GUIDANCE

Developing and Strengthening IT Acquisition Professionals

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is dedicated to the development and retention of information technology (IT) acquisition professionals. Having knowledgeable and experienced IT acquisition professionals requires a multi-faceted approach including formalized training, on-the-job training (OJT), and employee development (i.e., mentoring).

The agency recognizes the importance of strengthening its IT acquisition professionals to ensure that employees are properly trained to address complex and often expensive IT procurements. IT acquisition professionals play a vital role in the agency's mission success and ensure that the Government receives the best value for the goods and services it procures.

Effective acquisition of IT products and services requires extensive working knowledge of: (a) the Federal Acquisition Regulation, (b) agency regulations and policies governing IT acquisitions and investments, (c) standard industry IT practices, (d) IT products and services, and (e) challenges uniquely inherent to IT acquisitions.

IT acquisition professionals benefit from a cross-section of knowledge and experience in the 1102 contracting series. Key IT knowledge areas include, but are not limited to:

- Principal laws and regulations governing IT;
- Elements of IT strategic planning;
- Capital planning and investment management;
- Systems-level acquisition strategies, including development and integration;
- Enterprise architecture principles;
- Information security requirements;
- Legal and regulatory practices surrounding data rights for IT service contract deliverables and commercial software licenses;
- IT marketplace; and
- Earned Value Management principles and other performance management tools.

A. <u>Training</u>:

The NRC's Acquisition Workforce Training and Certification Program facilitates the certification of IT acquisition professionals and encourages the continuing education, professional development, and growth of the acquisition workforce as a whole. To ensure that employees have the qualifications necessary to conduct their responsibilities in effectively and efficiently acquiring IT products and services, the agency actively promotes and supports various types of training opportunities.

NRC acquisition workforce professionals are required to have an Individual Development Plan or similar plan to ensure that there is a clear strategy for receiving effective training while meeting overall agency objectives and priorities.

The NRC follows Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) guidance in developing training programs for its acquisition workforce. IT acquisition professionals receive Federal Acquisition Certification-Contracting (FAC-C) certification (Levels 1, 2 or 3) and are required to complete at least 80 hours of continuous learning points every two years. (See FAC-C requirements at: http://www.fai.gov/drupal/certification/fac-c-certification-requirements-table.)

Acquisition professionals are encouraged to participate in training provided by other Federal agencies (i.e., Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI), Defense Acquisition University (DAU) or Treasury Acquisition Institute) and engage in training opportunities provided through the agency's Enterprise-Wide Contracts. Since NRC does not have specific in-house IT acquisition courses, employees are encouraged to attend training provided by external vendors.

Web links:
- http://www.fai.gov/drupal/
- http://www.dau.mil/default.aspx
- http://www.irs.gov/uac/Treasury-Acquisition-Institute

IT acquisition professionals may attend other types of training opportunities such as, but not limited to:

- National Contract Management Association sponsored conferences or seminars (see http://www.ncmahq.org/).

- U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) sponsored training or seminars (see http://www.gsa.gov/portal/category/27105). GSA has online training focused on their schedules. On-line courses include GSA acquisition vehicles, basic contracting for GSA's Federal Acquisition Service schedules, marketing for the new small business and initiating partnering agreements. (See GSA's Interact for upcoming training, webinars, and self-paced video tutorials on how to purchase though GSA technology programs.)

- Section508.gov helps agencies learn how to ensure their Electronic and Information Technology (E&IT) is accessible for people with disabilities. BuyAccessible.gov helps federal government officials acquire E&IT that meets Section 508. It will create and maintain records for use in solicitation and demonstrating due diligence in compliance.

- Sustainable acquisition conferences, seminars, working groups for buying environmentally friendly (green) IT products and services.

NRC acquisition professionals are required to be registered in Federal Acquisition Institute Training Application System (FAITAS). FAITAS is a Government-wide integrated acquisition workforce career management system. FAITAS contains a certification module and a continuous learning module which manages, track and issues Federal Acquisition Certifications and continuous learning achievement certificates.

B. On-the-Job Training (OJT):

The Information Technology (IT) Team in the Office of Administration (ADM) has the primary responsibility for developing the abilities and skill sets their employees through OJT and by ensuring that their workload assignments allow them to develop expertise in one or more IT acquisition areas.

OJT for acquisition professionals may include, but not be limited to:

- Assisting offices with new or innovative IT requirements, including high risk or complex IT procurements
- Serving as a non-voting member or observer of a Source Evaluation Panel for IT products and/or services
- Participating in agency working groups to address specific IT challenges
- Giving formal or informal presentations to management on IT issues or concerns
- Performing peer reviews as a contracting officer or senior contract specialist for IT solicitations and awards
- Attending agency meetings to better understand how IT affects functions and mission objectives
- Establishing or participating in vendor communication meetings or pre-solicitation conferences with IT firms
- Serving as an acquisition liaison with offices requiring IT support
- Serving on rotational assignments in the Office of Informational Services (OIS) or other program offices
- Attending meetings or conferences of a professional acquisition or IT organization
- Participating in OFPP meetings for young acquisition professionals
- Attending government-wide meetings and conferences on specific topics or issues that affect agency IT procurements
- Participating in professional acquisition or IT organizations
- Participating in strategic sourcing initiatives or commodity team
- Participating on integrated product teams

At the NRC, IT acquisition professionals participate on the NRC's IT Portfolio Council. Its membership consists of NRC employees from various offices (e.g., Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation, OIS, Office of the Chief Financial Officer, etc.) that have IT procurements. It is a council that helps NRC to identify strategic sourcing opportunities for IT investments and to align planning for those activities with NRC budget activities.

The IT Team Leader in ADM also serves as a voting member of the NRC's Information Technology/Information Management (IT/IM) Board (see http://portal.nrc.gov/edo/ois/bpiad/EASB/ECCB/default.aspx), which is one of two NRC IT governance bodies at the NRC. This board has broad NRC membership, including OIS, Computer Security Office, NRC regional offices, program offices, and acquisition team. The Information Technology Board (ITB) is a review body established by the NRC Chief Information Officer to review and recommend changes to the agency's Information Technology/Information Management (IT/IM) architecture including the portfolio of IT/IM systems, technologies, and standards and to conduct periodic performance reviews of major IT/IM investments. The ITB reviews new proposals and current IT/IM investments based on IT/IM Portfolio Executive Council (IPEC) priorities, alignment with strategic direction, ability to integrate into NRC's IT/IM architecture, conformance with technology standards, and potential risks to the NRC IT environment and infrastructure. The goal of the ITB is to help align IT/IM investments and technology standards with NRC's mission, and to ensure that IT investments are made according to the agency priorities set by the IPEC.

C. Mentoring:

The NRC considers mentoring to be a critical role of senior agency leadership and management to ensure that IT acquisition professionals receive proper and necessary advice, guidance, encouragement, and support.

The IT Team Leader has the primary responsibility for mentoring their employees and encouraging contracting officers and senior contract specialists to mentor junior staff. However, the NRC encourages employees to have more than one mentor, including a higher level employee in another acquisition team within ADM. (See FAI Acquisition Mentoring Resources at: http://www.fai.gov/drupal/certification/mentoring.)