

Procurement Advisory

ADVISORY NO. 110

USDA Chief Acquisition Officer (CAO) Roles and Responsibilities

1. SUMMARY

The purpose of this Advisory is to clearly define and communicate to USDA's acquisition workforce the role of the CAO which is collaboratively developed and administered in coordination with the Senior Procurement Executive (SPE).

2. BACKGROUND

Statutory and regulatory guidance from the *References* listed in Section 3 explain that the primary duty of the CAO is acquisition management. The primary role of the CAO is acquisition management. The CAO advises and assists the head of USDA and other agency officials to ensure that USDA's mission is supported by acquisition activities. In addition, the *Actions* discussed in Section 4 highlight priority management areas which significantly impact USDA's ability to meet mission goals effectively and efficiently.

3. REFERENCES

41 U.S.C. 1702(b); <http://uscode.house.gov/download/pls/41C17.txt>

Agriculture Acquisition Regulation (AGAR) 401.601 and AGAR 402.101;
<http://www.dm.usda.gov/procurement/policy/docs/agar04.pdf>

7 CFR 2.24; <http://cfr.vlex.com/vid/2-24-assistant-secretary-for-administration-19897299>

4. ACTIONS

In accordance with the AGAR Subpart 401.6:

The authority and responsibility vested in the Secretary to manage USDA's acquisition function is delegated through the Assistant Secretary for Administration [who is also the CAO] to the SPE. This broad authority includes, but is not limited to, the following responsibilities:

- (a) Prescribing and publishing Departmental acquisition policies, regulations, and procedures.*
- (b) Taking any necessary actions consistent with policies, regulations, and procedures with respect to purchases, contracts, leases, and other transactions.*
- (c) Designating contracting officers.*

- (d) *Establishing clear lines of contracting authority.*
- (e) *Evaluating and monitoring the performance of USDA's acquisition system.*
- (f) *Managing and enhancing career development of the contracting work force.*
- (g) *Participating in the development of Government-wide acquisition policies, regulations, and standards; and determining specific areas where government-wide performance standards should be established and applied.*
- (h) *Determining areas of Department-unique standards and developing unique Department-wide standards.*
- (i) *Certifying to the Secretary that the acquisition system meets approved standards.*

USDA's CAO, working collaboratively with the SPE, also assists in promulgating the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) priority management areas which are as follows:

- (a) *Buy Smarter* – Work with the Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Chief Information Officer (CIO), and Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO) to increase agency use of government-wide and USDA-wide strategic sourcing vehicles to save money and reduce duplication. It involves ensuring a reasonable price is paid for purchases and, of equal importance, that the optimal goods and services are bought using the best methods to accomplish USDA objectives. To that end, rigorous data mining, comprehension, and analysis are critical to planning (strategically when, where, what, and how) to buy more effectively. Partnering to ensure data accuracy, transparency, and timeliness are part of USDA's acquisition culture is critical. Effective data capture is also important in measuring cost, schedule, and performance of acquisitions, and ultimately seeking improvements where needed. Finally, the CAO encourages development of creative and innovative ideas and solutions when they do not conflict with the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) or USDA guidance such as the Agriculture Acquisition Regulation (AGAR).

Another key aspect of the acquisitions process supported by the CAO includes utilizing strategic sourcing to maximize the value USDA earns on every taxpayer dollar spent. That includes not only seeking volume discounts for bulk purchases, but also locating opportunities for reduced spending and other efficiencies. Examples include grouping processes and skills around services or supplies commonly purchased, awarding contracts or blanket purchase agreements (BPAs) to fulfill recurring USDA requirements and limit processing and delivery times, or other insightful methods of optimizing the acquisitions process.

- (b) *Strengthen the acquisition workforce* – Support a well-trained, well-empowered acquisition workforce to enhance requirements definition, improve supplier relationships, optimize solutions for contract award, and strengthen management of acquisitions. USDA's acquisition workforce includes USDA employees that are *contracting professionals*, *contracting officers representatives* (CORs), or *program and project managers (P/PM)*. In general a *contracting professional* is someone who is a General Schedule (GS)-1102, and/or a contract specialist, contracting officer, or procurement analyst. A *COR* or *P/PM* in USDA's acquisition workforce is someone who holds a Federal Acquisition Certification in the COR or P/PM program. To obtain a Federal Acquisition

- (c) Certification in any of the aforementioned programs USDA employees must adhere to OFPP and Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI) training and development guidelines. The CAO also supports implementation of USDA's annual Human Capital Plan which is a tool used in partnership with other agency executives to assess the current acquisition workforce and plan a strategic approach to enhancing workforce capacity and capabilities. Finally, the CAO collaborates with other organizations such as other CAO's, congressional oversight committees, the agency inspector general, and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) regarding government-wide acquisition matters.
- (d) *Build the right supplier relationships* – Promote a high performing, ethically sound, and socio-economically diverse supplier base. This includes supporting thorough market research as a strategic step in positioning USDA's acquisition workforce to be better informed about the market's competitive forces. Better market information will foster acquisition of better products and services at better prices, ultimately enhancing the value in meeting USDA's mission.
- (e) *Advance mission performance* – Collaborate with other agency leaders to ensure acquisition strategies are aligned with, and guided by; mission, program, and performance objectives. The CAO works to limit occurrences where agency mission areas and contracting activities work in isolation or functional stovepipes. Conversely, the CAO works to achieve synergies through an integrated acquisition team approach. Through collaborations among contracting, technical, and program personnel, all phases of the acquisition life cycle may be better aligned and objectives more effectively achieved.

USDA's CAO works with the SPE in crafting innovative solutions to optimize acquisition outcomes and maximize the value of taxpayer dollars. This begins by the CAO fostering an environment that highlights the "Big A" of the acquisition process. That is, setting a foundation for acquisition planning to occur well before the actual procurement or contracting phase begins. It involves the CAO strategically planning and partnering with other significant executive stakeholders (CFO, CIO, CHCO, etc) early and often throughout the entire acquisition process to promulgate the government's and USDA's major initiatives. Ultimately, the CAO serves as the catalyst for all acquisition-related processes and is an incredibly important stakeholder, change agent, and leader of USDA acquisitions.

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EXPIRATION DATE: Effective upon issue date until canceled. [END]