

# **Use Just Enough Structure: Plan, Communicate, Follow-Up**

## **Activity 1: Planning and E-Procurement Project**

You work for a K-12 school district whose school year begins September 1. The district has decided to implement an e-catalog system that will link to cooperative contracts and consortia having education-focused supplies like classroom items and associated cloud-based software used for remote learning.

There had been an explosion of growth in student population in the district. While the plan is to use face-to-face teaching in classrooms, there still is uncertainty about whether remote teaching or hybrid class deliveries may be needed for a combination of in-classroom and at home, virtual training.

This system will include new e-catalog functionality but ideally will improve the existing BidNet functionality and add contract administration features now being developed in the industry. The system must support delegation to select users to permit them to place orders using procurement cards if purchases are within the small purchase limit of \$10,000.

The average publication-to-award time is 120 days. The Dean of operations and Dean of Instruction have weighed in promoting the project at public meetings with families and the teacher's union.

Who are the stakeholders? Brainstorm the questions for planning this project.

## **Activity 2: Managing the E-Procurement Project.**

A week after contract execution, a new strain of pandemic has hit. Industry reports delays in availability of programmers. There is a shortage of critical educational supplies, many of which are shipped from overseas.

The contractor has sent notice of change and force majeure under the contract's terms and conditions.

What actions need to be taken to adapt to the changed conditions?

## **Initial Steps in Project Management**

While complex projects like major construction and IT implementations use more sophisticated models, these are the initial steps in project management:

1. Have the team members brainstorm the list of everything that must be done. A useful tool is a tree diagram, where overall objectives are listed and branches progressively developed to get to more discrete objectives.
2. Expand the tree until tasks are broken down into appropriately sized tasks that can be completed or effectively managed by individuals. Self-stick notes are useful tools used by teams to define and collect requirements at the appropriate level.
3. Consider numbering the tasks for ease of discussion where there are many. Statements of work use work breakdown structures (WBS) having numbered paragraphs (e.g., 3.1.1) to identify progressively more detailed descriptions of subtasks.
4. Determine how much time each task requires. Include the duration of tasks on the self-stick notes.
5. Armed with the tasks and schedule requirements, find schedule dependencies.
6. Identify and start with the long-lead items.
7. Monitor the conditions and adjust as necessary, communicating and coordinating with stakeholders.

## **Self-Assessment of Project Management Skills**

For a free self-assessment of project management skills, see [https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM\\_60.htm](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM_60.htm).

## Procurement-Planning Checklists

Procurement-planning checklists are a good way to identify essential steps and considerations required for a successful procurement. They are tailored for the type of commodity or service involved. In some cases, procurement professionals and sourcing teams have enough recent experience with a requirement that formal pre-solicitation team meetings are not required.

But using a checklist is a good way to manage planning. Consider these considerations that could be included in a pre-solicitation planning meeting with stakeholders:

- Identify responsibilities. Clearly define the responsibilities for arranging a business strategy meeting, specification drafting, solicitation development, evaluation team selection and management, preparation of a quality management plan (or portions of the solicitation dealing with quality control), inspection and acceptance, and post-award contract administration.
- An approach to market research. Agree on the nature of market research needed. Who will conduct informal vendor one-on-one meetings with known industry leaders, and what are the constraints on those meetings?
- Do the open records/freedom of information laws permit requests for information that invite confidential information, improving the chances of getting useful information? Will a draft request for proposal be used?
- The expected solicitation strategy. Will a request for proposal (RFP) be used? If so, what are threshold views regarding the factors that will be evaluated: technical, management, past experience/demonstrated capability, cost? What will be the timing for development of a more detailed-evaluation/source-selection plan, and who is responsible for leading its creation?
- Budget and contingency. Discuss the pros and cons of disclosing at least a rough-order-of-magnitude estimate regarding availability of funds. Should a portion of the appropriated/ allocated amount be set aside as a reserve for changes that may be needed?
- Contract type, e.g., firm, fixed price. What price or cost information, e.g., labor hours and labor rates, should be requested?
- Key milestones. Will progress payments be used? At what stages? How will progress be measured or assessed?
- A quality management approach. Key performance or compliance metrics must be in the solicitation document and contract if they will be used for acceptance or computing payments tied to performance. What metrics are used to assess program performance now? Should those be disclosed to vendors? Will vendors

be asked to propose contract performance metrics that are aligned with the business unit's measurements (such as service level agreements in IT procurements) that can be used for acceptance of deliverables or other performance? How will those measures factor into the proposal evaluation? Can and should incentives (e.g., payment incentives) be used that are tied to performance that significantly exceeds minimum standards?

- Risk management. Is a formal risk management plan required? Have at least the important risks been identified, assessed, and handled in the solicitation and proposed contract?
- Key constraints on the project. Discuss assumptions regarding constraints during planning meetings. These can include such things as schedule, agency resources, financing options, and legal requirements imposed by law.
- Contractual governance structure. If there will be a governance body used during contract performance, like an information technology steering committee, who will be members? What will be disclosed in the solicitation regarding the governing body's responsibilities during contract administration? Should any commitments be made in terms of times for review and approval of changes, for example?
- Major areas of proposal, schedule, and contract risk. Address, at least generally, the likely expectations of the vendor in terms of their risk and change management challenges. This topic often is a subject for market research meetings before solicitation development.
- Expected issues in key terms and conditions, e.g., intellectual property ownership/licensing and liability limitation/allocation. Issue escalation. In complex projects, would it be helpful to define an issue escalation process (a meet-and-confer process short of formal disputes clauses) that permits either party to elevate an issue above the project team to a project sponsor or contractor executive?
- The solicitation/contract approval requirements. Invite key reviewers to solicitation planning meetings. For example, legal counsel may want to be invited so she can build her own knowledge base about the procurement, making her better able to perform a timely legal review of the solicitation and awarded contract.

The use of a procurement-planning checklist can help identify agenda items for procurement team meetings. Having stakeholders involved early in the procurement-planning meetings helps a team understand their needs.