

## Transcription

Announcer:

The "Behind the Buy" podcast features audio stories told by members of the Federal acquisition workforce who have successfully executed best practice IT contracting strategies from the TechFAR and Digital Services Playbook to help their agency meet its mission.

Anne:

Hi everyone, I'm Anne Rung- Administrator of the Office of Federal Procurement Policy. Today for the Administration's Behind the Buy audio series, we hear from a White House contracting officer who will discuss how to make procurement simple and intuitive. Traci Walker is a contracting officer for the Executive Office of the President (EOP) and serves as a founding member of the United States Digital Services (USDS) procurement team. Through USDS, Traci drives strategies and implementation approaches for digital services and agile procurement for agencies such as the Forest Service, Small Business Administration, and the Department of Veterans Affairs. Thanks, Traci for joining today's Behind the Buy.

Anne (Warm-Up Questions):

How long have you served in the Federal Government?

What did you do beforehand?

Did you join as a contracting officer?

What do you like most about the job?

Anne:

Using a Government service shouldn't be stressful, confusing, or daunting. It's our job to build services that are simple and intuitive enough that users succeed the first time, unaided.

Tell us about a procurement that you improved by making it simple and intuitive.

Traci:

At EOP, we purchased a specific technology platform to meet the needs of end users. In order to facilitate the development of applications for various EOP components, we needed to put in place a simple, quick, and flexible method of procuring system integration support services on a regular basis. So we created a multiple award Blanket Purchase Agreement, utilizing GSA's Schedule 70, which required the system integrators to propose an Agile Software Development methodology which would be used on all task orders placed under the BPA.

Anne:

What was your customer trying to accomplish?

Traci:

Based on market research we determined we had key strategies we wanted to accomplish with this procurement:

- Ensuring we did not get stuck in a proprietary solution/contract so if the service provider was non-performing we could exit easy
- Deploying requirements for all software development on an Agile basis
- Employing modular contracting methods to keep costs and risks low through frequent competitions

- Finding solution providers who were subject matter experts in the platform technology we chose

Anne:

How did you ensure that communication was simple and clear for each step of the procurement?

Traci:

1. To ensure this- all stakeholders (management, legal, budget, customers) were briefed early and often on the plan to do a multiple award BPA – and how it would benefit them. Any questions/concerns were quickly addressed.

Anne:

Did you tailor your language for each group of stakeholders?

Traci:

1. Customer Communication

- a. With the customer – we focused the communication on how fast we executed follow on procurements, how their technology needs are met with frequent delivery of working products and how quickly non-performance are addressed

- b. We also discussed how easy it was to purchase through this vehicle as we only needed a statement of objective for the functionality of their applications for the task orders instead of complex end user requirements.

2. Supporting Offices Communication (e.g., Legal, CFO, etc.)

- a. We brought in legal and the budget team at the very beginning of the conversation about this strategy. They were part of the decision-making process.

3. Industry Communication

- a. We held an industry day with prospective bidders to gauge their reaction to the plan. All were very happy with the path and liked the execution.

- b. We also submitted our process flows for the “as is” process in the solicitation which greatly helped Industry understand how to propose to the task orders.

- c. In our second competition, we held individual discussions with the BPA holders and the customers so everyone had a clear understanding of the requirement.

Anne:

Are there any other procurements that you’re working on where you have found success using similar strategies?

Traci:

1. I’m currently working with GSA to establish a Multiple Award BPA for a specific technology platform –which is very similar in nature to what I did for the EOP. The idea is to allow for companies that are experts in the technology to establish a BPA and provide services on an agile basis to agencies who need these services. It will be the first of its kind but it will epitomize the concept of simple and intuitive. There will be ordering guidelines to help requesting agencies make the best acquisition choices for their task orders.

Anne:

How do you convince other agencies to adopt these strategies?

Traci:

1. I've helped agencies via acquisition strategy sessions, re-write Statements of Objectives and RFPs to focus on Playbook Plays, and identified process roadblocks that hamper performance.
2. Right now, it's too early to fully assess these procurements' success since they are still in the acquisition phase, but the early feedback from both the host agency and the vendor community is very positive.

Anne:

Requirements can change and sometimes an exit strategy is needed. How do you plan for an exit strategy?

Traci:

1. Using modular contracting methods
  - In case a new direction is needed
2. Not awarding task orders for longer than a year
  - In case of non-performance
3. Including continuity of operations and extension clauses
  - In case the mission was completed earlier than expected
4. Keeping the source code and intellectual propriety in the hands of the Government.  
Understanding that while we buy services, Industry produces product – and that is the Government's property.
  - In case we need to switch midstream

Anne:

What is the biggest challenge for someone new to the Federal acquisition workforce?

Traci:

1. Getting the authority to be innovative is hard when starting out in acquisition. Acquisition almost has an apprentice/master-type of education process. With more experience comes more responsibilities and abilities to bring creative approaches to procurements. So be patient, but also don't be afraid to push the boundaries.

Anne:

How do you recommend that millennials counter these challenges?

Traci:

1. Become a champion for an acquisition method you identify with – whether it’s Agile Acquisition, buying Cloud technology, purchasing smartphones. By becoming the “go to” person for questions surrounding a product, service or acquisition method you can help your agency by being an in house subject matter expert. And communicate your interest as much as possible – get involved with interagency and vendor/government working groups.

Anne:

What is the long-term value for information sharing platforms like the Behind the Buy series?

Traci:

1. Education and communication are key to successful implementation of the Digital Service Playbook, TechFAR and Digital Services within the Government. Industry demonstrates how information-sharing platforms are successful, and its time the Government started taking our cues from what has been successful. Getting acquisition professionals to actually use the tools that we are procuring is a big step in that direction. It’s easier to buy something once you understand it –

Anne:

Thanks to Traci for sharing her success story. Everyone who has an innovative strategy for driving procurement performance is encouraged to join the podcast series. I’d like to hear about your experience so that we can increase awareness and adoption of proven techniques. Share your experiences and learn from your peers by visiting [buyers club dot idea scale dot com](http://buyersclub dot idea scale dot com) and clicking “TechFAR Hub Use Cases.” Access curated expertise, prices paid data, and contract vehicles for categorized goods and services by visiting the Acquisition Gateway at [hallways dot cap dot gsa dot gov](http://hallways dot cap dot gsa dot gov).

As always, thanks for tuning in.

Listen for us next time, where we’ll continue to take you Behind the Buy.