged and shipped. Note that the POC for receipt may not be the CO of the RFP.	V.

# Topic 1: PARTS OF A SOLICITATION

Section Letter (Fed only)	Section Title	Description	Will be discussed further?
Section E.	Inspection and Acceptance	Process used by government to accept deliverables and consequences if not accepted. Note the time to review as payments can hinge on acceptance and has a “cost of money” impact	V.
Section F.	Deliveries or Performance	Defines how the CO will control the work performed and how you will deliver certain contract items. Can highlight specific deliverables stated in the contract and expected by the agency within a certain time period.	I. & V.
Section G	Contract Administrative Data	Important for the winner but may have some pricing implications (like workday info). It contains addition POC info like the COTR, the method of payment, the 75% depleted notice, and the required contents of the invoice.	V.
Section H.	Special Contract Requirements	Can contain a wide range of special contract requirements like Key Personnel, Emergency Preparedness, Protecting Sensitive Information, Background Investigations,	V.

# Topic 1: PARTS OF A SOLICITATION

Section Letter (Fed only)	Section Title	Description	Will be discussed further?
Section I.	Contract Clauses/General Provisions	Identifies the contract clauses incorporated by reference in the RFP. All are binding.	I. & V.
Section J.	Attachments, Exhibits	Appendices to the solicitation. Examples range from technical specifications through statement of work items and labor categories required by the federal government.	II.
<b>Section K.</b>	<b>Representation s/Certifications</b>	<b>Must be completed, usually at sam.gov, by an official authorized to bind the firm and must be returned with the proposal. They are legally binding.</b>	<b>I., &amp; II.</b>
Section L.	Proposal Preparation Instructions	Instructions for: how to format the documents; how to outline material; how to submit questions regarding the procurement; how the proposal is to be delivered; and sometimes notices, conditions, or other instructions.	II.
<b>Section M.</b>	<b>Evaluation Criteria</b>	<b>This section outlines how the agency will assess and evaluate the proposals it receives. Following review of the 1449 or other info to offerors, this is the first thing to find and read.</b>	<b>I., II., &amp; IV</b>

# Topic 1: PARTS OF A SOLICITATION

## “Section A: Information to Offerors”

\*this becomes the cover sheet of the contract

First things first! Make sure if a solicitation is “restricted” that your firm has the appropriate set-aside status.

-  -Government fills out for solicitation release
-  -Contractor fills out for proposal submission
-  -Government fills out for awarding the contract



# Topic 1: PARTS OF A SOLICITATION

## “Section K. Representations and Certifications”



Are you registered in sam.gov the System for Award Management?

**SAM Status Tracker**

Check registration status by typing in a DUNS number

DUNS Number  Plus 4 (Optional)

Or, check registration status by typing in a (NY)CAGE Code

(NY)CAGE Code

gunnison federal services

**Status: Active**

Your registration was activated on Dec 02, 2015. It expires on Dec 01, 2016 which is one year after you submitted it for processing.

<b>Core Data</b>	<b>Assertions</b>	<b>Reps &amp; Certs</b>	<b>POCs</b>	<b>Submit</b>	<b>Processing</b>	<b>Active</b>
Completed	Completed	Completed	Completed	Completed	Completed	Completed



- ▶ You must be registered in sam.gov to be receive a Federal contract award; otherwise your proposal is “non-compliant” and will not be considered.
- ▶ Allow several business days from the time you register in SAM to the time you submit a proposal.
- ▶ If you need help registering, or updating a registration in SAM – call your PTAP advisor.
- ▶ Follow the Proposal Instructions in Section L.
- ▶ If not required to submit a full copy, you may still need to submit a statement that everything is current – and has been updated in the last 12 months.

# Topic 1: PARTS OF A SOLICITATION

## “Section M. Evaluation Criteria”

**How the government plans to select a vendor is the #1 thing you need to pay attention to!**

# Topic 1: PARTS OF A SOLICITATION

## “Section M. Evaluation Criteria (cont.)”

These are some examples of evaluation criteria:

$$(T < PP) > P$$

Technical is greater than Past Performance and when combined are greater than Price.

$$(T < PP) = P$$

Technical is greater than Past Performance and when combined are equal to Price.

$$(T = PP) < P$$

Technical is equal to Past Performance and when combined are less than Price.

P

Price only – often in the form of Lowest Price Technically Acceptable or LPTA.

# Topic 1: PARTS OF A SOLICITATION

## “Section M. Evaluation Criteria”

- ▶ Why is it the most important?
  - Shows what the customer says is the importance of aspects of your business – are you highly capable? Are you highly experienced? Are you a low cost provider?
  
- ▶ Sometimes criteria discussion is grouped under a broader heading called “Basis for Award”:
  - **Lowest Priced – Technically Acceptable:** the lowest price wins (technically acceptable may or may not contain evaluations of other inputs)
  - **Best Value:** competitive source selection where things other than price are more important than price.
  - **Best Value with Trade-Offs:** occasionally, buyers prescribe the trade off process in detail.

# Topic 1: PARTS OF A SOLICITATION

## “Section M. Evaluation Criteria”

Examples of when evaluation criteria drive you to make business decisions:

- $(T < PP) > P$  – Your firm does not have any recent or relevant past performance = probably a no bid.
- LPTA – Your firm is not a low cost provider, but rather has invested heavily in being a high quality provider with rates that reflect that = probably a no bid.
- $(T < PP) > P$  – Your firm has done some recent and relevant jobs and your costs are highly competitive, but the technical volume calls for detailed quality management plan, project management plan, and training plans; your firm does not have any of these on paper = probably a no bid.

# Topic 2. Solicitation Review Process

Step 1:

- Understand Requirements

Step 2:

- Document Unclear Areas

Step 3:

- Bid / No Bid

# Step 1: Understand Requirements

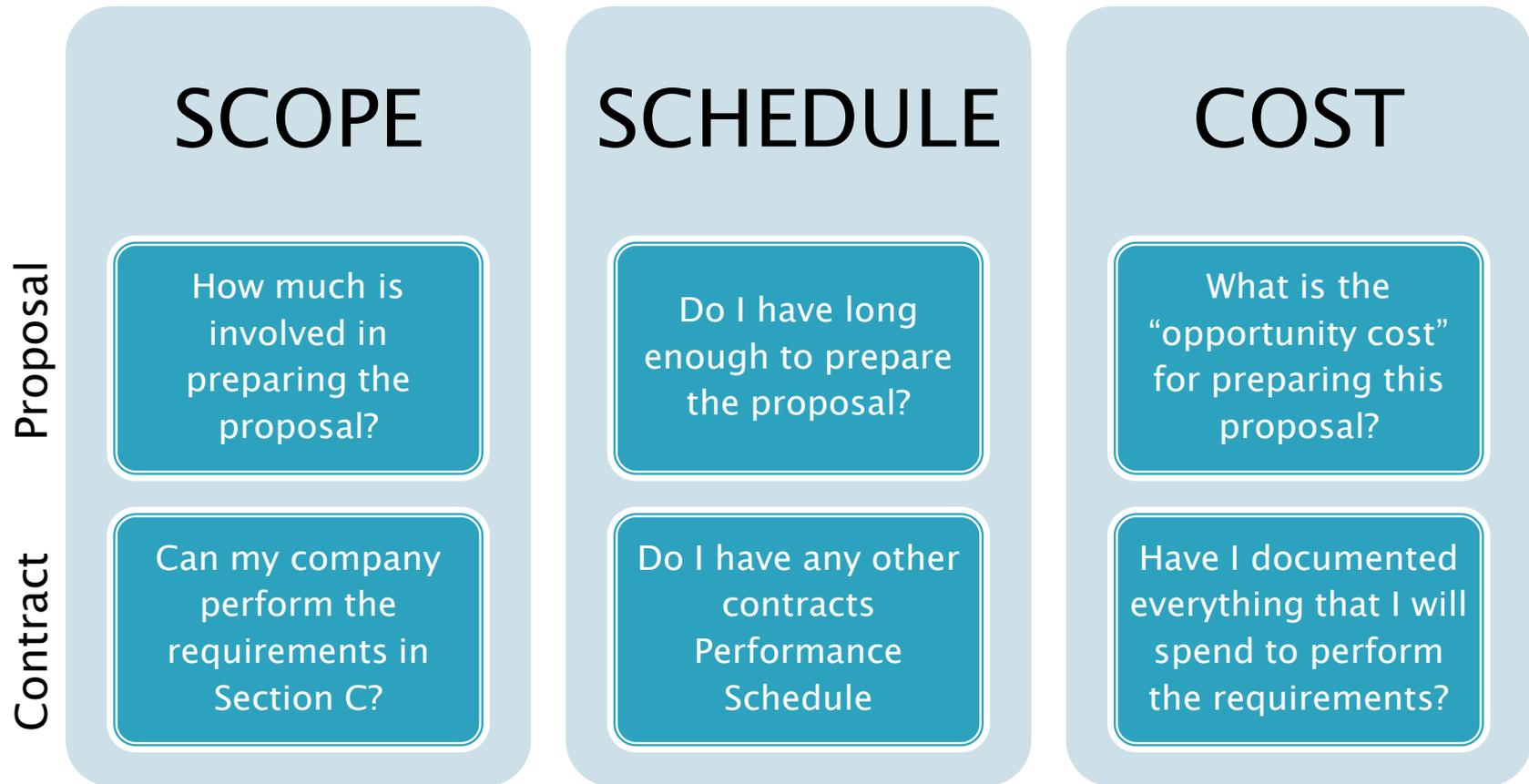
## Step 1: Understand Requirements

- Can my company do this scope of work? Do I need to team?
- Can I meet the proposal response requirements?
- Understand every element that impacts price.
- Given the evaluation criteria – can we win?



# Step 1: Understand Requirements

For both the proposal and the ultimate contract work, approach it like a project – paying attention to each aspect of the:



# Step 1: Understand Requirements

## Can my firm do this work?

- Look for these key words to understand what has to be done for the contract: **shall, will, must, deliverable, required.**
- Look for performance measures – does your firm typically perform to this level or higher
- What are the quality factors – does your firm currently collect this data and actively work to improve?
- Certifications – does your firm have the required – or even preferred certification(s)? For instance, are you required to have ISO:9001:2008 certification?
- Do you have the staff with the skill sets of labor needed to perform the work? If not, do you have a robust recruiting system to get them?

# Step 1: Understand Requirements – Schedule

## For the Proposal Schedule:

Check dates of submission – do you have the time and people to complete?

Question & Answer Due Dates

## For the Contract Schedule:

Look for due dates and timelines, make sure to note all contract dependencies.

Look for milestones & benchmarks and plan your solution



# Step 1: Understand Requirements – Cost

## op·por·tu·ni·ty cost

*noun* ECONOMICS

the loss of potential gain from other alternatives when one alternative is chosen.  
"idle cash balances represent an opportunity cost in terms of lost interest"

## Cost for Preparing the Proposal

Understand your “opportunity cost” if you choose to prepare this proposal.

Estimate the labor and supplies it will take you to prepare your proposal – is your probability of winning worth that cost?

Understand your costs for proposal preparation will not be reimbursed.

Are there real costs associated like “bid-bond” requirements?



# Step 1: Understand Requirements – Cost

## Cost of Contract Performance

Of course your thinking about the labor and/or supplies being procured – but ensure you know cost impacts of prevailing labor wages and fringe benefits – or FARs that govern material purchasing like Buy American Act.

Are there performance incentives and disincentives?

Make sure you are reading for cost impacts like bonding & insurance requirements; GFE vs CFE; and PPE.

All those other deliverables and requirements like: status reports, post contract training or certifications for contract staff; ad hoc reports; travel for attendance at a Start of Work Meeting; and creating and maintaining items like Integrated Master Schedules



# Step 2: Document Unclear Areas

## Step 2: Document Unclear Areas

- Are there any contradictions in the instructions?
- Is there any missing information (like specifications) that make proposing and pricing well impossible?
- Write questions for the CO

# Step 2: Document Unclear Areas

## Professional

- Poorly written questions reflect on your company; mind your grammar and spelling.

## Considerate

- Buyers are busy people, especially during procurements, be considerate of them and do not ask questions that are clearly answered in the solicitation.

## Competitive

- Remember that every question you ask and have answered is information your competitors will also be able to see. Before you ask, check with anybody in your firm that has met with the customer to make sure they don't already have an educated guess because they know this customer.

# Step 3. Bid / No Bid

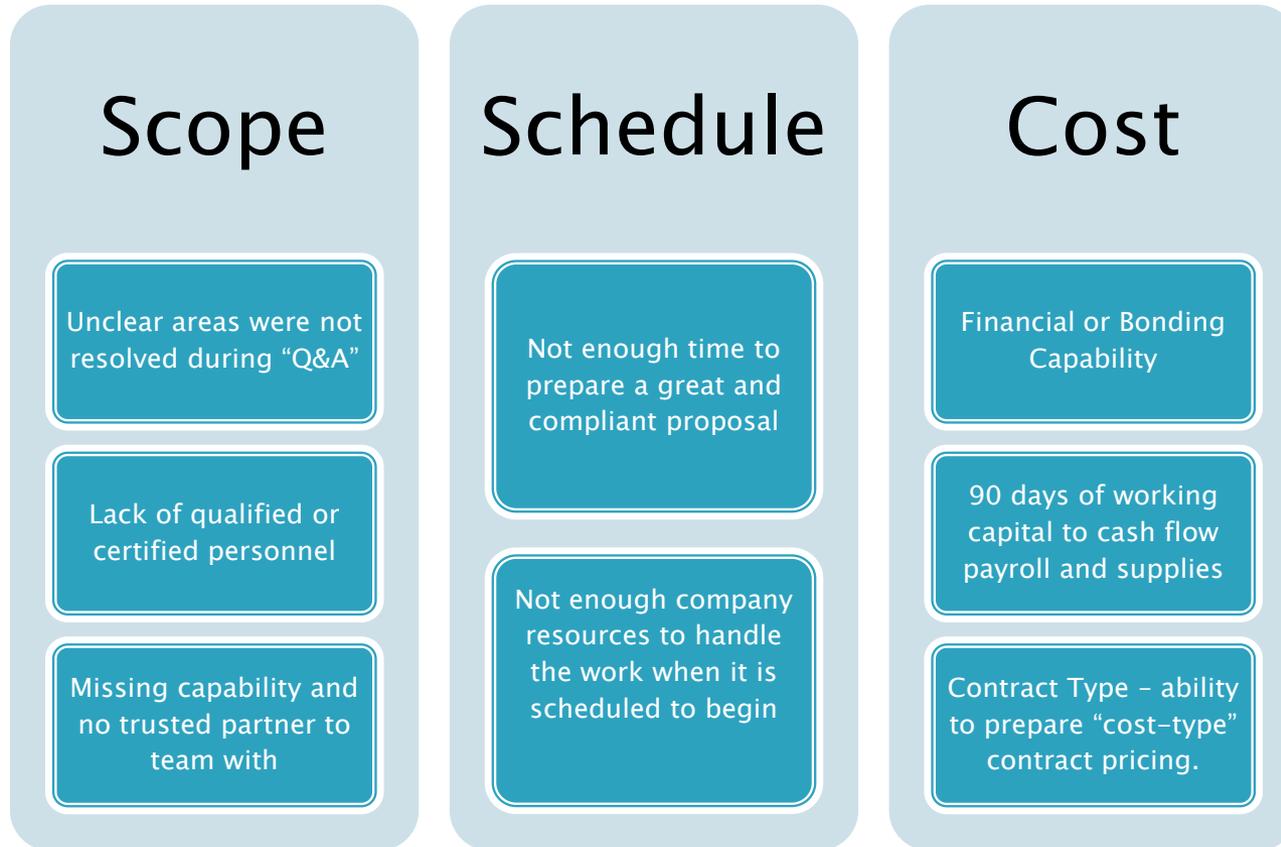
Bid / No Bid decisions can take place at any point during the proposal process even up to the last minute – however – catching “deal breakers” early on during the review of the solicitations saves you time and money.

## Step 3: Bid / No Bid

- Can my firm differentiate ourselves from other bidders? (Is it Price? Is it Capability?)
- Does my firm have any discriminators over other bidders?
- Are the risks (both for proposal and performance) mitigated satisfactorily?

# Step 3: Bid – No/Bid

## Common “Deal Breakers”





# Topic 3: Tips and Tricks

- ▶ **“Best Value”** – just because the government does not have to go with the lowest price, understand that your competitors have almost always sharpened their pencil.
- ▶ **“Preferred”** – just like job announcements, solicitations sometimes say certain capabilities, especially certifications, are “preferred”. Think long and hard before bidding on something that you do not have the “preferred” credentials for.

# Topic 3: Tips & Tricks

## Understand about timelines:

- ▶ The government estimates the date they plan to “drop” a solicitation; understand this may not be the date for a variety of reasons.
- ▶ For competitive procurements, the government extends a proposal deadline when THEY need the extra time – not you.
- ▶ If there is Q&A and the answers have not been published 24-48 hours before the proposal due date, there will likely be an extension along with the publication of the answers.

# Topic 3: Tips & Tricks

- ▶ In the Q&A, the CO will often answer with “*see solicitation*”. They are human and can be wrong, or you wouldn’t have asked the question (because you are ***courteous***). Do your best to write your proposal and if it is a deal breaker – go “no bid”.
- ▶ Another way to be ***courteous*** is to group your questions in a logical way; for instance, put technical questions together in order of how they appear in the solicitation. Group questions about the proposal instructions together as well. The reason for this is that multiple government employees answer the questions.

# Topic 3: Tips & Tricks

## Knowing the Customer

- ▶ The best way to understand a solicitation is to understand the customer by having talked to them about their forecast and needs.
- ▶ Optional Pre-Proposal Conference: if there is a pre-proposal conference: GO!!!
- ▶ Listen for *“the voice of the customer”*. If there is an unusual or inordinate amount of emphasis on something in the solicitation – you can guarantee the customer had a problem contractor in the past. This is your opportunity to show how good your firm is at doing “X”.



## Topic 4: Past Performance Information (PPI)

What's it for?

To demonstrate your firm's capability to fulfill the contract requirements– what is the prospective customer trying to answer: how risky it is to select your firm?

# Topic 4: Past Performance Information (PPI)

PPI can be gathered in three primary ways and are seeking information on (a) Quality of Service, (b) Schedule, (c) Cost Control, (d) Business Relations, and (e) Overall Customer satisfaction.

## Federal only: Past Performance Information Retrieval System (PIIRS)

In short: your permanent record. This is where your Contractor Performance Assessment Reporting System (CPARS) are stored.

## Past Performance Questionnaires

Usually a quick form for your former customer(s) to answer and submit. Sometimes you may only need to provide contact information\*\*

## Past Performance Citations

Responses you write based on Evaluation Criteria and Proposal Instructions in the solicitation.

Notes:

\*One, two, or all of these methods may be used for any competitive and negotiated procurement.

# Topic 4: Past Performance Information (PPI)

Citation Example – no two agencies ask for exactly the same thing on citations, but the template below covers the “universe” of what you can expect to see so that you can be prepared to answer:

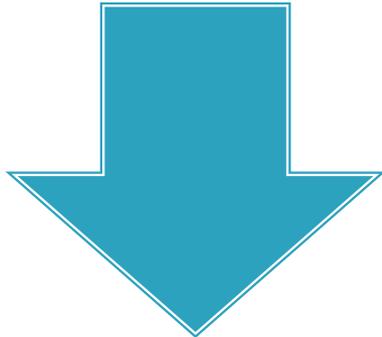
**Tip:**  
provide what was asked for, in the same order that they asked for it in; adding content that was not requested ≠ better.

Past Performance Citation – Sample Template	
<b>Insert Contract Name</b>	Insert Logo Here
Customer:	Contract Number:
Customer Address:	Contract Type:
Period of Performance:	Award Type:
Contracting Officer:	Original Contract Value:
	Current Contract Value:
	Role: (Prime or Sub):
COTR:	Subcontractor(s)
	Project Manager:
<p><b>Project Summary:</b> (Provide a summary on what your contract is about)</p>	<p><b>Questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What services does this contract provide? What functional areas does this contract cover? (you may copy and paste sections of the PWS/SOW – just make sure that all functional areas are listed and described).</li> <li>Acceptable quality levels (AQLs), and contract data requirements list (CDRLs), service level agreements (SLA's) or other deliverables that you have for this contract.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Performance &amp; Accomplishments:</b> (How has your company performed on this contract? Explain how you may have exceeded customer expectations. (Toot your own horn!))</p> <p>Note: in this section, tell your good story about how you differentiate yourselves from other contractors. Use specific examples to substantiate the claim – and don't forget to tell <u>how</u> you got there.</p>	
<b>Innovations:</b>	
<b>Cost Control:</b>	
<p><b>Customer Satisfaction:</b> Note: include history of CPAR ratings (for Federal contracts) and any quotes/testimonials from customers</p>	
<b>Awards/Recognition:</b>	
<b>Manning/Staffing/ of Effort:</b>	
<b>Labor Categories:</b>	
<b>Specialized Skills/Certifications Needed:</b>	
<b>Specialized Tools/Methods/ Techniques:</b>	
<b>Lessons Learned / Problems Resolved</b>	



# Topic 4: Past Performance Information (PPI)

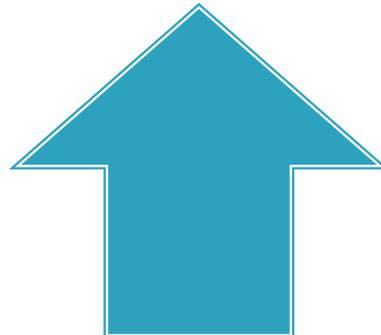
Most proposal instructions tell you how far back you may go for a reference, but if they don't, the rule of thumb is pick examples that are:



RECENT



RELEVANT



*Not so Good:* 3 to 5 years  
*Better:* ≤ 3 years  
or current contracts  
with at least 6 months  
of performance  
*Best:* ≤ 2 years completed  
contracts or current  
contracts with at  
least one option year  
renewal



# Topic 4: Past Performance Information (PPI)

What does “relevant mean” – which references should you pick?

Similar Scope

Similar Size or “Magnitude”

Similar Complexity

# Topic 4: Past Performance Information (PPI)

## Frequently Asked Questions:

- ▶ Q: How do I ever win my first award without past performance?
- ▶ Q: Can I use my prior work history as an employee to another firm?
- ▶ Q: What does it mean when the evaluation criteria says that lack of past performance will be rated “neutral”?
- ▶ Q: What if the past performance is from my sub-contractor, not my firm as Prime?
- ▶ Q: Can I cite my firms’ commercial experience?

# Topic 4: Past Performance Information (PPI)

## PTAP Best Practice Recommendations:

- ▶ Just like on a job reference for your resume:
  - Contact the POC and request their permission to use them
  - Make sure you know they will give you a glowing recommendation – choosing someone who will may be more important than contract relevance to some prospective customers.
  - Test all contact information provided to ensure it is current
  
- ▶ On a “go-forward” basis, PTAP recommends keeping a “past performance” library of your contracts so that you have everything documented and ready to use when it is relevant to your proposal.
  
- ▶ The Technical Volume is a great place to add DEMONSTRATED CAPABILITY by using real life examples of contracts where you have used a relevant capability, process, key personnel member, or tool that you plan to use on the proposed work.
  
- ▶ Once you have bid/proposed and learn the result: WIN OR LOSE: Ask for a debriefing. You will learn vital information about the strengths and weaknesses of your whole proposal (not just past performance).

# Closing & Summary

So, you should know:

- ▶ A high level overview on the parts of a standard solicitation
- ▶ A process for understanding what you have read in a solicitation
- ▶ What is recent and relevant past performance.

Don't forget that part of PTAP services include helping you understand what you are reading in solicitations! One on One counseling is always available to you.

## Next Steps: take the modules in the PTAP Contract Ready Series!

