Introduction

Every important DOD materiel development program requires a great deal of personnel and financial resources. As such, it is imperative that these programs are reviewed throughout key phases of the acquisition process. That is the mission of the Army Systems Acquisition Review Council (ASARC).

Specifically, the ASARC provides senior acquisition managers and functional principals the opportunity to review designated programs at formal milestones to determine whether a program or system is ready to enter the next acquisition phase. DoD Directive 5000.1, DoD Regulation 5000.2-R, General Order #3, and Army Regulation 70-1 govern the process. The ASARC makes recommendations to the Army Acquisition Executive (AAE) on those programs for which the AAE is the milestone decision authority (MDA). In addition to these milestone reviews, an ASARC may be convened at any time to conduct a formal review of the status of a program, to address a specific issue, or, in the case of acquisition category 1D Programs, to determine the program’s readiness for the Defense Acquisition Board (DAB) and to establish the Army position.

The process described in this article pertains primarily to a milestone review and can be tailored for “special” reviews. While it is theoretically possible to make major acquisition decisions through the staffing process alone, experience has shown that face-to-face discussion speeds the decisionmaking process and improves understanding of the program and the decisions being made.

Organization And Membership

ASARC members include senior acquisition managers and functional principals. The Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology (ASAALT) is usually designated as the Army’s Acquisition Executive. Members are listed below; however, additional members may be added as necessary.

Army IPT Structure

ASARC members are supported in the decisionmaking process by an integrated product team (IPT) comprised of representatives of each of the Army staff elements. The IPT functions in a spirit of teamwork with participants empowered, to the maximum extent possible, to make commitments for the organization or the functional area they represent. IPTs enable decisionmakers to make the right decisions at the right time.

Two IPT levels support the program manager (PM) throughout the review process: the ASARC and the various working integrated product teams (WIPTs). Established to support each program, the ASARC IPT performs the day-to-day work required throughout the acquisition process, to include those activities leading to a successful milestone decision. The ASARC IPT, which is led by the PM, is the level at which the majority of interaction between the program management office (PMO) and the Department of the Army (DA) staff occurs.

Support provided by the IPT includes reviewing program documentation, preparing assessments, and making recommendations on the
readiness of the program to enter the next acquisition phase. IPT members must be proactive and participate early in the milestone preparation activities. IPT members must also work closely together and with the PM to find acceptable solutions to problems. Issues identified during the IPT process, but not resolved at that level, should immediately be raised to the appropriate decision authority.

The IPT is further organized into WIPTs, which are oriented toward one or more of the various functional areas. These areas typically include cost, acquisition, test and evaluation, and requirements. The PM, in coordination with IPT members, proposes the WIPT structure that is best suited to support his or her specific program. Most IPT members will participate on one or more of the functional teams. WIPTs are normally engaged upfront and continuously during the acquisition process to assist in developing acquisition plans or strategies, test and performance evaluation strategies, and logistics and fielding strategies that will increase the program’s probability of success.

Key Coordination Roles

The program’s DA Systems Coordinator (DASC) is the primary acquisition staff officer at HQDA. As the ASARC IPT facilitator, the DASC assists the PM in managing the IPT. The facilitator is also responsible for ensuring that IPT members support the PM in preparing the program for review. Further, the facilitator is responsible for recording issues identified by IPT members and assisting in tracking the resolution process. The central focus of the PM and the DASC is to manage the IPT to a zero issues or low-risk ASARC assessment. The PM manages the efforts of the PMO to provide quality and timely program documentation and information to the Army staff and supporting activities, while the DASC ensures that the Army staff action officers effectively support the PM’s efforts.

The PM should designate a member of the PMO to serve as the ASARC coordinator, who will be the PM’s primary action officer within the PMO for managing the preparation efforts and keeping the process on track. The coordinator also maintains program schedule information, establishes and oversees a program library and current documentation status log or register, establishes and maintains a point-of-contact (POC) list, prepares ASARC-related correspondence, and acts as the central POC at the PMO for all ASARC members. In addition, the coordinator works on routine matters with the DASC, and the DASC coordinates with the PM on important issues.

Serving as the ASAALT POC for the ASARC process is the Executive Secretary. The ASARC Executive Secretary also provides guidance, advice, training, latest policy information, and examples of successful ASARCs.

Schedule Of Events

At the initial IPT meeting, a schedule should be prepared with a target date for the ASARC. Once the schedule is established, the remaining preparation milestones are backward planned. IPT meetings should be proposed and scheduled at a rate of once a month and can be adjusted to respond to the program’s needs. The goal is to ensure that adequate time is allowed to enable all required actions to be completed on schedule. The ASARC Executive Secretary publishes a target date (month) for the ASARC starting 6 months prior to the meeting. Later, the ASARC Executive Secretary establishes the exact date of the ASARC—2 months in advance—in coordination with the calendars of the AAE and VCSA.

Documentation

Documentation is the primary source of information for acquisition decisionmakers and their staff at the DA and Office of the Secretary of Defense levels. Statutory or other documentation requiring approval by the MDA are normally nonnegotiable and must be prepared in a prescribed format. Other review and oversight documentation can be negotiated by the PM with the IPT as to need or format.

One of the IPT’s first tasks is to determine the requirement for program documents and information and recommend to the MILDEP what documentation should be prepared or tailored for the specific program. Each WIPT is responsible for reviewing program documentation within its functional area and providing recommendations to the IPT. A major function of the IPT is to apply tailoring to the maximum extent possible without undue risk to the oversight or decision process.

MIPS

The intent of the Modified Integrated Program Summary (MIPS) is to provide the decisionmaker with a single document that contains only the information necessary to make the decision. The MIPS is an executive summary of the program and its issues, thus, no one format fits all programs. This eliminates the need for separate, stand-alone documents that cause unnecessary duplication of effort.

The MIPS must answer the following five key questions:

- Is the system still needed?
- Does the system work (from the standpoints of the user, functional staffs, and the PM)?
- Are major risks identified and manageable?
- Is the program affordable (adequately funded)?
• Has the system been subjected to cost as an independent variable analysis?

The PM maintains primary responsibility for the production and content of the MIPS. The MIPS is coordinated with the IPT membership to elicit comments and input at the earliest possible opportunity. A key document within MIPS is the issues/ risk memorandum because it identifies all issues that were not resolved within the IPT process and require MILDEP or AAE resolution. This memorandum also provides recommended solutions, if applicable, and any risks to the program associated with the identified issues.

Final IPT Meeting

The ASAALT Deputy for Systems Management chairs the final IPT meeting to review the MIPS and the ASARC briefing and to determine if the program is ready to proceed to the MILDEP review. The goal of this final IPT meeting is to ensure that there are no open issues or nonconcurrences. In addition, the IPT will identify any remaining issues that require guidance or resolution at the MILDEP review. The final IPT meeting is normally attended by the program executive officer (PEO), PM, all IPT members, and any staff principals who might be involved in issue discussion and resolution. If the staff principal does not attend, IPT members should be prepared to confirm the principal's concurrence with the contents of the MIPS. The typical agenda should include a run-through of the proposed briefing slides. Briefers should present only the information required to support requested decisions. It is important that all remaining issues receive a fair hearing and every effort is made to reach resolution prior to MILDEP review. Finally, the ASAALT Deputy for Systems Management is responsible for determining if the program is ready for MILDEP review.

MILDEP Review

The MILDEP Review is a rehearsal for the ASARC and allows one last opportunity to resolve any open issues. It also allows the MILDEP to issue guidance and help the briefers refine their presentations. Attendance at the MILDEP review should include ASARC IPT managers, the PEO, the user, staff principals or their representatives (only if there are issues associated with their area of interest), the ASARC Executive Secretary, and the CIO, G-6 or Deputy for Systems Management (depending on the type of program). It is the responsibility of IPT staff members to brief their principals of the outcome of the final IPT meeting and inform the DASC of the principal's desire to attend the MILDEP review. The PM is not required to pre-brief any principals other than the MILDEP, but it is advisable that he or she pre-brief any principal with outstanding issues. If the MILDEP determines that the program is not ready for the ASARC review, the decision will be accompanied with specific direction as to the deficiencies that must be corrected to have an acceptable program.

ASARC

The MIPS should answer all questions and identify the issues needing resolution by the ASARC. The ASARC briefing presentation should be prepared based on the information included in the MIPS. Backgrounds on all areas to be briefed in the ASARC—user, developer, tester, and affordability—are contained in the MIPS. A typical ASARC agenda is shown on Page 13.

If possible, all portions of the briefing should be prepared by the same activity to ensure consistency and standardization of appearance. It is also extremely helpful to have the preparer of the slides located in the vicinity of the Pentagon to ensure the quick turnaround of briefing changes.

The PM is required to brief the VCSA prior to the ASARC, and the date and time of this briefing are arranged by the ASARC Executive Secretary. The PM or PEO will lead the briefing and designate what roles the other members of the briefing party should play; however, the briefing team should be limited to no more than eight individuals. The AAE does not normally require a pre-brief because he is kept informed by the MILDEP, but IPT representatives should brief their principal. Further, the ASARC IPT representative is responsible for notifying the PM or DASC if his or her principal desires a pre-briefing or meeting.

Expected Outcome

The Acquisition Decision Memorandum (ADM) documents acquisition decisions made and is signed by the MDA. It also establishes the exit criteria that must be demonstrated by the next milestone so a program can move to the next acquisition phase. The ADM is written by the ASARC/DAB Executive Secretary and signed by the appropriate MDA. There is no prescribed format for the document, but it should include the exit criteria applicable to the next milestone review and any other specific guidance directed by the MDA such as delegation of the decision authority to the PEO on specific matters.

Summary

The ASARC is a crucial meeting on the program acquisition path. With proper planning and coordination, it can ease a program's progress through the acquisition process and ultimately result in a better product for our soldiers in the field.

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