

NOAALink User's Quarterly



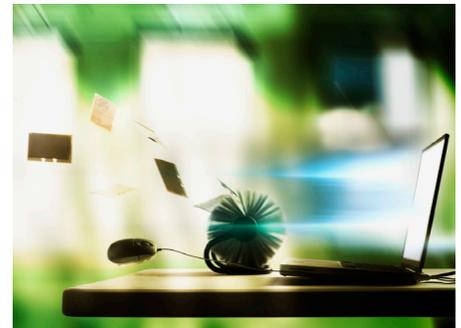
*Service. Partnership. Commitment.
Where Business and IT Connect.*

NOAA is constantly responding to an ever-changing technological landscape. Who imagined a few short years ago that NOAA would leave Blackberry mobile devices for iPhones, store and process data in the commercial cloud, and embrace non-traditional applications such as open source and mobile? As a result, we think about information security, the end-user experience, and systems interactivity in new ways.

As innovation in Information Technology (IT) marches on, NOAALink collaborates with organizational leadership and other IT functions to develop our future awareness and IT acquisition approaches. NOAALink acquisition and policy insights help Task Managers get vital information into their requirements documents to ensure alignment with NOAA and Department of Commerce (DOC) IT objectives.

In the public sector, the future of IT gives the American people and an increasingly mobile workforce access to high-quality digital government information and services anywhere, anytime, and on any device. With that goal in mind, the NOAALink Program continues to evaluate and develop purchasing options that support the following trends:

- Cloud computing
- Shared services
- Authentication and data encryption
- Infrastructure for mobile technologies
- Application migration, development, and management for mobile devices
- Governance and standards that simultaneously support new technology and manage risks



BEST PRACTICES

Writing a Performance Work Statement (PWS) That Delivers

Federal emphasis on performance-based acquisitions means structuring all aspects of an acquisition around the purpose of the work to be performed and measurable outcomes. In the online guide [Seven Steps to Performance-Based Acquisition](#) developed by the Department of Commerce, Department of Defense, Department of the Treasury, Department of Agriculture, General Services Administration, and Acquisition Solutions, Inc., one of the key steps is to craft the performance work statement (PWS).

The foundation for a successful acquisition consists of clear answers to three questions: what do I need, when do I need it, and how do I know it's good when I get it? Here are some tips to making sure your PWS document answers those questions.

Conduct an analysis

Preparing a PWS begins with a close examination of the agency's requirements and can be a "bottom up" assessment looking for re-engineering potential or a "top down" approach that starts with high-level objectives. Regardless of the analytical process adopted, your task for the PWS is to develop certain information:

- A description of the requirement in terms of results or outcomes
- Measurable performance standards
- Acceptable quality levels (AQLs)

Apply the “so what?” test

Rather than examine “how” things are or should be, an analysis of requirements needs to identify the essential inputs, processes, and outputs. To arrive at the essentials, use the “so what?” test. Ask questions like: Who needs it? Why is it needed? What is done with it? What occurs as a result? Is it worth the effort and cost? Would a different input, process, or output be preferable? Then, with those critical parameters outlined in the PWS, contractors can propose innovative and streamlined approaches.

Capture the results of the analysis in a matrix

As you develop analysis information, capture it in a performance matrix, such as:

- **Desired Outcomes:** What do we want to accomplish as the end result of this contract?
- **Required Service:** What task must be accomplished to give us the desired result? (But not “how.”)
- **Performance Standard:** What should be the standards for completeness, reliability, accuracy, timeliness, customer satisfaction, quality and/or cost?
- **Acceptable Quality Level (AQL):** How much error will we accept?
- **Monitoring Method:** How will we determine that success has been achieved?

This information matrix serves as the basis for the performance work statement.

Write the performance work statement

The [PWS template](#) on the NOAALink website will help you organize your information. Below are a few themes you should keep in mind.

- Describe the work in terms of the required results rather than either “how” the work is to be accomplished or the number of hours to be provided.
- Enable assessment of work performance against measurable performance standards.
- Rely on the use of measurable performance standards to encourage competitors to develop and institute innovative and cost-effective methods of performing the work.

Let the contractor solve the problem, including the labor mix

First, don’t specify the requirement so tightly that you get the same solution from each contractor.

Second, performance-based service acquisitions require that you jettison some traditional approaches to buying services, such as specifying labor categories, educational requirements, or number of hours of support required. Those are “how” approaches.

Third, note there are times when more prescriptive language is required. For example, in terms of IT security and standards, access control and encryption protocols cannot be left to “contractor innovation.” In addition, some critical services may have 100 percent performance standards, whereas for most other service types, the price for perfection would be unaffordable.

Remember that how the PWS is written will either empower the private sector to craft innovative solutions or limit that ability. For more about developing PWS documents, contact NOAALink or look for PWS training coming in fiscal year 2014.



ON THE RADAR

Enterprise Initiatives

Tier 2 and Tier 3 Service Desk Consolidations – NOAALink initiated NOAA’s incremental move to common advanced technical support (Tier 2 and Tier 3) across the organization. In the first year of the program, Tier 2 and Tier 3 support for several organizations came together under one umbrella. A contract awarded in March adds system and network administration, web development, and IT

security services to the consolidated contract. The project leader and the NOAALink PO continue the search for support functions from other organizations that could transition to the common structure. Those opportunities leverage economies of scale and simplify the acquisition of those services.

Red Hat – The Red Hat project will hold costs down and make purchasing of the popular operating system platform easier. NOAALink and the project team, with representation from NOAA Line/Staff Offices, are on track to have a Blanket Purchase Agreement (BPA) in place by June 1.

Esri – NOAALink and an Esri working group from across NOAA anticipates establishing an Enterprise License Agreement (ELA) this quarter for Esri products and maintenance. Esri software is used for geographic mapping, analysis, and visualization of data.

Cloud Computing – NOAA's Data Center Consolidation Project is exploring options for strategic acquisition of commercial cloud-based hosting services to accelerate cloud adoption within NOAA and provide a cloud migration path and destination for applications currently running within our data centers. The team has conducted informational meetings with NOAALink contractors and their industry partners and is currently developing a Performance Work Statement (PWS).

NOAALink Contract Refresh – While the Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ) contract at the foundation of the NOAALink program runs for another seven years under its original \$2.5 billion ceiling, NOAA customers stand to benefit from coming adjustments to the contract. The pools of five 8(a) core contractors and one Strategic Management Services (SMS) contractor have tackled a long list of task orders in the past few years and are nearing the 8(a) set-aside ceiling of \$300 million. To continue making available the 8(a) and SMS pools, NOAALink is developing a plan to add new contractors. The plan also includes a refresh of the Small Business pool so new contractors can join the program. Currently, NOAALink includes a pool of five small business contractors.

GUIDANCE YOU CAN USE

NOAALink Expands Acquisition Processing

Recently, NOAA's Acquisition and Grants Office (AGO) extended NOAALink acquisition processing authority to include regularly servicing (or local) acquisition offices and field delegates.



What has changed?

- All NOAALink actions no longer go exclusively to AGO's Strategic Sourcing Acquisition Division (SSAD)
- Regularly servicing (or local) acquisition offices can now process many of your NOAALink actions and coordinate with SSAD to manage certain types of NOAALink actions
- SSAD now processes enterprise and special interest actions and is the regularly servicing acquisition office for NOAA OCIO
- NOAALink-trained field delegates and Acquisition Division staffs can now process NOAALink actions within their warrant level
- The NOAALink fee applies to contract actions processed by SSAD and local acquisition offices, but does not apply to actions processed by field delegates

What hasn't changed?

Each IT procurement within NOAALink scope requires a NOAALink worksheet and a C.Request routed to the NOAALink Program Office (NPO) for approval. Out-of-scope requirements still include micro-purchases, office supplies, and PCs and accessories (available on the Department of Commerce portal).

How will I know whether to submit my requisition to NLK, my regularly servicing acquisition office, or a field delegate?

Check the Comments field in your C.Request for guidance on submitting to SSAD (NLK), your regularly servicing acquisition office, or field delegate.

Who is my regularly servicing acquisition office?

It is the acquisition office you rely on for your other acquisition needs. If directed by NOAALink, submit your requisition to your regularly servicing acquisition office rather than SSAD.

How do I submit a request through a field delegate?

Get prior approval within your organization's established procedures to identify a field delegate and indicate as such on the NOAALink worksheet.

C.Request Procurement Pointers

Due to financial system interfaces, the following naming standards apply when adding Supporting Documents to C.Request:

- Each file must have a unique name (if the document is in Word, Excel or PDF, each name must be different)
- There should be no special characters (the underscore '_' is okay but never use the ampersand '&' or brackets ('[' or ']') '{' or '}')
- The length of the file name should be kept to a minimum (short and descriptive) and must be under 40 characters
- The type of extension used should be '.docx', '.xlsx', '.pdf', etc.
- There is no maximum number of documents that can be attached
- For the NOAALink Worksheet, use the following naming convention in the Title field: *requisition number*-NOAALink Worksheet

Ensure your requisition is NOT COMMITTED before releasing it for approval. Committing it will prevent NPO from adding necessary attachments and, because of a systems issue later in the process, may force you to start over with a new PR.

MEET THE FACES BEHIND NOAALINK

Meet Tracey McCray, Contracting Officer Representative (COR), NOAALink Program Office; and Denise Harper, Contracting Officer, Acquisition and Grants Office.

CORs serve as business communications liaisons between the government and its contractors. Tracey conducts post-award oversight and technical direction for NOAALink core contracts and specific task orders. Supporting contracts in both the 8(a) and Small Business core contractor pools, Tracey works to ensure that a contractor's performance meets the standards in the contract and that NOAA and DOC resources are used and managed effectively.



Denise is part of the acquisition management team. Focused primarily on hardware and software purchases, she is authorized by the government to publicize procurement opportunities, make contract awards, and modify contract terms or schedules. In support of NOAALink initiatives to develop enterprise purchase agreements for commonly used software products, Denise provides guidance and advice to the NOAALink PO and project teams. She assists customers with acquisition planning, provides procurement training to contract specialists, assigns contract specialists to process acquisition packages, tracks the progress of purchase requests, and monitors the program's 8(a) and small business utilization compliance.

Also, the requisition process will continue to require that requestors initially include the line item for the 3% NOAALink fee as a reminder that the fee must be funded; however, a minor change was implemented going forward. Once the NOAALink Program Office (PO) validates the funds for each PR – including the total award amount plus the 3% NOAALink fee – the separate line item for the 3% fee will be removed because it is not part of the award to the vendor. The fee will be assessed on each line of accounting listed in the PR and will be reflected in the CBS financial system under object class code 77-11-00-00. Please DO NOT add this line item back into the PR prior to submitting for acquisition processing. Requestors should also ensure that object class codes are NOAALink specific by adding 11 as the last two digits of the standard codes (e.g., xx-xx-xx-11).

Look Ahead: Acquisition Cutoff Dates

Please keep in mind that fiscal year 2013 acquisition cutoff dates apply to NOAALink requirements. In order to meet the acquisition deadlines, you must route your purchase request (PR) in C.Request to the NOAALink Program Office (NPO) at least five (5) days prior to the acquisition cutoff dates published on the [AGO website](#). The timing of your PR must also be compliant with Procurement Administrative Lead Time (PALT). PALT is set forth in [NOAA Acquisition Handbook Part 7, Exhibit 2](#) and should be considered in the context of the cutoff dates.

If you have any questions, please contact us at noaalink.help@noaa.gov.

RESOURCES

Visit our Website

Visit our website for the most up-to-date NOAALink information. FAQs, required documents, and training information are routinely updated for your reference. Access the site via <http://www.cio.noaa.gov/NOAALink/index.html>.

Email us

If you are unable to find the information you require on our website, or if you need further guidance, please feel free to contact us at NOAALink.Help@noaa.gov.

Join our Mailing List

To receive important updates on program requirements, required documents, and other guidance, please join our mailing list by sending an email to NOAALink.Help@noaa.gov.