

A satellite with two large solar panel arrays is shown in space, orbiting Earth. The Earth is visible on the left side of the frame, showing a blue and white horizon. The background is a dark blue space filled with stars. The satellite is positioned in the upper right quadrant, with its solar panels extending towards the top and right edges. The Earth's surface is visible on the left, showing a mix of blue oceans and white clouds. The satellite's body is white and cylindrical, with a smaller antenna-like structure on the left side. The solar panels are dark blue and rectangular, arranged in two long, parallel rows on either side of the satellite's main body.

NOAA ACQUISITION AND GRANTS OFFICE

Industry & Academia Communications Guide

NOAA AGO Office
1335 East-West Highway, SSMC1, Suite 6300
Silver Spring, MD 20910

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Table of Contents

CONTENTS

1. Background	3
1.1 Federal Policy	4
1.2 Department of Commerce Policy	4
2. Purpose	4
3. Statement of Commitment	5
4. Significance of Engagements to Government	6
5. Significance of Engagements to Industry and Academia	7
6. Vendor Resources	8

Background

Successful acquisitions and financial assistance (inclusive of grants and cooperative agreements) depend on a clear understanding of market and technological capabilities. As a result, early and meaningful engagements with supply (product) and service providers (all nongovernment organizations, including industry, academia, and their representatives) are essential to the Government's ability to minimize risks, and maximize mission opportunities and taxpayer values.

The Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) (see [FAR 15.201](#)) encourages exchanges between the Government and interested parties, from the earliest identification of a requirement through receipt of proposals, in a fair and transparent manner. Open communication and collaboration between providers and the Government can drive innovation in products and services, and improve the acquisition environment, resulting in:

- Greater clarity of agency requirements;
- Increased awareness and more realistic expectations of marketplace capabilities and current industry products and services;
- Increased competition, including greater use of small businesses;
- Greater use of small business set-asides;
- More favorable pricing;
- Higher-quality contract deliverables, and
- Fewer performance problems.

1.1 FEDERAL POLICY

In February 2011, the Office of Management and Budget's Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) issued a memorandum, "[Myth-Busting: Addressing Misconceptions to Improve Communication with Industry during the Acquisition Process](#)," which includes objectives for reducing communication barriers and encouraging vendor (provider/purveyor) engagement throughout the acquisition process. That memorandum directed federal agencies to develop vendor communication guides, consistent with existing laws and regulations, that promote responsible and constructive exchanges with industry.

1.2 DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE POLICY

In addition to the efforts to reduce communication barriers and promote vendor engagement articulated throughout this guide, the Department of Commerce issued the following policies that promote vendor engagement through effective acquisition planning and competitive strategies:

- a. [Commerce Acquisition Manual \(CAM\) Chapter 1307.1, Acquisition Planning \(August 2020\)](#): This CAM chapter provides policy for acquisition planning, market research and competition.
- b. [CAM Chapter 1306.70, Competition Requirements \(September 2020\)](#): This CAM chapter provides policy promoting full and open competition, including strategies to migrate to more competitive contracts, and the requirement to use market research to identify and mitigate barriers to competition.

Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to support the development of effective and meaningful working relationships with partners in industry and academia (inclusive of all non-governmental organizations and their representatives) who are focused on NOAA, through enhanced outreach that builds stronger communications.

Statement of Commitment

NOAA's Acquisition and Grants Office (AGO) has identified outreach to supply and service providers (industry and academia) as a strategic objective. AGO is committed to accountability, transparency, and integrity during its external engagements, and its employees are encouraged to engage with providers to promote meaningful exchanges of information. We provide this experience through high quality relationships, within a user friendly and dynamic environment. We, therefore, welcome comments regarding this communication guide and request that you share any observations on it by contacting the Acquisition and Grants Ombudsman, Mr. Rafael Roman, at Rafael.Roman@NOAA.gov.

The AGO vision for provider engagement fosters productive activities and relationships to ensure that NOAA receives best value products and services to fulfill its mission as effectively and efficiently as possible. In accordance with OFPP suggested direction, AGO strives to:

- Provide early and effective communication with industry and academia;
- Facilitate outreach to vendors that the agency has not worked with in the past;
- Identify which procurements are likely to involve opportunities for additional communication with industry;
- Protect non-public information, including vendors' confidential information and the agency's source selection information; and
- Internally and externally publicize (acquisition community listserv/communiques, NOAA and Department-wide Broadcasts, Sam.Gov, etc.) upcoming vendor communication and engagement training and awareness events.

Significance of Engagements to Government

For the Government, early, frequent, transparent, and constructive communication with providers is the foundation of proper planning and execution that leads to successful acquisitions and financial assistance. Acquisition and financial assistance processes include: descriptions of objectives and requirements; solicitations and selection of sources; contract and financial assistance awards, funding, performance and administration; and those technical and management functions directly related to the process of fulfilling agency needs by contract ([FAR 2.101](#)) or financial assistance ([2 CFR 200](#)).

Engagement with providers is critical to strategic planning, describing bureau needs, developing acquisition and financial assistance strategies, identifying terms and conditions, and aligning practices appropriate for contemplated accords and transactions. The better the understanding of the marketplace, technologies, solutions, practices, costs, benefits, risks, and limitations of alternative procurement and financial assistance approaches, the higher the probability of a successful acquisition or financial assistance cycle that leads to a desired end state.

Significance of Engagements to Industry and Academia

The resources, costs, and time involved in identifying and tracking business opportunities, through the targeting, pursuit, capture, and proposal development processes are high. For this reason, the substance, frequency, and timing of information exchanges with the Government is critical to the allocation of valuable resources, funds, and time resulting from risk-based investment decisions. Further, the amount of activity and coordination required of a responsible provider is the impetus to commence decision gates, well in advance of solicitation release.

Vendor Resources

NOAA strongly endorses vendor engagement and communications. [FAR 15.201](#) and [2 CFR 200.203](#) encourage exchanges between the government and interested parties. Further, [FAR 10.002\(b\)\(2\)](#) lists market research techniques used by the Government to enhance vendor engagement practices and increase engagement opportunities.

The [AGO website](#) is a rich source of information regarding NOAA and AGO. Among its available information, the AGO website shares material about NOAA's and AGO's organizational structure, leadership, mission, and activities. Below are various resources currently available to industry and academia on the AGO website:

a. Small Businesses

- AGO's Small Business website [portal](#) provides access to many valuable tools:
 - › One-on-one meetings with the Small Business Office can be arranged by posting a time and date on the Small Business Electronic Calendar.
 - › Small business conferences are posted on the [AGO's Events page](#), [Sam.Gov](#) and [Twitter](#).
 - › Available documents include previous [Industry Day Presentations](#), [Small Business Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQ\)](#), [Small Business Profile Registration System](#), [Responding to Sources Sought](#), [NOAA Top Vendor List](#), [How to Develop a Strategic Partnering with NOAA](#) and [End of Year Report](#).

b. Large Businesses

- Large businesses and academia may also request meetings with the Small Business Office (see the meeting request process above) relating to small business matters. Large businesses may also benefit from the AGO Small Business portal's informative materials.

c. Events Applying to All Vendors

- [AGO's Events page](#) identifies major acquisition and financial assistance outreach activities. Outreach events are also posted on the [ProTech](#) and [NMITS](#) websites, [Sam.Gov](#) and on [Twitter](#). Financial assistance events can also be found on the Grants Online advisory page (login is required) and with various Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs); as well as on the AGO website's Events page.
- AGO hosts an annual Industry Day Conference and a Financial Assistance Workshop. In addition, it holds pre-solicitation conferences as deemed appropriate. Industry Day Conferences typically include presentations from NOAA leadership and panel discussions with NOAA Line and Staff Offices regarding organizational structures, mission programs and business opportunities. Financial Assistance Workshops are a valuable resource for parties seeking grant opportunities and for current financial assistance recipients seeking compliance refreshment.
- There are a number of public indexes referred to within AGO's website that are critical to the announcement of business opportunities and other exchanges.
 - › The Department of Commerce and its bureaus use the Commerce Business Opportunities Tool (C-BOT), which is a business opportunity forecast with points of contact and their contact information. C-BOT can be accessed [here](#).
 - › The System for Award Management (SAM) is used to do business with the Government, and it provides business partners with visibility and transparency into posted contract opportunities, contract data, wage determinations, and the buying process. Outreach events are posted on [Sam.Gov](#) and/or other government points of entry, such as the website events pages discussed above.
 - › The Grants Management Division (GMD) publishes NOAA financial assistance opportunities on [Grants.Gov](#).

Upon request, additional outreach and collaboration opportunities are available to vendors:

- Vendors may request meetings with AGO leadership, contracting officers, and project/program managers.
- [NOAA's website](#) identifies all Line and Staff Offices. Project and program office websites are fertile sources of information about Line and Staff Office missions, activities, organizations, and points of contacts. Further, meetings with project and program officers are encouraged in order to perform timely due diligence regarding actual or projected NOAA needs, concerns, budgets, and timelines.
- Proposal offerors may request pre- and post-award debriefs. See [FAR 15.505](#), [FAR 15.506](#), and [AGO Acquisition Instruction 21-03 Appendix I](#).
- Vendors may request details regarding the process, findings, and determinations having to do with their contract's performance. Information regarding how well a contractor performs under an awarded contract is captured in the Contractor Performance Assessment Reporting System (CPARS); making an actual or proposed CPARS entry an excellent point of focus for engagements with a contracting officer and a project/program manager. Discussions around CPARS entries offer the opportunity for a better bilateral understanding of interests and expectations. [FAR 42.1502](#) requires the annual reporting of contractor performance in CPARS and [FAR 42.1503](#) addresses the factors upon which contractor performance will be graded.

- Data and information generated or held by NOAA organizations may be requested by vendors and the general public. Under the Freedom of Information Act, (FOIA) vendors and the general public may request information from NOAA that could assist with research and the understanding of federal decisions, practices, processes, and/or trends. This is a powerful resource that can be used by vendors to gather budget, equipment/product inventory, risks and concerns, project/program manager contact information, technical manager contact information, and incumbency information, etc. [FAR 24](#), Protection of Privacy and Freedom of Information, addresses FOIA and [FAR 24.2](#) calls for timely and responsible satisfaction of FOIA requests. FOIA Office contact information can be accessed [here](#). [2 CFR 200.212](#) addresses additional access to federally held information.
- Through industry, academia, and professional associations, AGO participates in focus groups, panels, and special projects, where it exchanges and receives due diligence information, as well as receives feedback regarding its outreach initiatives.
- NOAA has an [Acquisition and Grants Ombudsman](#) who collaborates with companies, academia, and professional associations to resolve their concerns and exchange ideas. The Ombudsman also serves as a liaison to parties external (governmental and non-governmental) to AGO. In this latter capacity, the Ombudsman engages with NOAA project and program offices, Procurement Technical Assistance Centers, industry, academia, professional association groups, and the public. Also, for additional information, or for the submission of comments, regarding this communication guide please contact the Ombudsman.

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