

# Taking the BS out of Bids

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# Hi! Who is here?

# Nice to meet you!



Miatta Myers

*Acquisition Nerd*



Ashley Owens

*Breaker of Chains, Acquisition*



Amy Ashida

*Designer/Acquisition fan*

# Today you'll walk away with:

1. **Fresh ideas** for requesting, writing, and reviewing bids
2. **A better understanding** of the folks on the other side other side of the table

18F is a civic consultancy  
for the U.S. government,  
inside the U.S. government.

We're federal employees.

GSA Headquarters  
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GENERAL SERVICES  
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18F works with federal,  
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successfully deliver  
efficient, easy-to-use  
digital services.



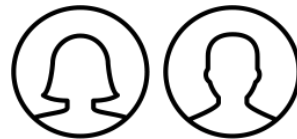
# We collaborate and coach government agencies through...



**1. Discovery research and  
prototyping**



**2. Solicitations and bid  
evaluation**



**3. Collaborative post-award  
management**




# Let's talk about bids.




We know they can feel  
like this.



We want them to feel  
like this.



**Stuff  
government  
should know**



**Stuff  
vendors  
should know**



Stuff **everyone** should know



# Stuff **everyone** should know

## 1. You're on the same team!

- Fundamental principle is trust
- We can't make this change on our own - we need your help!

# Stuff **everyone** should know

## 2. Use plain language

- Be clear in expectations
- Avoid buzzwords
- It's the law (Plain Language Act)

# Plain language examples

## What we're hoping to achieve as a result of this acquisition

We want a wholesale replacement of our data reporting system. Our goal is not to create a feature-level duplication of our legacy system, but instead to have a thoughtful software development process by which the various users of the system have their needs addressed.

## Description of Work to be Performed

The Court seeks agile software development services. The services to be provided will include all aspects of the software development process, including initial planning, design, software development and coding, prototyping, documentation, testing, and configuration.

*Data Rights and Ownership of Deliverables* – Consistent with FAR 52.227-14, which applies to this task order, the Court intends that all software and documentation delivered by the Contractor will be owned by the Court and committed to the public domain. This software and documentation includes, but is not limited to, data, documents,

# Stuff **everyone** should know

## 3. Show, don't just tell

- Share your repos
- Share your screenshots
- Give us stuff to click through
- Show us how your product/team will address our challenges

# Stuff **everyone** should know

## 4. Work in the open to whatever degree you can

- Avoid conflicting your vendors
- Free advertising if you do good work
- Sets a standard - if you share other people will share with you

# Stuff **everyone** should know

1. You're on the same team!
2. Use plain language
3. Show, don't just tell
4. Work in the open to whatever degree you can





# Stuff **vendors** should know

# Stuff **vendors** should know

## 1. Please ask questions

- Help us help you!
- If it's confusing now it will probably be confusing later
- Draft solicitations and Q&A

# Stuff **vendors** should know

## 2. Please bid!

- We can't give you chances if you aren't in the agile vendor pool
- State and local governments can use GSA schedules
- Here are some resources on how to get in them

# Stuff **vendors** should know

## 3. The interview is for both parties

- The money shouldn't be the only decision driver.
- Agencies use buzzwords too
- How we do verbal interviews

# Stuff **vendors** should know

## 4. Collaboration is a competitive advantage

- Working in a black box for months doesn't help anyone
- Knowing how to collab with government in the federal space is a skill!
- Not just what you worked on but how you worked on it



# Stuff **vendors** should know

## 5. We want you to be direct about the way you work

- If gov is trying to change the way they work - demonstrate how you can do that
- If you want to do waterfall or agilefall just say it - and tell us why
- Don't be afraid to speak up if the government is unclear or inconsistent in the solicitation

# Stuff **vendors** should know

1. Please ask questions
2. Please bid!
3. The interview is for both parties
4. Collaboration is a competitive advantage
5. We want you to be direct about the way you work



**Stuff government should know**

# Stuff **government** should know

## 1. Keep it simple

- Ask for the moon, not the solar system
- Don't require a PhD to understand the ask
- Page limits please!

# Stuff **government** should know

## 2. Give small businesses a chance

- Competition is good!
- May give you a chance to invest locally



# Stuff **government** should know

## 3. Disclose as much information as possible in the solicitation

- Potential blockers - if you know about them don't hide them
- IGCE (cost estimate) amount per year
- Screenshots of the existing system - esp if the vendor will work with or within it

# Stuff **government** should know

## 4. Do verbal interviews

- Ask to speak to the team that would be working on your project - not the VP
- Tailor the questions to each vendor's technical approach

# Stuff **government** should know

## 5. Go beyond reference checks

- Include this in the evaluation criteria
- Fact checking via Google can go a long way
- Check out the company website
- Look at team member's LinkedIn profiles - what is their work history

# Stuff **government** should know

## 6. Evaluate the things that matter

- Page count is not a good evaluation method
- Here are some evaluation questions (18F has these)
- If you're buying an existing product, ask to drive your own demo
- Evaluate based off of the real world

# Stuff **government** should know

1. Keep it simple
2. Give small businesses a chance
3. Disclose as much as possible in the solicitation
4. Do verbal interviews
5. Go beyond reference checks
6. Evaluate the things that matter

Now **you** have  
the secrets.



Next time you feel like  
this...



Come back to this list  
(it's on Github/18F  
blog/somewhere?)  
and feel like this.



# Get some references

Visit [github.com/18F/cfa2020/](https://github.com/18F/cfa2020/) to find:

- Evaluation Process Guide
- Verbal Interview Question Bank
- 18F Verbal Interview Sample
- These slides

## Verbal Interview Question Bank

These questions may be used in future acquisition verbal interviews to elicit additional clarity about a contractor's technical approach in their proposal.

Note: verbal interviews are not the same as oral presentations under FAR Part 15. Oral presentations allow a contractor to amend or change their proposal. Verbal interviews do not permit a contractor to amend or change their proposal, instead they provide an opportunity to ask clarifying questions on the technical approach portion of their proposal as written.

### Technical Approach

#### Engineering

- Talk about your process for determining which software and programming language to use as your development team iteratively builds software products. We're also interested in hearing the rationale for the initial software and programming languages in your technical response.
- What is your technology stack of choice for this project, and why? Which

# Let's do this together

To learn more visit

[18f.gsa.gov/how-we-work/](https://18f.gsa.gov/how-we-work/)

[18finquiries@gsa.gov](mailto:18finquiries@gsa.gov)

# Q&A

# Thank You

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