

SARA, SECTION 1423
ACQUISITION ADVISORY PANEL
Acquisition Workforce Working Group

Update
April 21, 2006

Presented by:
Joshua Schwartz
Working Group Co-Chair



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Introduction

- The Acquisition Workforce was NOT on the list of topics that Congress expressly required the Acquisition Advisory Panel to address. So a sensible threshold question is why we concluded that we should focus on this aspect of the procurement system.
- From the inception of our panel there was an informal consensus that improving the acquisition workforce is an essential component of any realistic program to improve the performance of the federal procurement system.
- And it is painfully apparent that those demands of modern federal procurement are markedly different in amount, and in kind from those that faced the acquisition workforce of, say, 1990. This is not your father's federal procurement system!



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Workforce Demand Factors

- *Dramatic expansion in the dollar volume of federal procurement since 9/11*
- *A marked shift toward, and growth in, service contracting, including performance-based contracting, which places additional demands on the acquisition workforce*
- *With the growth of interagency contracting, the division of responsibilities between the customer agency and the agency that hosts the procurement vehicle creates novel challenges for the acquisition workforce.*
- *The shift to procurement of commercial products and services places new demands on the acquisition workforce to establish mastery of the market sectors in which they do acquisition.*
- *Increased complexity of the procurement system as a whole: Although the procurement reforms of the 1990s often make available procurement procedures that are quicker and more efficient than the classic procedures, they have also created a proliferation of contract vehicles and procedural options. Mastery of the procurement system has become more daunting, even as some of the procurement pathways themselves have been simplified.*



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Workforce Supply Trends

- ***Extensive anecdotal evidence suggested a significant gap existed between the demands on the procurement workforce and the capabilities and size of the existing workforce.***
- ***Available statistics on the size and composition of the federal acquisition workforce suggested a growing mismatch between needs and the resources available to meet them. Demands were growing and the workforce had been downsized. There was also strong reason for concern about the age and experience structure of the existing workforce. It appeared quite unlikely that we were taking the steps necessary to assure a qualified and adequate-sized workforce for the next generation of procurement practice.***
- ***At the same time we knew there were serious problems with the data that we had available about the size and capability of the acquisition workforce. We rapidly realized that it was virtually impossible to say anything rigorously correct about workforce levels across the government because definitions of the acquisition workforce were not consistent across the government and were not consistent over time. Moreover, whatever the applicable definition, information has been collected and reported in less than consistent fashion***



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What we have done and learned

- ***We've made a systematic effort to collect and analyze all available data about the federal acquisition workforce. We have discovered that workforce trends are even murkier and more complex than most of us had understood.***
- ***We've supplemented this overall survey and analysis by consistently asking government and former government witnesses before the panel who came to talk about various aspects of procurement functions to address the adequacy of the existing workforce to meet the challenges that they experience and those that they foresee for the future.***
- ***In addition, we've asked witnesses from the private sector who were invited to describe commercial practices in the procurement of services (and goods) to describe the staffing and procedures that they bring to bear on the sourcing decision and process. The key insight here is that the government cannot hope to benefit from the adoption of practices from the private market place without the resources that are necessary to make those practices successful.***



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Areas to Address in Recommendations

- ***Disclaimer reminder: None of these recommendations has been adopted by the panel or even formally presented for consideration. This is a working group chairman's roadmap only.***
- ***Data collection: We need to assure, going forward, that consistent and sensible definitions of the acquisition workforce are in place, and that accurate data is consistently collected about all of the relevant categories.***
- ***Qualitative Assessment: We need to institutionalize measures that go beyond counting the workforce, to measuring successful performance of the overall acquisition mission.***
- ***Human Capital Planning for the Acquisition Workforce: This needs to be institutionalized as an essential element of management for every agency.***
- ***Demand analysis and gap analysis needs to become part of the human capital planning process; despite the difficulty of the task, or concerns about the political spin of the results, agencies need to undertake serious and consistent efforts to determine what kind of acquisition workforce numbers and capabilities they need and to seek the resources to hire and train that workforce.***



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Areas to Address in Recommendations (cont.)

- ***System-wide workforce incentives: We need to focus on creating attractive career paths in an increasingly unified acquisition workforce. Competition among agencies to retain the services of our most talented procurement professionals is a good thing; mobility within the workforce is an alternative to losing these professionals to the private sector.***
- ***The real and the ideal: We live in an era of sharp budget constraints and it is unrealistic to pretend otherwise. So we can not simply proceed by assuming the power and resources to create the ideal workforce. At the same time, it seems clear that an adequate workforce is essential to the success of the procurement reforms of the 1990s and essential to almost every facet of the other recommendations being made by this Panel. We simply cannot have a first class procurement system without investing in a first class acquisition workforce. Precisely because most of us believe that many public missions are best achieved through effective use of the resources of the private sector, the acquisition workforce remains essential to a core function of government***

