

A Successful Alpha Contracting Experience

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What we are about to describe was based on an actual Alpha Contracting experience between the Team Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (Team C4ISR), at Fort Monmouth, NJ; the Signal Center (SIGCEN), Fort Gordon, GA; and General Dynamics, C4 Systems (GDC4S), Taunton, MA; which occurred over a 26-day period in September 2004. Team C4ISR members, primarily the Communications Electronics Life Cycle Management Command (CELCMC) Acquisition Center, Project Manager Tactical Radio Communications Systems (PM TRCS), CELCMC Legal together with SIGCEN and GDC4S, used Alpha Contracting to design, develop and provide Joint Network Node (JNN) training suites and training simulators. JNN is the bridge to future combat networks between Mobile Subscriber Equipment (MSE) radios and Warfighter Information Network-Tactical (WIN-T), the Army's communications network system for tomorrow. JNN is the most sophisticated, state-of-the-art technology communications equipment that is fielded today. The JNN training suites and simulation requirement came from a LTG Steven Boutelle — the Army Chief Information Officer and G-6— directive when he learned that, although unit training was provided for, there was no institutional training for JNN. Simply stated, unit training trains an entire unit of warfighters whereas institutional training trains replacements to the units. For the SIGCEN to be able to train troops on JNN equipment in January 2005, the training suites had to be procured and the contract had to be 100-percent definitized no later than Sept. 30, 2004.

TRCS and JNN will provide the tactical radio communications bridge to the Future Force. The Alpha Contracting process is putting state-of-the-art communications equipment in the hands of Soldiers today. (DOD photo.)



Alpha Contracting — Breaking Down the Walls

Although Alpha Contracting takes many forms, it amounts to an accelerated contractual process whereby two or more parties, such as the government and a contractor, work together simultaneously as a team to develop a proposal and negotiate a contract. Traditionally, the contracting process involves separate activities — which usually involves contracting, program management, legal, small business and auditors, just to name a few — of the government and the contractor working independently in developing their positions for the requirement.

After completing their respective tasks, the various entities provide their input

to the contracting officer who merges their information into one proposal or offer and then the negotiation process begins with the government and contractor on opposing sides. As issues are raised during negotiations, each side would confer with various subject matter experts of their respective organizations for comments and backup support. The process repeats itself over and over again until an agreement is reached and negotiations are concluded. The problem with this process is that it is time-consuming, a duplication of effort and can cause friction between the parties,

whereby negotiations may be stalled or collapse.

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Alpha Contracting breaks down the walls between the organizations and makes each side's proposal or offer transparent. This process speeds up the cycle time for a new acquisition and dramatically reduces duplicative efforts. The organizations do not wait for a complete proposal or offer to be developed, but share information as it becomes available. For example, if a subcontractor submits a proposal to the prime contractor, the prime will share the

subcontractor's information with the government upon receipt, even if the prime has not yet completed its own proposal. An audit and technical evaluation can take place on the subcontract effort, thereby allowing both parties to start negotiations early in the process. This may result in a negotiated subcontractor effort being incorporated into the prime contractor's proposal making that action already completed even before the government receives the prime's complete proposal.

Alpha Contracting may be a more intense effort for the individuals participating than normal contracting procedures, but if all parties are committed to the process, it will dramatically speed up award of a new sole-source requirement and can create a collegial atmosphere of sharing information.

Top Management Support

Alpha Contracting can only be successful if it has support from top leadership from both the government and contractor. In our successful Alpha Contracting experience, we received top management support from Boutelle; MG Michael R. Mazzucchi,



CPL David Segrest (left), radio operator, and SGT Tracey Sourbeck, heavy equipment repairman, Explosive Hazards and Awareness Team, 200th Engineer Battalion, Alabama Army National Guard, take up a security position just outside Camp Victory, Iraq, in May 2005. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Michael Carden.)

Commanding General (CG), CELCMC and Program Executive Officer Command, Control and Communications Tactical; BG Janet Hicks, CG Fort Gordon and SIGCEN; Edward Elgart, Director CELCMC Acquisition Center; and Mark Fried, President, GDC4S Communications Networks Division. In addition, senior management from each organization made allowances for their limited resources to be diverted from other

important activities to make the Alpha Contracting process a top priority.

In our case, Robert Golden, PM TRCS; COL Michael Cordes, Director of Training, SIGCEN; John Martin, Vice President, GDC4S; Heath Fisk, Manager of Contracts, GDC4S Communication Network Division Contracts; and Gary Estler, Director, Systems Support, GDC4S Program Management, relayed to their respective workforces that this requirement was a top priority. Without leadership and top management support, combined with their commitment to provide the appropriate resources to get the job done, our Alpha Contracting experience could have been a disaster.

Trust

Alpha Contracting will not be successful if the government and contractor do not trust each other. Each side must be open and honest relative to their respective positions. Keep in mind that each side is developing real-time positions and it is critical to the processes' success that communications are constant and open. If one side believes that the other side is holding



SPC Dustin Bonina, Co. A, 181st Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division, maintains radio contact with his unit headquarters while conducting an outer perimeter security patrol of the Guantanamo Bay detention facility in Cuba. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Jolene Staker.)

back pertinent information, the Alpha Contracting process will falter. The government and contractor have to foster a climate of trust or Alpha Contracting will fail. In our situation, candid discussions started from day one and carried through negotiations to award and even post-award. Open communications on both sides were the norm.

Commitment and Focus

Although the amount of work involved in Alpha Contracting is the same as it is with the normal procurement process, the effort is a lot more intense. All required procedures must be accomplished, but the time it takes to complete the entire contracting process is reduced dramatically. Both sides must be focused on what has to get accomplished and when. For example, in our Alpha Contracting experience, the normal cycle time allotted was 120 working days from receipt of a qualified acquisition requirements package. We completed the entire Alpha process in 26 calendar days and just 18 calendar days from the request for a proposal. During one weekend alone, our team averaged more than 30 hours in overtime per person to make the award happen quickly. If all parties involved are not willing to make a full commitment to the process, it will not work.

Computer Resources

Alpha Contracting can benefit tremendously from having computer tools that assist in developing and displaying the information. We conducted most of our negotiations in a large conference room that used a computer networked with several big screens that surrounded the room giving everyone visibility into what was being developed. Because this was being done in real time, everyone had the opportunity to contribute their respective points to the negotiations and see the changes implemented instantly. For this acquisition, we implemented a color-coded scheme that allowed everyone to know whose position it was and what day that position was developed. This allowed us to view an entire document that was being developed before our eyes while at the same time recognize which organization contributed the corresponding information. We found it dramatically sped up the process, was an excellent method to keep track of each organization's input and allowed everyone to share the same real-time information.

Alpha Contracting is a great process to reduce cycle time for a sole source acquisition. It will only work if it has top leadership support, if each side trusts the other and if the people doing the work are 100-percent committed to the project. The process will be aided tremendously if computer resources are used that allow everyone to know each side's position and what issues have been resolved. In our case, if an agreement could not be reached within a few weeks, the funds would have expired and we would not have a contract. Not only would both sides have failed to reach an agreement but

we would have also let the warfighters we support down. We were committed to not letting that happen. Both sides knew what was at stake and, by working as a team, we achieved unilateral success.

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Radio communications are critical to operational success. The Alpha Contracting process ensured that Soldiers like SSG Curtis Chekel with the 5th Infantry Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, have the equipment and training they need to be successful in combat. (U.S. Army photo by SSG Mike Buytas.)