



# Presenting Past Performance and References



Best Practices To Presenting Your  
References And Past Performances  
In Requests For Proposals (RFP),  
Requests For Bid And Solicitations.

## Learning Objectives

At the end of this module, you will understand the importance of Past Performance, how the government uses Past Performance Information, and how to create winning Past Performance and References sections for the RFP/Solicitation process with government agencies.

## About FDIC Small Business Resource Effort

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) recognizes the important contributions made by small, veteran, and minority and women-owned businesses to our economy. For that reason, we strive to provide small businesses with opportunities to contract with the FDIC. In furtherance of this goal, the FDIC has initiated the FDIC Small Business Resource Effort to assist the small vendors that provide products, services, and solutions to the FDIC.

The objective of the Small Business Resource Effort is to provide information and the tools small vendors need to become better positioned to compete for contracts and subcontracts at the FDIC. To achieve this objective, the Small Business Resource Effort references outside resources critical for qualified vendors, leverages technology to provide education according to perceived needs, and offers connectivity through resourcing, accessibility, counseling, coaching, and guidance where applicable.

This product was developed by the FDIC Office of Minority and Woman Inclusion (OMWI). OMWI has responsibility for oversight of the Small Business Resource Effort.

## Executive Summary

The Federal Government is the world's largest buyer, spending over \$400 Billion dollars annually on anything from armored vehicles to pens and pencils to socks. Approaching a government agency successfully can be difficult and intimidating. Marketing any product or service requires understanding (the what, who, where, when, how and why) of your buyer. Successful efforts also require that you present strong past performance. Government agencies view contractors with positive past performances as likely to perform well again in the future.

The Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) defines past performance as relevant information, provided for source selection purposes to Government-Owned Entities (GOE), regarding a contractor's actions under previously-awarded contracts. Federal Contractors should be aware that most federal work they do will include past performance evaluations and that past performance constitutes a major factor in whether a vendor wins new business.

Your (or your company's) past performances and references from previous engagements are key assets in the RFP/Solicitation process with the government. Most government solicitations require Past Performance Information (PPI) from three sources with corresponding references. The government solicitation teams then rank your PPI according to an evaluation system and contact your references to verify information and seek their opinion. By understanding the evaluation process and how to present your Past Performance Information in the best light, you can increase your chances of winning the solicitation.

While past performance has always been strongly considered in awarding contracts, the government feels that contractors with positive past performances are likely to perform well again in the future, a sentiment that carries the support of both agencies and vendors. Because of information sharing, poor past performance hurts government contractor's more than commercial vendors. Past performance is now arguably the second-most important selection criteria after price. The choice of references and overall strategy in addressing the past performance part of a solicitation is one of the most important decisions after whether to bid.

### **What is Past Performance Information?**

Past Performance Information (PPI) is relevant information for the government's source selection regarding contractors' actions under previously awarded contracts. The source selection authority considers the relevancy of all information and combines both self-reported information and that gleaned from the Past Performance Information Retrieval System (PPIRS) and other sources in evaluating past performance.

This is a significant factor in the selection process, which combined with your Technical Proposal is often weighted more than price. PPI encompasses not only your experience, but also an evaluation of your past company experiences. Therefore, when you document and present your PPI to the government as part of your proposal, be sure to be clear on not just what you accomplished, but how you met and exceed contract performance metrics.

Typically Government-Owned Entities require that all negotiated competitive acquisitions expected to exceed the simplified acquisition threshold include past performance as an evaluation factor. As a standard, the solicitations typically describe how past performance will be evaluated and how offerors with no relevant past performance will be evaluated.

Contractors submitting a response to a solicitation are given an opportunity to identify references, past or current contracts similar to the requirement, information on problems encountered and corrective actions. Information regarding predecessor companies and key personnel or subcontractors who have relevant experience that are expected to perform major or critical aspects of the requirement may also be considered under past performance.

## Who Is A Good Reference?

Although government owned entities (GOE) rely heavily on Past Performance Information Retrieval System (PPIRS) and other sources in evaluating past performance, other sources may include phone calls to personnel within agencies the contractor previously worked for, even if they are not listed as references.

Contracting officers on small contracts not subject to past performance evaluations typically still keep notes on performance issues and often require references for previous work performed. Consequently, the selection of references should be given a high priority. They should be selected early enough so you can inform them of their inclusion with adequate time to respond.

When required to provide a list of references you should include a current contact name, e-mail address, and telephone number with a description of the work performed. It is your responsibility to notify references that the Contract Officer or member of the Technical Evaluation Panel (TEP) may be contacting them in connection with the acquisition.

It is advised that you prepare in advance all information requested and help prep your references them on the solicitation and key points to talk about. It is your responsibility to make this easy for your references as you may require their assistance again in the future. Important tips for selecting references include:

- Choose references that will speak highly of your work
- Double-check contact information. Be aware that in the highly-transitory federal world, the contracting officer or reference you worked with may have moved on to another position.
- Be aware of when the reference will be contacted. Try to ensure that any negatives associated with another contract are ironed out before references are contacted.
- Choosing someone who will give an excellence reference is probably more valuable than work more closely related to the desired contract.

## Past Performance In The Solicitation Process

In conducting its evaluation of quotes, the Government may seek information from any source it deems appropriate to obtain or validate information regarding an offeror's past performance. Past performance information, when included as an evaluation factor, includes recent and relevant contracts for the same or similar items and other references (including contract numbers, points of contact with telephone numbers and any relevant information).

In most Government solicitations, the contracting organization requires a minimum of three (3) references for work performed within the past (typically three years). The Government strictly evaluates an offeror's compliance with technical requirements and performance standards stipulated.

Government Owned Entities (GOE) typically ask references to provide information that will show the relevance to the current requirement and to rate: (a) Quality of Service, (b) Schedule, (c) Cost Control, (d) Business Relations, and (e) Overall Customer satisfaction. The government uses this information to evaluate the level of risk associated with your company when providing goods or services subject to the solicitation.

### **Your Performance Pursuant To A Solicitation**

Past Performance is also created based on Technical Performance, Cost Control, Schedule (Timeliness), and Business Relations of your deliverables pursuant to a solicitation. Contracts over the simplified acquisition threshold are generally subject to past performance evaluations. A Government Owned Entity (GOE) will conduct a past performance evaluation after the work on a contract or order is complete, through interim evaluations on contracts exceeding one year, or as needed based on the requirements of the contract.

During contract performance, your Contracting Officer (KO), Contracting Officer's Representative (COR), or Contracting Officer's Technical Representative (COTR) will typically evaluate your performance based on either a pre-determined rating scale and/or the Quality Assurance requirements stipulated in the contract. This information is typically entered into the Past Performance Information Retrieval System (PPIRS) through the Contractor Performance Assessment Reporting System (CPARS) for use in future source selections.

When involved in a solicitation, the Government evaluation panel will consider these ratings in assessing your Risk Level as well as any information you provide. If you don't have a PPIRS entry for work provided to a Government Owned Entity, you should request one created for your work. Whether you have past performance with the government or not, it is advisable to highlight your key accomplishments and successes based on the rating system the government uses.

While rating guidelines differ between agencies and departments, you can expect to see guidelines based on Technical Performance, Cost Control, Schedule (Timeliness), and Business Relations. Also, be aware of any unique performance metrics you need to address in your Past Performance Information.

## Typical Government Performance Rating Guidelines

RATING	DEFINITION AND CRITERIA
EXCEPTIONAL	<p><b>Technical Performance:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Met all performance requirements / Exceeded 20 % or more</li> <li>• Minor problems / Highly effective corrective actions / Improved performance/quality results</li> </ul> <p><b>Cost Control:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant reductions while meeting all contract requirements</li> <li>• Use of value engineering or other innovative management techniques</li> <li>• Quickly resolved cost issues / Effective corrective actions facilitated cost reductions</li> </ul> <p><b>Schedule (Timeliness)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significantly exceeded delivery requirements (All on-time with many early deliveries to the Government's benefit)</li> <li>• Quickly resolved delivery issues / Highly effective corrective actions</li> </ul> <p><b>Business Relations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly professional / Responsive / Proactive</li> <li>• Significantly exceeded expectations</li> <li>• High user satisfaction</li> <li>• Significantly exceeded SB/SDB subcontractor goals</li> <li>• Minor changes implemented without cost impact / Limited change proposals / Timely definitization of change proposals</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>RISK LEVEL: VERY LOW</b></p>
VERY GOOD	<p><b>Technical Performance:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Met all performance requirements / Exceeded 5% or more</li> <li>• Minor problems / Effective corrective actions</li> </ul> <p><b>Cost Control:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction in overall cost/price while meeting all contract requirements</li> <li>• Use of value engineering or other innovative management techniques</li> <li>• Quickly resolved cost/price issues / Effective corrective actions to facilitate overall cost/price reductions</li> </ul> <p><b>Schedule (Timeliness)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On-Time deliveries / Some early deliveries to the Government's benefit</li> <li>• Quickly resolved delivery issues / Effective corrective actions</li> </ul> <p><b>Business Relations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional / Responsive</li> <li>• Exceeded expectations</li> <li>• User satisfaction</li> <li>• Exceeded subcontractor goals</li> <li>• Limited change proposals / Timely definitization of change proposals</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>RISK LEVEL: LOW</b></p>
SATISFACTORY	<p><b>Technical Performance:</b></p>

RATING	DEFINITION AND CRITERIA
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Met all performance requirements</li> <li>• Minor problems / Satisfactory corrective actions</li> </ul> <p><b>Cost Control:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction in overall cost/price while meeting all contract requirements</li> <li>• Use of value engineering or other innovative management techniques</li> <li>• Quickly resolved cost/price issues / Effective corrective actions to facilitate overall cost/price reductions</li> </ul> <p><b>Schedule (Timeliness)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On-time deliveries</li> <li>• Minor problems / Did not affect delivery schedule</li> </ul> <p><b>Business Relations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional / Reasonably responsive</li> <li>• Met expectations</li> <li>• Adequate user satisfaction</li> <li>• Met subcontractor goals</li> <li>• Reasonable change proposals / Reasonable definitization cycle</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>RISK LEVEL: MODERATE</b></p>
<b>MARGINAL</b>	<p><b>Technical Performance:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some performance requirements not met</li> <li>• Performance reflects serious problem / Ineffective corrective actions</li> </ul> <p><b>Cost Control:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not meet cost/price estimates</li> <li>• Inadequate corrective action plans / No innovative techniques to bring overall expenditures within limits</li> </ul> <p><b>Schedule (Timeliness)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some late deliveries</li> <li>• No corrective actions</li> </ul> <p><b>Business Relations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less Professionalism and Responsiveness</li> <li>• Low user satisfaction / No attempts to improve relations</li> <li>• Unsuccessful in meeting subcontractor goals</li> <li>• Unnecessary change proposals / Untimely definitization of change proposals</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>RISK LEVEL: HIGH</b></p>
<b>UNSATISFACTORY</b>	<p><b>Technical Performance:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most performance requirements are not met</li> <li>• Recovery not likely</li> </ul> <p><b>Cost Control:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant cost overruns</li> <li>• Not likely to recovery cost control</li> </ul> <p><b>Schedule (Timeliness)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many late deliveries</li> </ul>

RATING	DEFINITION AND CRITERIA
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative cost impact / Loss of capability for Government</li> <li>• Ineffective corrective actions / Not likely to recover</li> </ul> <p><b>Business Relations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delinquent responses / Lack of cooperative spirit</li> <li>• Unsatisfied user / Unable to improve relations</li> <li>• Significantly under subcontractor goals</li> <li>• Excessive unnecessary change proposals to correct poor management</li> <li>• Significantly untimely definitization of change proposals</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>RISK LEVEL: VERY HIGH</b></p>

Once the Technical Evaluation Panel (TEP) and/or the contracting officer receives your proposal and Past Performance Information (PPI), they will validate your information and assign a performance risk rating. The final past performance rating may be reflected in a color, a number, adjective rating, or some other means, depending on the agency policy for indicating the relative ranking of the offerors.

Performance risk assessments typically look at the number and severity of problems, the demonstrated effectiveness of corrective actions taken, and the overall work record. They also note performance in the areas most critical solicitation requirements. A significant achievement, problem, or lack of relevant data in any aspect of the requirement can become an important consideration in the source selection process.

A negative finding may result in an overall high performance risk rating, depending upon the significance placed on that aspect of the requirement by the source selection team. This information is evaluated along with other requirements and a comparison is made between all offerors to determine the winning bid.

## Steps to Document and Present Past Performance Information

### Choosing Past Performance

The most ideal Past Performance Information include those that are both recent and relevant to the solicitation. Similar or relevant past performance efforts can be determined by the size, scope, complexity, and contract type. Additionally, performance experiences in the same industry, type of work, or NAICS codes category can be good choices. It is advised that you include a note to explain the relevance of your past performance submitted, particularly when it is not be easily apparent.

In the case of a newly formed business entity or in contractor teaming arrangements where you rely mostly on the past performance and experience of your key personnel, partners on the team, or on a major subcontractor(s), the proposal must clearly explain "whose" past performance, and "how" that past performance is relevant to the procurement. When choosing requirements to submit, also

consider who the best reference is for that Past Performance. Note that you may be deemed non-compliant if you submit more than the required quantity of past performance statements.

### **Subcontractor, Team, and Joint Venture Past Performance**

The government typically treats subcontractor, and teaming, and joint venture partners' past performance information the same as any prime contractor past performance information. This is because many companies have merged, consolidated, or otherwise changed in recent years.

Because the Technical Evaluation Panel (TEP) and/or the contracting officer must obtain the consent of the separate entities before disclosing any PERFORMANCE INFORMATION (PPI) to the prime, it is advisable for the prime to gather and include disclosure consent from subcontractors or partners in the proposal. This allows the government to discuss any past performance questions or issues from a partner with the prime, and facilitates easier communication and resolution of problems.

### **Conducting Past Performance Discussions**

It is typical for your company to be provided an opportunity to address adverse past performance information obtained from references on which you have not had a previous opportunity to comment. Any past performance deficiency or significant weakness must be discussed with offerors within the competitive range during discussions.

This allows you as the offeror a fair opportunity to rebut any negative information that may not be due solely to the poor performance of the contractor, or that may not have been adequately resolved since the date of the information provided. For example, there may be times when excessive Government-driven requirement changes or last minute changes may negatively impact the contractor's performance.

Note that some Government Owned Entities (GOE) provide a framework for debrief as part of the solicitation and you may also be able to request a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Action. The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) gives you the right to access information from federal agencies. A debrief may include feedback on the proposal's weaknesses or deficiencies, the evaluated cost or price, and the ranking of the bidders as well as a review of past performance.

### **Documenting Past Performance Information**

It is important to thoroughly document your past performance information. This helps you in many ways – in questions or disputes with your contracts, in new solicitations, and with increasing your brand awareness. Therefore, it is advised to capture the following information from all of your past experiences, both organizational and personal.

- Past Performance Industry
- Client Organization
- Your or your company's role (Prime or Sub-contractor)

- Brief description of your Responsibilities & Services
- Details on your Past Performance, and your self-assessment of contract performance
- Contract Details (Contract Number, Title, Description, Value, Type [Firm-Fixed Price, Time & Materials, etc.], Period of Performance)
- Contract Point of Contact

In general, you should organize this information in a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System, database or spreadsheet. Make sure your headers and table formatting are intact and easy to transfer into an appropriate presentation format.

### Formatting Your Past Performance Information:

In conducting its evaluation of quotes, the Government may seek information from any source it deems appropriate to obtain or validate information regarding an offeror’s past performance. The solicitation typically prescribes strict guidelines/requirements of Past Performance Information (PPI). It is advised that your submitted PPI to be clear, concise and responsive to the solicitation instructions and evaluation factors. This means using an easy-to-read format with information laid logically and sized appropriately. You should also include your reference or point of contact in this section. Below is an example of how you can format your Past Performance

#### ProSidian Consulting Past Performance Example.

<b>OFFEROR NAME:</b>	Your Company, Inc.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIME	<input type="checkbox"/> SUB
<b>CONTRACT TITLE:</b>	Example Contract Title		
<b>AGENCY OR CUSTOMER:</b>	Target Federal Agency or Department		
<b>CONTRACT NUMBER:</b>	Abcd1234		
<b>AWARD DATE:</b>	12/23/2012	<b>CONTRACT TYPE:</b>	Firm-Fixed Price
<b>CONTRACT VALUE:</b>	\$000,000.00	<b>PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE</b>	Feb. 2, 2012 to Jan 31, 2013

PROCURING OR ADMINISTRATIVE CONTRACTING ACTIVITY:			
POINTS OF CONTACT	PROCUREMENT CONTRACTING OFFICER (PCO):	ADMINISTRATIVE CONTRACTING OFFICER (ACO):	TECHNICAL REPRESENTATIVE (COR):
<b>NAME:</b>	John Smith - Contracting Officer	Jane Smith - Administrative Contracting Officer	John Doe - Contracting Officer’s Representative
<b>ADDRESS:</b>	Address	Address	Address
<b>TELEPHONE:</b>	Phone	Phone	Phone
<b>FAX NO:</b>	Fax	Fax	Fax
<b>E-MAIL:</b>	Email	Email	Email
CONTRACT DESCRIPTION			
<b>INDUSTRY SECTOR:</b> Federal Government (USA)			
<b>CLIENT ORGANIZATION:</b> Target Federal Agency or Department			
<b>RESPONSIBILITIES &amp; SERVICES:</b> Enter a brief, targeted description of your contract performance. Be sure to address your Technical Performance, Cost Control, Schedule (Timeliness), and Business Relations.			
<b>SUBCONTRACTING PLAN:</b>			
CONTRACT RELEVANCE:			
Address the reasons why your past performance is relevant to the current solicitation.			

## Steps to Document and Present References

Your references are a valuable resource and an advocate in the solicitation process. It is advised to keep contact with your key references, ask them to be your reference, and inform them well in advance of any solicitations that may require their assistance.

Organize your References in a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, spreadsheet, or database similar to your Past Performance. Many solicitations either require a Past Performance Questionnaire or detailed information regarding your references. Before sending a Past Performance Questionnaire to your references, it is a good idea to pre-fill as much information as possible to make it easy for your reference to complete and send to the contracting officer.

If the solicitation does not require a Past Performance Questionnaire, make sure the references you provide are presented in a clear, concise manner. When choosing which references to use, choose those that:

1. Will speak highly of your company. ***This is the most important.***
2. Have received similar products or services that the current solicitation requires, or
3. Have a services of similar scope, size and complexity compared with the current solicitation requirements

### Preparing Your References For Their Interview

The government selection team (including technical Evaluation Panel (TEP) and/or the contracting officer) will ask your reference or point of contact pertinent questions regarding your contract performance with them. Typically, they will ask the reference:

- Contract details, including the work accomplished, complexity of work, contract value, and schedule.
- If problems surfaced, what did the government and the contractor do to fix it?
- Did the contractor use personnel with the appropriate skill and expertise?
- How did the contractor perform with regard to schedule, cost control, business relations, and management?
- How did the contractor manage subcontractors, if any?
- What were the contractor's strong points or what they liked best?
- Would you have any reservations about recommending a future contract award to this contractor?
- Who else may know or have Past Performance Information on the offeror?

When you contact your reference to ask them for assistance and to be an advocate, be sure to go over the key points of your contract performance with them. This is especially if they are unfamiliar with the contracting process, or has not documented Past Performance Information before. Coach them on the type of questions that may be asked and to be truthful of all the successes and problems, and how those problems were addressed and resolved.

### Key Takeaways from This Module

- Past Performance Information is both your experience and an evaluation of your experience.
- Choose Past Performance and References based on contract relevance, recency, and your performance on the contract.
- Your References should be your advocate from within the client organization.
- Document and organize all of your past performance information to be able to quickly respond to solicitations, contract questions, and to increase brand awareness.
- Utilize tools like Customer Relationship Management systems, databases, or spreadsheets to organize your past performance and reference information.
- Format and present your past performance information in a clear, concise, and easy-to-follow template.
- If possible, coach your references and points of contact on key highlights of your successful contract performance and the type of questions they may be asked.

### Sources and Citations

- Office of Federal Procurement Policy, Office of Management and Budget, Executive Office of the President, *Best Practices For Collecting And Using Current And Past Performance Information*
- Department of Defense (DoD) Past Performance Integrated Product Team (IPT), *A Guide to Collection and Use of Past Performance Information (Version 3)*
- GovWin Network, *The Importance of Past Performance*
- Defense Acquisition University ACQuipedia, *Past Performance*
- Peter Dong, ProSidian Consulting, *Presenting Past Performance and References- 2013*