

Writing Proposals for DHS and DoD

Briefing for the Government Technology and
Services Coalition (GTSC)

Thomas W. Essig

TWE LLC

12 March 2013

Agenda

- My Background
- Key Government Participants in Source Selection
- Recommendations for proposal writing
- Solicitation (RFP) sections/requirements
- Things to do before the RFP is released

My Background

- 2006 – 2009: CPO/Deputy CPO, DHS
- 1976 – 2006: Department of the Navy
 - 1976 – 1999: Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA)
 - Negotiator for AEGIS Weapon System
 - Contracting Officer for Standard Missile, Aircraft Carrier, and Battleship programs
 - Head, Major Combatant Shipbuilding Contracts
 - Deputy Director for Shipbuilding and Undersea Systems Contracts Divisions
 - Director, Surface Systems Contracts Division
 - 1999 – 2004: Director, Navy Engineering Logistics Office (NELO) and Executive Director, Office of Special Projects
 - 2004 – 2006: Director, Program Analysis & Business Transformation (DASN Acquisition)
 - Oversight of Navy-wide contracting + Acquisition Reform

Key Government Participants in Source Selection

- Agency heads are responsible for source selection
- Unless another individual is appointed, the Contracting officer is the Source Selection Authority (SSA)
- The SSA shall—
 - Establish an evaluation team
 - Approve the source selection strategy or acquisition plan
 - Ensure consistency among all source selection documents
 - Ensure that proposals are evaluated based solely on the factors and subfactors contained in the solicitation
 - Consider the recommendations of advisory boards or panels (if any)
 - Select the source or sources

Key Government Participants in Source Selection (continued)

- Evaluation Teams
 - Source Selection Evaluation Board (SSEB)
 - Price Evaluation Team (PET)
 - Others
- Source Selection Advisory Committee (SSAC)
- Advisors
 - Contracting Officer
 - Legal Counsel

Recommendations for Proposal Writing

1. Read the RFP, especially sections L and M
2. Make it easy for the Government to find the information they're looking for
 - Separate section covering each factor and subfactor
3. Don't simply restate the RFP requirement, or that "we will meet all contract requirements"
 - Tell them *how* you will do that
4. Don't simply give them a textbook answer
 - Tell them what you will do, but also
 - Demonstrate that you have established methods and processes to successfully accomplish the work

Recommendations for Proposal Writing (continued)

5. Prove it

- Demonstrate that your proposed methods and processes work

6. Use various methods of conveying the message, including call-out blocks, tables, charts, etc.

7. Identify why teammates were selected

- What benefits (from the Government's perspective) do they bring to the team?

8. Establish your win theme

- Don't just demonstrate that you can do the work, demonstrate why you can do it better than your competitors

Recommendations for Proposal Writing (continued)

9. Have your proposal drafts reviewed by panels that can ensure both compliance and content

- Compliance:
 - Have you provided all information required by the RFP?
 - Is it easy for the evaluator to find information required by the RFP (especially, Section L proposal instructions)?
 - Is it easy for the evaluator to map the proposal to the RFP evaluation criteria (Section M).
 - Have people with source selection experience on panel
- Content
 - How well did we understand the customer's requirement?
 - How well did we demonstrate superior methods, processes, experience, etc?
 - Have people with detailed technical knowledge of the work scope on the panel.

Solicitation Sections/Requirements

- Section A – Solicitation/Contract Form (SF 33)
- Section B – Supplies or Services and Prices/Costs
- Section C – Description/Specs/Work Statement
- Section D – Packing and Marking
- Section E – Inspection and Acceptance
- Section F – Deliveries or Performance
- Section G – Contract Administration
- Section H – Special Contract Requirements
- Section I – Contract Clauses
- Section J – List of Attachments
- *Section K – Representations, Certifications and Other Statements of Offerors*
- *Section L – Instructions, Conditions & Notices to Offerors*
- *Section M – Evaluation Factors for Award*

Section L

Instructions, Conditions and Notices to Offerors

- May include information on things such as contract type, protests, RFP inquires, taking exceptions to terms and conditions of RFP, etc.
 - Exceptions, deviations, assumptions – high risk
- Proposal Preparation Instructions/Instructions to Quoters/etc.
 - Sometimes a separate RFP attachment
 - Proposal formatting and submission requirements
 - Details regarding what's to be covered by the proposal
 - Mirror this in your proposal

Section M

Evaluation Factors for Award

- Sometimes a separate RFP attachment
- Identifies:
 - Basis of Award
 - Award on initial offers, if contemplated
 - Key evaluation factors, subfactors, and elements
 - Relative order of importance of factors and subfactors
- Factors and subfactors are individually rated/scored
- Proposal should mirror factor, subfactor, element structure

What Should You Do Before the RFP is Released?

- Before the procurement is initiated
 - Review DoD Source Selection Procedures at <http://www.acq.osd.mil/dpap/policy/policyvault/USA007183-10-DPAP.pdf>
 - Courtesy calls on customer contracting and program personnel
 - Explore future/upcoming opportunities
 - Websites
 - Industry or Small Business Conferences
- Before the RFP is released
 - Attend all pre-solicitation conferences and comment on draft RFPs – especially if they favor competitors
- Anytime you can
 - Find out about the incumbent, including Government assessment of its performance

For more information on DHS contracting and business opportunities:

Open For Business centralizes information to let every business in America know how to work with the Department of Homeland Security. Designed to assist the business community, we include links to contracts, grants, small business opportunities, research and development and contacts.



www.dhs.gov/openforbusiness

DON Acquisition One Source

<http://www.acquisition.navy.mil/content/view/full/184>

Department of the Navy R x

www.acquisition.navy.mil/content/view/full/184

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Department of the Navy
Research, Development & Acquisition

Search:

Meet ASN RDA Organizations Programs Policy and Guidance Acquisition Workforce **Acquisition One Source**

Home > Acquisition One Source > Business Opportunities

Business Opportunities

This area is designed to help firms interested in doing business with the Department of the Navy (DoN), understand how DoN conducts its business, and how they can identify business opportunities.

- [Understanding how to do business with the Navy](#)
- [Finding Business Opportunities](#)
- [Small business Resources](#)

MEET ASN RDA

ORGANIZATION S

PROGRAMS

POLICY AND GUIDANCE

ACQUISITION WORKFORCE

ACQUISITION ONE SOURCE

- Bridge Contract Policy
- Non-construction Contracts Containing Construction Work
- Service Requirements Review Board Guidance (SRRB) April 13, 2012
- **Business Opportunities**
 - [Understanding how to do business with the Navy](#)
 - [Find Business Opportunities](#)
 - [Small Business Resources](#)
 - [Preferred Supplier Program \(PSP\)](#)
 - [Organizational Points of Contact, by Subject](#)
 - [Contract Labor Standards & Relations](#)
 - [CEVM](#)
 - [eBusiness](#)
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Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Research, Development and Acquisition)
1000 Navy Pentagon, Washington, DC 20350-1000

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12 March 2013



DHS Contracting Organization and Authority

Briefing for GTSC

Thomas W. Essig
Former Chief Procurement Officer



Department of Homeland Security History

The Homeland Security Act of 2002:

United 22 previously disparate domestic agencies into one coordinated department to protect the nation against threats to the homeland.



Effective March 1, 2003

Heads of Contracting Activities (HCA)s

Initial

CBP

FEMA

FLETC

ICE

TSA

USCG

USSS

Subsequent

CBP/SBI

OSA

OPO

Office of Procurement Operations

Provides a full range of acquisition support to 35 program offices within DHS such as:

- Office of the Secretary (USM, CPO, CIO, CFO, ITAC)
- National Protection & Programs Directorate
- US VISIT Program Office
- Domestic Nuclear Detection Office
- Science & Technology (HSARPA)
- Citizenship & Immigration Services
- Center for Domestic Preparedness

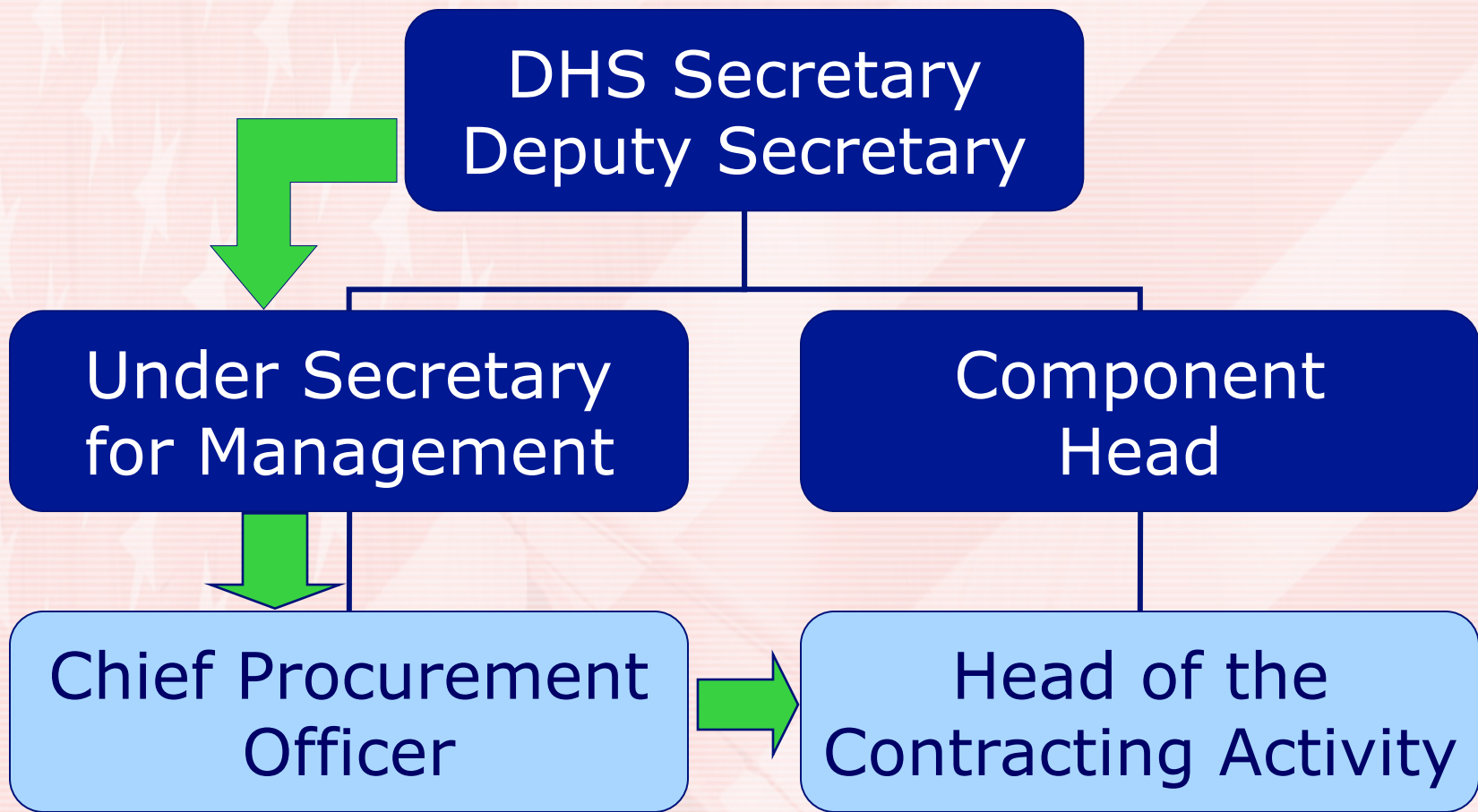


DHS Contracting Organizations



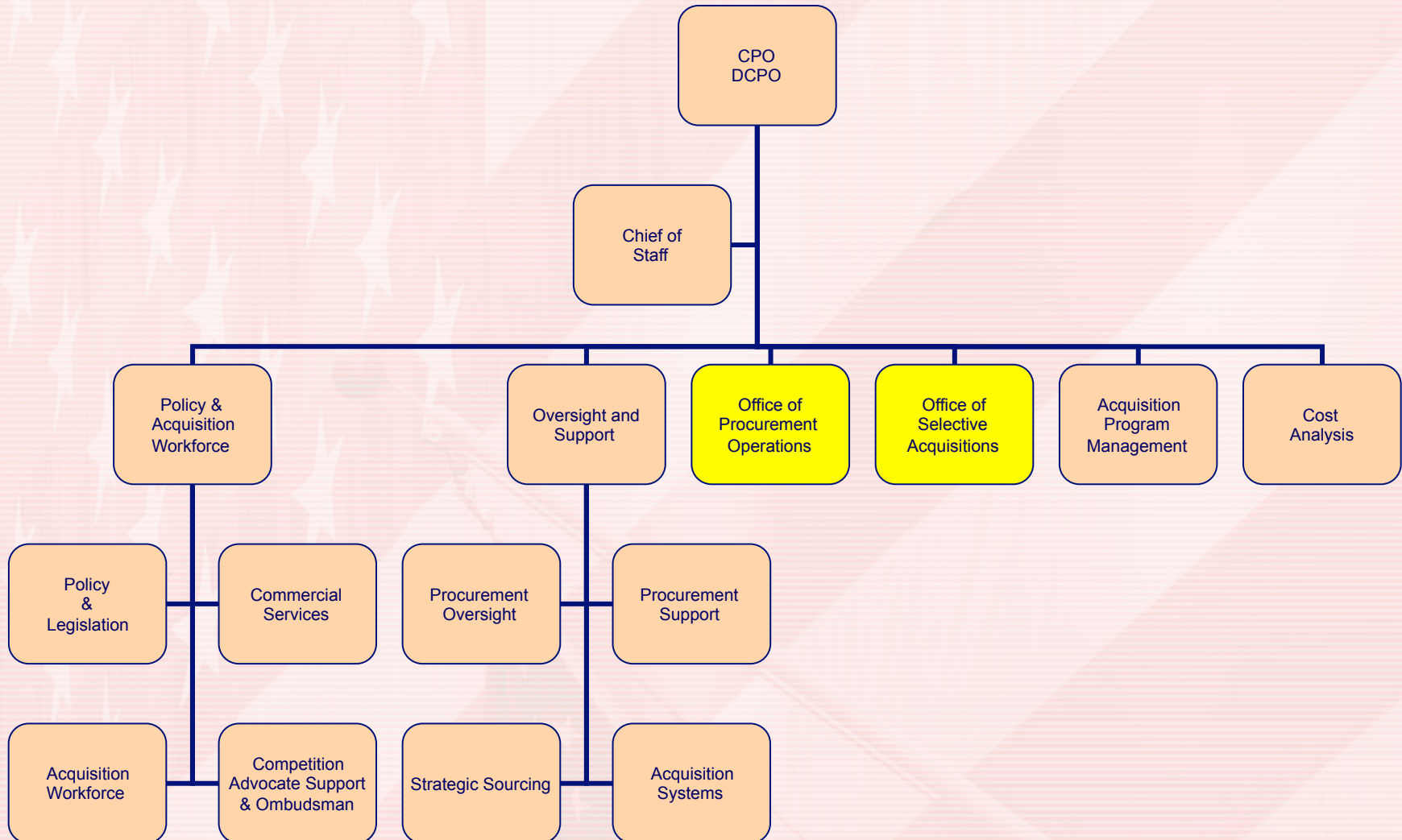
Legend: DHS Customer Acquisition Office

Dual System of Accountability (Contracting)

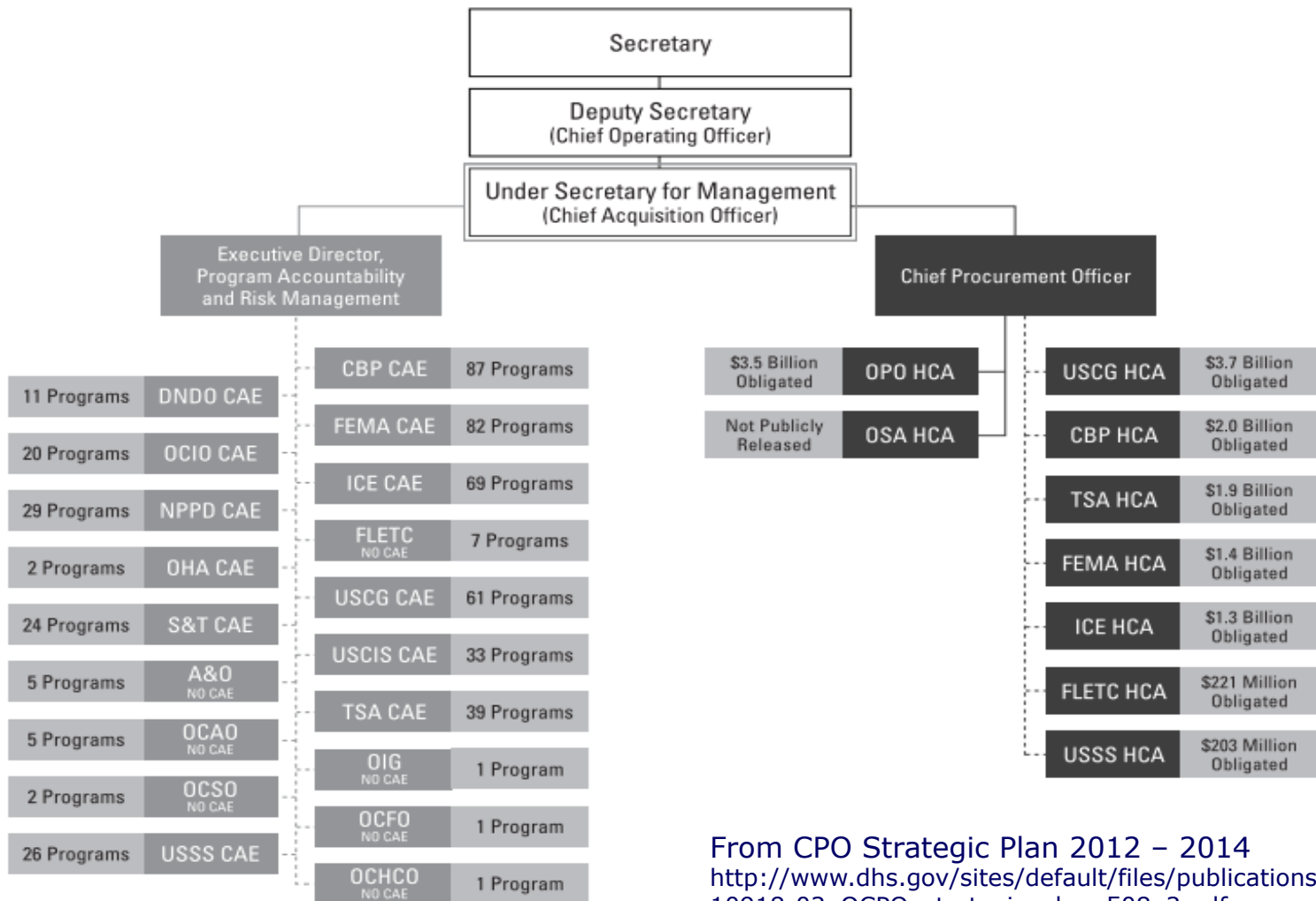


 = Flow of Contracting Authority

Office of the Chief Procurement Officer (2008)



Current DHS Procurement and Acquisition Structure



From CPO Strategic Plan 2012 – 2014
http://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/10918-02_OCPO_strategic_plan_508_2.pdf

Major Types of Business Opportunities at DHS

- Contracts and Subcontracts
- Other Transactions (R&D)
- Small Business Innovative Research (SBIR) Program
- Mentor-Protégé Program
- Grants to State and Local Governments
- Commercial Technology Development



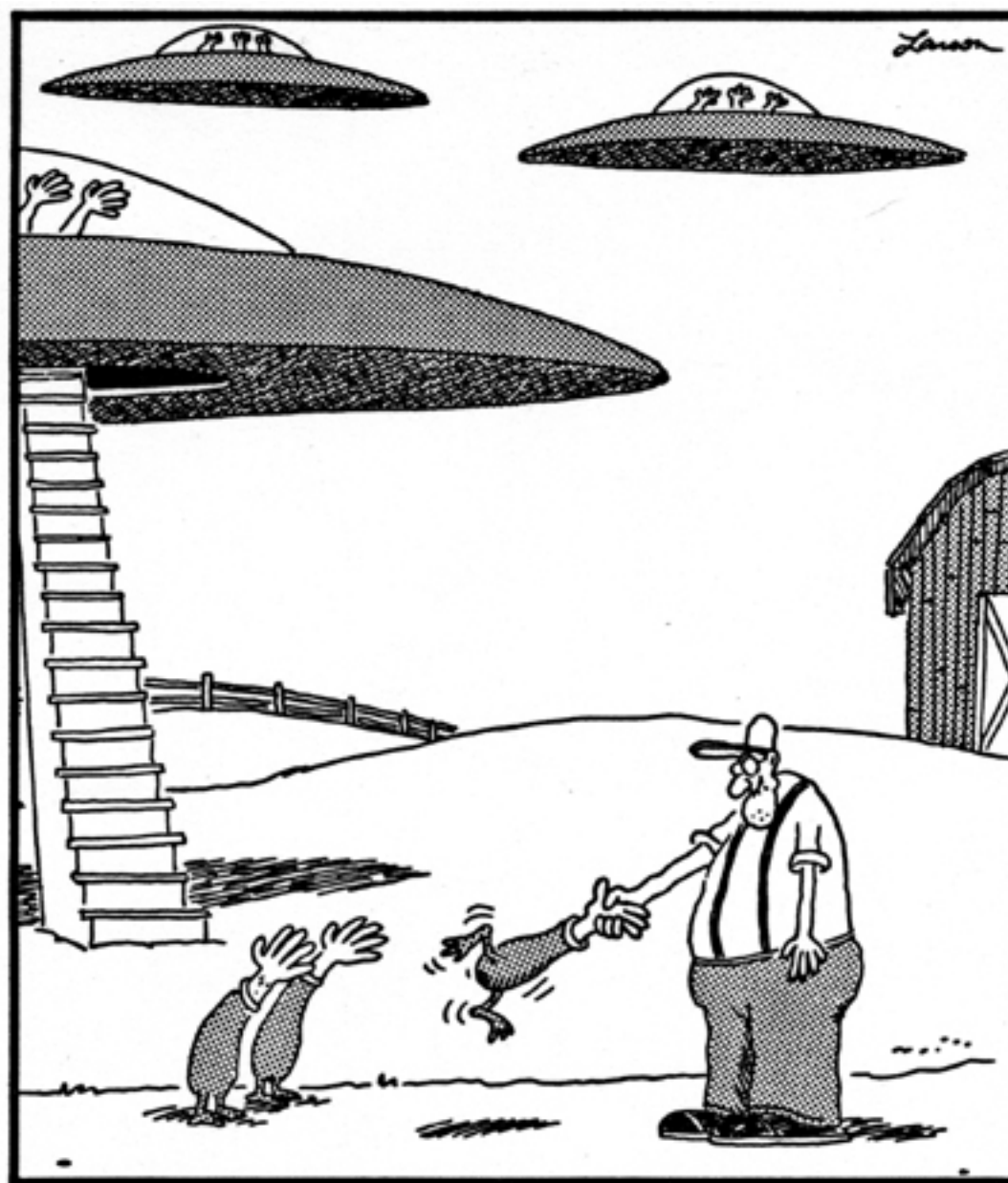
Tailoring Proposals for the Department of Homeland Security

March 2013

Why Care So Much About Proposal Writing?

“A man may take to drink because he feels himself to be a failure, and then fail all the more completely because he drinks [...] English [...] becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.” George Orwell.

- ▶ Good proposal writing is about understanding the customers' problems and clearly explaining how you can help solve them.
- ▶ The worse you are as a company at explaining your products and solutions, the worse those products and solutions will end up being.



Inadvertently, Roy dooms the entire earth to annihilation when, in an attempt to be friendly, he seizes their leader by the head and shakes vigorously.





9-612

辣婆婆
SPICY GRANDMA

有毒有害垃圾

Poisonous & Evil Rubbish



Summary: Succeeding at DHS

- ▶ To succeed at DHS you must:
 - ▶ Understand **exactly** who you are trying to sell to; and then
 - ▶ Communicate effectively in that specific customer's language.

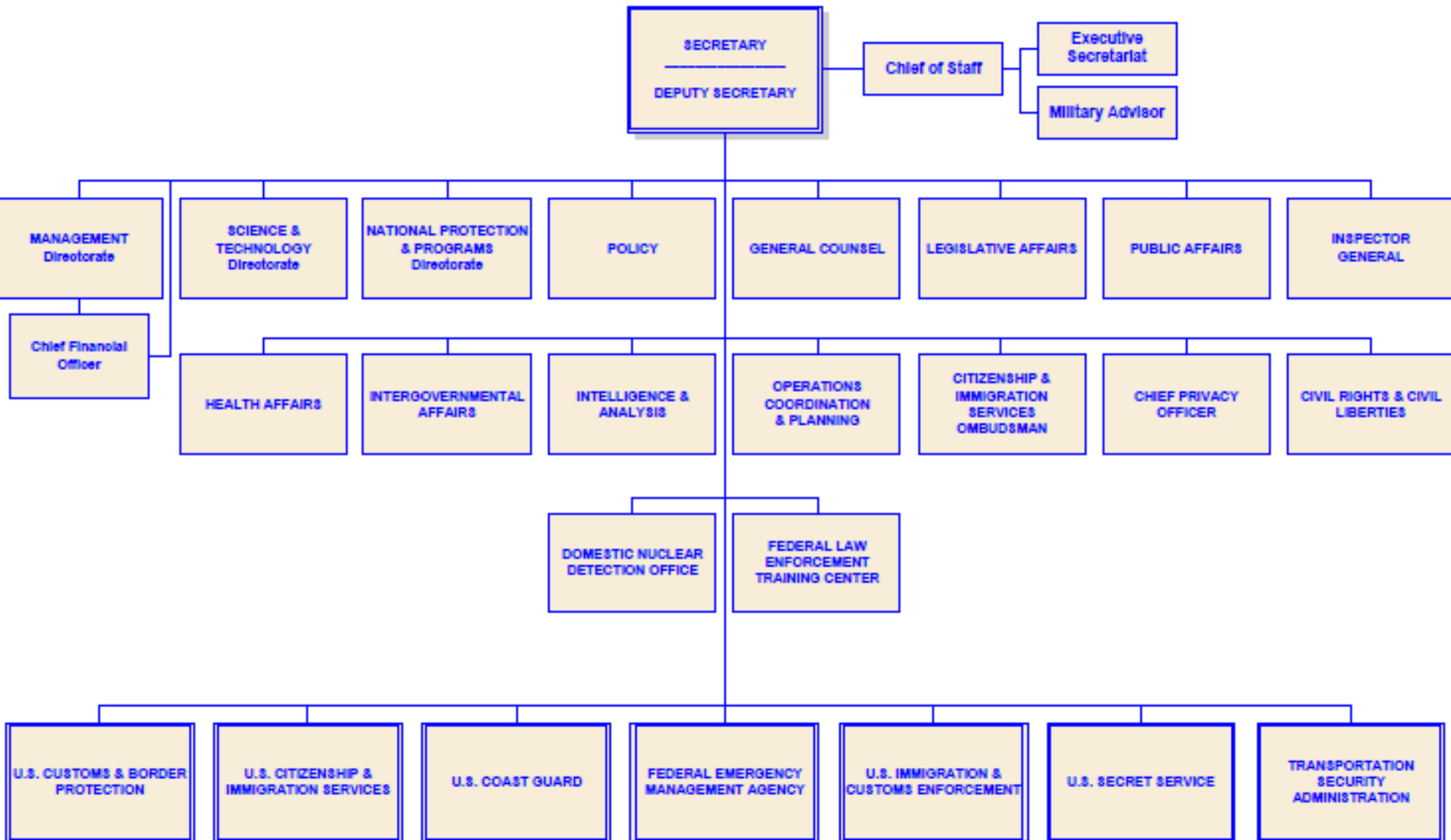
Summary: Understanding DHS

- ▶ DHS is an uneven and immature organization
- ▶ Little Cohesion with Uneven Capabilities:
 - ▶ There is no single “DHS.”
 - ▶ The agencies have very uneven capabilities and often have little to do with each other.
 - ▶ DHS sometimes does not understand itself very well.
- ▶ Still Maturing:
 - ▶ Even after ten years, many aspects of DHS still taking shape.
 - ▶ Many agencies and organizations were “startups” or mergers.
 - ▶ DHS is perhaps least capable and sophisticated in the procurement space.

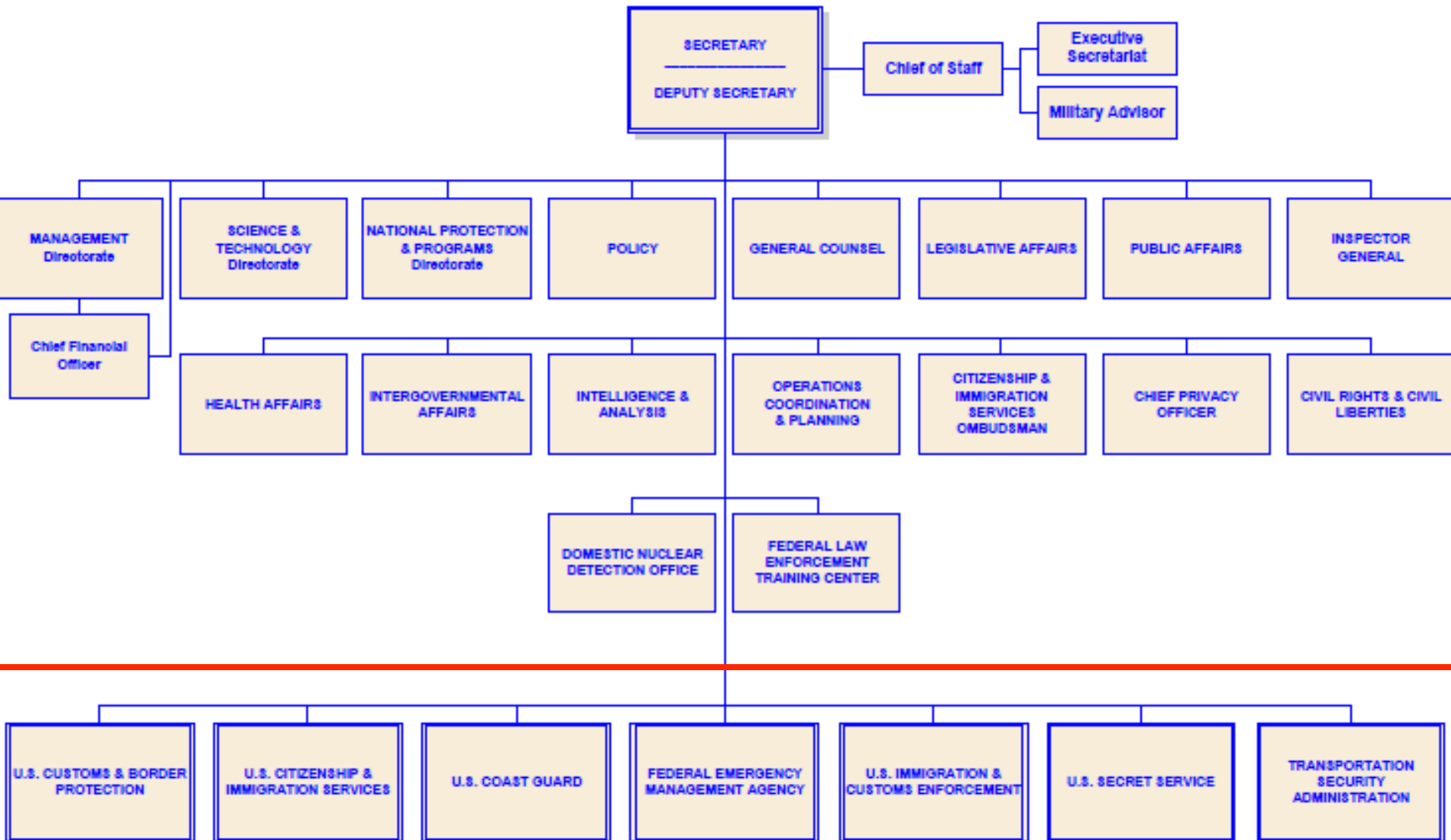
Understanding DHS: There is No “One DHS”

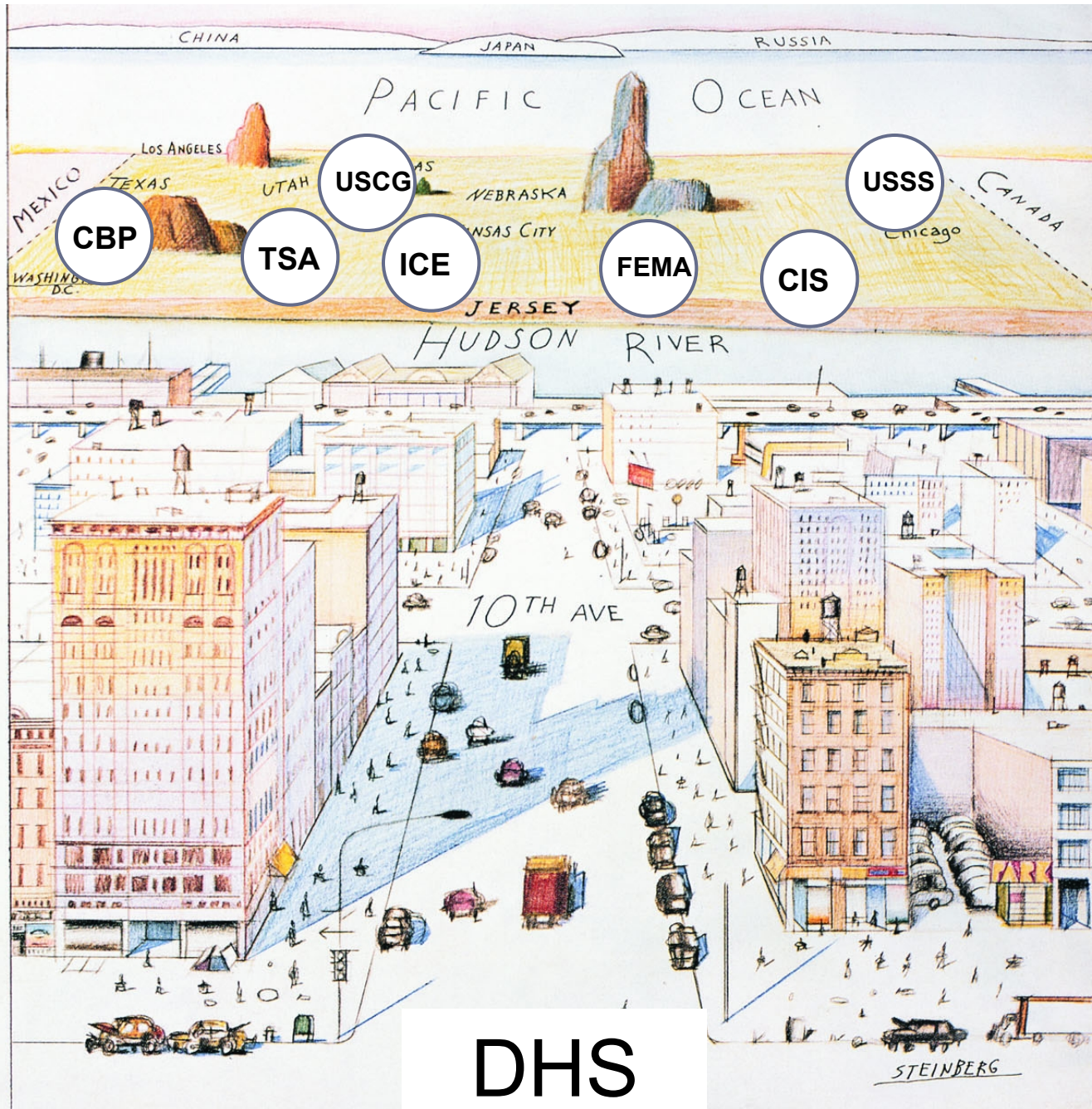
- ▶ The DHS Agencies Are Each Very Unique
- ▶ Very Different Missions:
 - ▶ Joint operations are rare because missions and operations are often completely distinct and unrelated.
- ▶ Dissimilar Histories and Cultures:
 - ▶ Mix of stable agencies, startups and mergers, creating different procurement approaches and cultures.
- ▶ Uneven Capabilities:
 - ▶ Mix of different legacy systems, approaches and skill sets.
- ▶ Different Procurement Approaches and Cultures:
 - ▶ The real power for driving procurements does not lie in the same place in each agency.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY





DHS

STEINBERG

Understanding DHS: Dept. is Still Maturing

- ▶ DHS does not always take a sophisticated approach to procurement and acquisition
- ▶ History of failed programs and procurements:
 - ▶ Very short list of acknowledged successes.
- ▶ Often Thin technical expertise:
 - ▶ Too few skilled procurement and program management personnel
 - ▶ Mix of stable agencies, startups and mergers, creating different procurement approaches and cultures.
- ▶ Unclear Requirements:
 - ▶ Many fundamentals still being addressed.
 - ▶ Few requirements “artifacts” like doctrine, ConOps, specifications, etc.

DHS is a Bit of a Mess. So What?

- ▶ You need to REALLY know your specific customer and be able to speak in their language
- ▶ Do your homework!
 - ▶ You can't always rely entirely on the RFP.
 - ▶ Publicly available documents and statements can be misleading.
 - ▶ Offer solutions that fit your specific customer.
- ▶ Don't simply apply the same approach you use with other customers:
 - ▶ A proposal with language a DoD customer might understand may not be understood by a DHS customer.
- ▶ Be prepared to REALLY explain your solution and its benefits:
 - ▶ Bring your own ConOps with you – explain how the solution will really work. Don't make them figure it out.
 - ▶ It's not enough to be compliant – you have to tell a story.

The Proposal Writing Challenge

- ▶ Goal of any writing project: “It’s figuring out, from the mass of things you might possibly mention, precisely what your points are – and then stating them cogently, with adequate reasoning and support.” Bryan Garner.
- ▶ Difficulty of Proposal Writing: Most proposals are written by vendors who don’t understand their customers and evaluated by customers who don’t understand vendors.
 - ▶ The more you know, the harder it can be to explain.
- ▶ Basic Strategy: Balance compliance with being clear and compelling
 - ▶ It is possible to focus too much on compliance.
- ▶ Ways to do better: Focus on:
 - ▶ A **process** to maximize the quality of your proposal;
 - ▶ A proposal **structure** that balances compliance and clarity;
 - ▶ Proposal **content** that the customers can understand.

How Companies Seek Government Business

Every company has their own business development process. Most follow some or all of the following steps:

- ▶ Step 1: Deciding on a market: It is not always self-evident to companies what market they are in. Many companies are still pondering whether they should be in the homeland security market.
- ▶ Step 2: Developing a “Pipeline” of Potential Opportunities: Most large companies attempt to track opportunities years before bidding.
- ▶ Step 3: “Shaping” Opportunities: Engaging with prospective customers to increase a company’s odds of winning business.
 - ▶ Customer meetings, white papers, etc.
- ▶ Step 4: Deciding to Bid: Most larger companies have some sort of formal process to decide how to spend bid and proposal funds.
 - ▶ The “gate” process, legal review, etc.
- ▶ Step 5: Bidding: Preparing the proposal.

Frequent Problems with Proposals

In our experience, most companies write TERRIBLE proposals.

The most frequent problems include:

- ▶ Lack of Customer Understanding: Proposals often reflect that the bidder does not understand who the customer is or what their problem is. Sometimes, the name of the customer isn't even right.
- ▶ Poor Organization: Proposals often are not organized the way the RFP requested (or otherwise not organized sensibly).
- ▶ No Solution: A surprising number of proposal include all the relevant sections but do not actually explain how the bidder's solution will solve the customer's problem.
- ▶ Non-Compliance: The proposal does not follow the RFP instructions.
- ▶ Poor Writing: Proposals often can't explain technologies or solutions in plain English; do not offer a clearly-written value proposition; read as if they were written by committee (because they were); and are generally incoherent.

Proposal Process Tips

- ▶ Don't Forget Why You Decided to Bid:
 - ▶ Organize all the materials from the capture process so the proposal writers can use this knowledge and guidance.
- ▶ Start Writing Before the RFP:
 - ▶ Write your own requirements for the customer's problem, then write a "proposal" against these requirements.
 - ▶ This will both give you a head start and illuminate gaps.
- ▶ Make Use of Your Resources:
 - ▶ Don't forget to leverage your own on-site personnel and teammates.
- ▶ Maximize the Input of Your Smartest People:
 - ▶ You will almost always have a fairly small group of people who know the most about the customer and your proposed solution.
 - ▶ Have this team outline of every section of the proposal.
- ▶ Give Writing Guidance to All Your Authors

Five Step Writing Process

1. Figure Out What You Are Writing and **Why**

- ▶ This is less obvious than you think. An author may not be clear what the purpose, goals, and objectives are for his/her proposal section.

2. Think of the Things You Want to Say

- ▶ What are the most important points?
- ▶ Where is the evidence and support?

3. Figure Out a Sensible Order for What You Want to Say

- ▶ This is your outline.

4. Using the Outline as a Guide, Write a First Draft

5. Edit the Draft



Proposal Structure Tips: Writing is not Math

In math, you can add numbers in different orders and get the same result:

$$5 + 2 + 6 + 10 = 23$$

$$6 + 5 + 10 + 2 = 23$$

Proposal Structure Tips: Writing is not Math

In math, you can add numbers in different orders and get the same result:

$$5 + 2 + 6 + 10 = 23$$

$$6 + 5 + 10 + 2 = 23$$

In writing, not so much:

Our unique solution will solve your problems.

Unique problems our will solution solve your.

Proposal Structure Tips

- ▶ Organization Matters:
 - ▶ You want to tell the whole story, in the right order – but not anything more.
- ▶ Make Your Proposal Easy to Score and Understand:
 - ▶ Start With the Structure of the RFP Itself.
 - ▶ Don't make the reviewers work hard to conclude the proposal is compliant.
 - ▶ Use bullets and section headings as reader guideposts.
- ▶ But Don't Let Compliance Overwhelm Clarity:
- ▶ **Always** include an executive summary, even if one is not specifically requested.
 - ▶ You do not need to label it as an “executive summary.”
- ▶ Begin each section of the proposal with its own summary.
- ▶ **Have your customer SMEs write these summaries.**

Proposal Content Tips: Avoid Engineering-Speak

▶ Engineering-Speak Defined:

- ▶ “Using the maximum number of the most complicated and overly-technical words to make a product or solution as hard to understand as possible.”

▶ Example: The Dihydrogen Monoxide Threat:

- ▶ The major component of acid rain.
- ▶ Contributes to the “greenhouse effect”
- ▶ May cause sever burns.
- ▶ Is fatal if inhaled.
- ▶ Contributes the to erosion of the natural landscape.
- ▶ Accelerates corrosion and rusting of many metals.
- ▶ May cause electrical failures and decreased effectiveness of automobile brakes.
- ▶ Has been found in excised tumors of terminal cancer patients.

Proposal Content Tips

- ▶ Use Plain English:
 - ▶ Avoid jargon.
- ▶ Explain the Benefits of Your Approach:
 - ▶ Do not assume the evaluators will understand why something is good, even if it's obvious to you.
 - ▶ If possible, provide details of specific mission-related benefits.
- ▶ Support Your Claims:
 - ▶ Provide proof.
 - ▶ Show you've done it before.
- ▶ Have a Sensible Balance Between Text and Graphics:
 - ▶ Bad graphics are not better than bad text.
- ▶ **Tell a story:**
 - ▶ Humans will evaluate your proposal. If they can understand and relate to it, they will score it higher.