



Southwest Michigan Procurement Technical Assistance Center

Top 10 Ways to Research Your Customer

One of the most important, yet overlooked, exercises for government contractors is to research your customer. Below is a list of 10 ways to get to know your federal buyers.

1. Examine the procurement history on Federal Procurement Database System (FPDS). <https://www.fpds.gov>.
2. Who are your Top 10 Buyers? Type your keyword in the EZ Search field, then look in the upper left corner of the results page.
3. What codes are they buying? Do you have those codes in your SAM registration?
4. What types of contracts are they using? Fixed Fee, Cost Plus? Is it an Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quantity? Still on the results page of FPDS, pick one of the contracts and click view. Scroll until you find the contract type. Do you know what that contract type means for you?
5. When is your product or service typically purchased? Some things are bought at a particular time of year, like construction in the Midwest is purchased in late Winter/Spring. You can find this easily by searching your FSC/PSC on www.usaspending.gov. This is fed by FPDS, but you can see the procurement trend more easily. If you're a manufacturer, look at DLA's Supplier Requirements Visibility Application, SRVA, forecast on DIBBS. Just remember that forecasts are not set in stone.
6. The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) may help you obtain some helpful information. You can request certain information (nothing proprietary) from past proposals and contracts. Allow a couple of weeks for the response.
7. Who is winning now? Why does the customer award to them? Is it their past experience? Is it their management team? If you look at Part M of your solicitation, the evaluation factors should be listed in order of priority. It may or may not start with lowest price.
8. Respond to Requests For Information and Sources Sought; follow the government agency on social media to see what they're doing and where they're going. Let your customer get to know you. Government contracting really is a two-way street and should be viewed as a partnership.
9. You may have to leave your office. Once you connect with the Small Business Specialist or buyer, it's a good idea to try to meet them. Even with today's technology, it's best to meet the customer in person if you can. This may require some travel.
10. If you think you don't have time for research before your bid is due, SLOW DOWN. This is research so you can understand your customer's needs and purchasing habits. Here in Michigan, we hunt deer. Good hunters track the deer prior to hunting season, looking for signs of what's in them there woods and what are its patterns. I'm not suggesting you put out salt-lick or apples, but watch your customer with a keen eye. Then, when you understand who you're dealing with, camo-up and move-in.

Some people say that government contracting is too much of a hassle. I understand their concerns and it does take some time and money. But when you consider that federal funds come from your taxpayer dollars, would you rather pay yourself or your competitor?