Data Call Approach for Proposal Management

Managing Teammate Data Calls for Large Proposal Projects - Art and Methods

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Capture and Proposal Managers leading large proposal development efforts involving teammates, teaming partners, and subcontractors (whether only one or several) need to gather critical data necessary to properly prepare and submit a fully compliant proposal to the customer.

Managing data calls with teammates is as much art as it is method. This whitepaper offers basic guidelines and an approach to manage time sensitive data requests in a way that ensures teammates understand what is needed, why it is needed, and when it is needed to facilitate complete and timely compliance with data calls.

Too often, prime contractors leading proposal efforts automatically cast a wide net for gathering RFP-required information from their teammates, much of which is really not required. This leads to an unnecessary burden on teammates who are often small companies selected to meet small business goals and companies who are promised only a small percentage of the work upon award, and thus a natural reluctance of these teaming partners to:

1. Transmit company data/information considered sensitive, proprietary, unnecessary, or invasive.
2. Perform unnecessary work or needless re-work responding to data calls often requiring approval from Legal/Contracts or senior management.

Using a defined data call approach and the recommendations offered in this whitepaper offers the following benefits to Capture and Proposal Managers:

- Establish a professional atmosphere to manage the proposal project
- Identify, gather, and manage critical data to support proposal development
- Set the stage for prime expectations for subcontractor responsiveness, accountability and degree of input
- Increase teaming partners confidence in your company’s ability to manage winning proposals—and by default increases confidence in your company’s ability to manage programs
- Support transition from proposal effort to awarded program kick-off
- Save time – both yours and your teaming partners

The most important time to perform data call planning is immediately after completing or participating in data calls for a major proposal development effort either as the prime contractor, teaming partner, or as part of the Lessons Learn post submission effort. Use information gathered to develop a group of data call templates and instructions for future use/reuse. This post submittal effort will result in a smoother data call process for future proposal development efforts, and significantly increase team productivity by reducing the time to manage and develop future data call requests.

The following section presents a few basic guidelines each Proposal Manager should consider before initiating a data call effort in support of a proposal development project.
Data Calls: Basic Guidelines

The following basic guidelines are based on the simple principle of being considerate of your teammates’ time and efforts:

1. Ensure your company and teammate are legally protected through a fully executed/signed Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) and/or Teaming Agreement (TA) that includes a non-disclosure clause. **Note 1**

2. Ensure your teammates understand what information will be provided to the team and what information will be held confidentially by the Prime Contractor. The entire team does not need access to much of what is provided by teammates in the data calls. If using a shared data repository tool, keep data call responses in a protected folder.

3. Ask only for information *actually required* to be responsive to the solicitation.

4. Always explain:
   a. *Why* the data is needed. Include actual customer requirement specific to request.
   b. *How* the data will be used/presented in the proposal.

   As the Prime Contractor you are ultimately directing the effort. You want the entire team to feel they are integral and valued partners; thus, you will use their time judiciously. If you are unable to explain why specific data/information is needed or how it is used, future request may be perceived as without justification and your ongoing relationship and their responsiveness to future requests may be affected. Additionally, by understanding the purpose of the requested material, the teammates can tailor it to maximize its’ relevance and value.

5. Do not ask for information already available or already provided. Request information verification retrieved from other sources such as internet sites or other data sources, i.e., DUNs numbers and Cage Codes are readily available on multiple open source websites.

6. Determine which teammates need to provide which data. Not all teammates need to provide the same level of information, e.g., Major Teaming partners (proposed for above an RFP-specified percent of work effort) may need to submit a Past Performance Reference; whereas, other teaming partners with only minor supporting roles may not. Do not ask for information from a teaming partner if it is not required.

7. Ask for data when it is needed or justified. See Data Calls: Timing section below.

8. Make it easy for your teammate(s) to respond. See Create Data Call Forms section below.

9. Set reasonable deadlines for the data call response.

10. Follow up frequently. If a teammate has missed a data call deadline, determine if there is some way you can help them satisfy the request.

**Note 1: This is not Legal advice.** Speak with a lawyer when establishing relationships with other companies for the purpose of exchanging sensitive, proprietary data, and information.

The following section provides an overall approach to achieve the above guidelines to support gathering critical data.

Data Calls: Approach

Data required to support a proposal development effort should be identified as part of the overall capture and proposal planning process. Often, the Capture Manager has already performed early data calls
needed to support the teaming selection process. The Capture and Proposal Managers need to coordinate data call planning to ensure efforts do not result in redundant data/information requests. The following approach is recommended to support the data call effort.

1. **Plan:**
   a. Identify required data needed to support proposal management and proposal development efforts.
   b. Coordinate with Capture Manager to record data already identified.
   c. Create a data tracking sheet to monitor and manage the data call process.
   d. Create data call templates to be provided to teammates.

2. **Schedule Data Calls:** Identify when data call information is needed to support proposal:
   a. Kick-off
   b. Development
   c. Production
   See section Data Calls: Timing below.

3. **Execute:**
   a. Send data calls as an email with a data request form for the teammate to complete as a separate (attached) file. See Creating a Data Call Form below.
   b. Request that each company add an extension to the file with their company name to more easily identify returned information.
      
      For Example: *Data Call 3_PoC_companyname.docx*
      
      You may consider adding the company’s name in the file name for them to ensure consistent naming approach.

4. **Follow-up/Track:**
   a. Check status of data calls:
      i. Daily at proposal stand-up meetings
      ii. Via email requests day before deadline and day immediately following deadline
   b. Track/Record consolidated data call results in a single location/document.

The following presents a list of common data most often needed/requested.

**Commonly Requested Data/Information**

*Table 1* presents commonly requested data/information exchanged to support proposal development. This list is not intended to represent a complete set and may vary widely based on the specific solicitation requirements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose / How Used</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DATA CALL: Points of Contact</strong></td>
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| **Purpose:** Provide names/roles/responsibility of teammates to support proposal/pricing/cost development, support reviews, gain approvals.  
**How Used:** Enables proposal team members to contact the correct individuals to get critical information/approvals quickly. | Key roles and contract information for:  
- Business Development Lead  
- Proposal Lead  
- Contracts Lead  
- Subject Matter Expert(s)  
- Price/Cost Lead |
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<th>Purpose / How Used</th>
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<td><strong>DATA CALL: Basic Company Information</strong></td>
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| **Purpose:** Solicitation requires the prime contractor to provide names of subcontractors/teammates and verification of ability/authorization to perform work and Social/Economic Status.  
**How Used:** Information often required as part of proposal response in contract, management, technical and cost/price volumes as part of the subcontracting management plan, small business subcontracting or participation plans, and pricing data. | • Corporate Headquarters Address or Address where work is being performed  
• Cage Code  
• DUNs Number  
• Socio/Economic Status, e.g., SDVOSB, HUB Zone, WOSB, etc.  
• DCAA Approved Accounting System  
• DCAA Approved Purchasing System |
| **DATA CALL: Company History/Role and Responsibility** | |
| **Purpose:** Critical background information describing company development and ability/experience to provide services to the customer.  
**How Used:** Support proposal write up describing why the teaming partner was selected and how they fit within the overall teaming arrangement as well as what work or requirements they are expected to perform. | • Company Formation (addresses corporate culture, socio economic status, stability)  
• Capabilities supported by Contracts performed  
• Mergers and Acquisitions (Corporate direction and capabiliies development, stability)  
• Corporate and Contract Awards, IDIQ Contract Vehicles  
• Company Size (ability to staff and/or manage large/complex contracts, corporate reachback for SMEs and staff to address staffing fluctuations and surges)  
• Company Locations (local reachback, increased ability to address staffing fluctuations and surges, locally available SMEs, ability to manage local or international programs) |
| **DATA CALL: Capability Questionnaire** | |
| **Purpose:** Often sent prior to or immediately following final RFP release, teammates are requested to rate their experience against the solicitations’ Statement of Work (SOW)/Performance Work Statement (PWS) based on their capability with reasonable supporting experience.  
**How Used:** Used by Prime contractors to:  
- Show depth and breadth of team experience  
- Rationalize selection of Teammate  
- Down-select teammates based on value to P-Win  
- Determine workshare (areas of support & percent of work)  
- Determine if there are any SOW/PWS gaps that need to be filled by an additional teammates  
- Assign proposal writing assignments based on self-proclaimed areas of expertise | A self-assessment of the company’s experience as it pertains to the SOW and backing it up with specific PP experience. The teammate is encouraged to be candid as this is a planning and analysis tool, not a product that will go in the proposal without heavy messaging. Often rated by showing a color coded matrix of strong, mid, weak experience allowing the prime contractor determine performance gaps and strengths and who can help where. |
| **DATA CALL: Past Performance Reference(s)/ Citations** | |
| **Purpose:** Used to demonstrate teammate’s ability to perform Statement of Work requirements.  
**How Used:** Help prime contractor to:  
1. Select from a number of potential past performance summaries from which to down-select the best 3 or 5 or whatever is required.  
2. Evaluate and determine proposal section write-ups to include past performance references to demonstrate teams’ capability and experience to perform. | Independent evaluation of company’s performance on a program from the customers’ Program Management Lead or contracting office most always sent directly to the requesting contracting officer leading the RFP selection effort to evaluate:  
- The company’s ability to successfully perform the required effort  
- **Relevancy:** The past performance is the same or similar in scope and magnitude of effort, and complexities this solicitation requires  
- **Recency:** Company’s experience performing similar work within 3 to 5 (maximum) years, thus retaining necessary skills and expertise necessary to perform |
| **DATA CALL: Teaming Partner Logos** | |
| **Purpose:** Capitalize on name recognition/branding that may be familiar to evaluator.  
**How Used:** Presented on cover and graphics within the proposal document. | Official high-resolution logo of the teaming partner authorized for use by the Prime. May request a standard version as well as a version with an invisible background. |
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Purpose / How Used</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DATA CALL: Key Personnel/Resumes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> To ensure your company has qualified personnel with the experience and skills needed to execute SOW requirements.</td>
<td>Individuals work experience, education, training and certification directly related to and supporting ability to perform in a proposed role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How Used:</strong> Submitted in the final proposal to demonstrate your company has the necessary qualified personnel available.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DATA CALL: Organizational Conflict of Interest (OCI)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> Identify if a company has a relationship or if a situation exists directly or indirectly relating to work to be performed under contract; that may diminish the company’s capacity to give impartial, technically sound, objective performance; or may result in the company having an unfair competitive advantage.¹</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How Used:</strong> Process used by the Government to control procurement integrity.¹</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DATA CALL: Cost/Price Data</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> To gather Teaming Partners program/project Cost/Price information by labor hour/category or by line item (product or service).</td>
<td>Often provided as an Excel worksheet with requesting Cost you will bill to the Prime Contractor per labor hour or by line item (product or service and escalation cost. May also require you define, G&amp;A, Fee, etc. The Prime may dictate rates, wraps and/or fee and ask the teammate to accept or Prime may ask teammate for a fully built-up or single quote and then negotiate or adjust workshare to reach Price To Win. Additionally, level of subcontractor costing information will be determined by RFP and may require detailed, sealed package.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How Used:</strong> Allows Prime contractor to create a consolidated Cost/Price to submit to the Government.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DATA CALL: Customer Questions/Clarifications</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> To help your company:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Influence the RFP in your favor</td>
<td>• Reference to a specific solicitation section, subsection, paragraph or line item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Correct clear errors in the RFP</td>
<td>• Question/Comment – addressing a perceived issue or requesting clarification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Improve (clarify) understanding of RFP requirements</td>
<td>• Recommendation to modify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How Used:</strong> Formal submission of questions/comment usually in the initial week or two following RFP, allowing enough time to vet internally before they are due to Government.</td>
<td>• Justification for modification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DATA CALL: Quotes and Accolades</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> To gather a collection of quotes and quantifiable success stories.</td>
<td>Substantiate the teammate’s actual experience, actual customer satisfaction and potentially use those summaries not selected for the past performance volume as vignettes to show expertise scattered throughout the proposal in call out boxes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How Used:</strong> Strategically scattered throughout proposal, supporting appropriate section, to substantiate success and customer satisfaction with the team and their past performance.</td>
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Table 1: Commonly Requested Data/Information. Additional data call items required by the solicitation needs to be identified early and provided to teammates to act on early in the proposal development cycle. This allows teammates time to manage information through their internal review and approval process.

The following is a list of additional types of information that may be required by the Prime for teammates to submit as part of the proposal, and thus managed by the data call process:

- **Letter of Consent:** Authorizing disclosure of past performance information.
- **Letter of Commitment:** Teaming Partner Officer authorized to commit company to the work.
- **Letter of Commitment of Key Personnel:** Agreement from submitted personnel to accept a job offer upon award or to perform job duties as describe in the proposal.
- **Representations and Certifications/FAR Compliance Forms:** Although required to be completed on the SAM.gov website, you may be required to submit a completed form or certification of Online Representations and Certifications.

Allow time in the schedule to obtain signed copies (pdf or faxed) from the teammates or personnel.

The following provides a recommended method to create a data call request and the tracking forms to manage them.
Create Data Call Forms

Data call forms should clearly communicate what data is being requested and provide a simple method to provide that data. The following components and approaches are recommended when creating a data call form with a sample provided in Figure 1:

1. **Program Name and Data Call Title:** Recommend sequentially numbering each data call to improve tracking and for reference
2. **Instructions:** Detailing the following:
   a. Desired data – include sample if warranted
   b. Return instructions
   c. Due date
3. **Data Table or Form:** Formatted to ensure recipient only needs to insert desired information
4. **Contact Information:** Individual to return completed data call and answer questions
5. **RFP Reference/Full RFP Requirement Text:** Detail need for requested information
6. **Data Use Explanation:** How information will be used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>XYZ Program – Data Call # 9: Organizational Conflict of Interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaming Partners Name: <strong>ABC Industries</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solicitation Name/Number: <strong>XXXXX-16-R-0001</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Company</strong> is required to provide the <strong>Program Name Contracting Office</strong> certification of no Organizational Conflict of Interest (OCI).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFP reference and requirement:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructions:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Please complete, sign, and return the Organizational Conflict of Interest form below on your company’s letterhead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. If an OCI is identified, in the following table, provide the following information:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. List of any actual or potential OCI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Mitigation plan for consideration by the Contracting Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OCI</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed by teammate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed by teammate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Send either the completed OCI form or the above completed OCI list and mitigation plan. The completed certificate or the above mitigation plan will be included in Volume X: Contract Documents in accordance with above RFP instructions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Return information no later than [Date and Time] to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POC:</strong>    <strong>[Contact Name, Title]</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>eMail:</strong>     <a href="mailto:xyx@company.com">xyx@company.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phone:</strong> (123) 456-7890</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1: Sample Data Call. Organizational Conflict of Interest. Include a clear explanation in the data call explaining your need for requesting the data and how the information is used. Also, include the solicitations instructions.*

Note that information filled in by the Prime is **highlighted in Grey** just for the purpose of this example. Information required by the Teammate is **highlighted in Yellow** and should remain in Yellow for submittal to the Teammate to clearly state what information is required.

Provide each Data Call Form in an email or in an attached Microsoft Work or Excel document to ensure ease of compatibility and use. Even if there are several data calls being sent at one time, and even if they are related in nature, it is important to number each, send each separately and track each individually. The reason – the most obvious reason is accountability. This makes it easier to track response to each data call. However, another critical reason is that if you embed several requests within a single
Data Call Approach for Proposal Management

data call, you are likely to receive only part of a response. This makes it difficult and, worst case, contentious, to obtain all the data requested.

Data Calls: Timing

Timing as to when data calls are to be sent, and determining what and how much information is requested at each interval is critical. If you send a request for all the information needed at one time, the teaming partner may be delayed in responding due to the volume of data to be gathered/created as well as working it through the review and approval process.

Timing of data calls should be based on the following:

1. **Business Acquisition Phase:** Much of data call timing considerations are dictated by where your company business development efforts are within the business acquisition phase, i.e., Capture Phase (prior to RFP release), or Proposal Development Phase (post RFP release), as well as the customers’ schedule. Ideally, much of the data call effort should be conducted prior to RFP release. However, some data requirements may not be known until the final RFP as many contract offices fail to include critical Sections L & M in Draft RFPs if a Draft RFP is released.

2. **Simplicity/Complexity of Information:**
   a. Data Calls for easily provided information like Points of Contact, basic company information, and Logos may be grouped together and requested as soon as the teaming partner is selected allowing only a few business days to provide. However, each piece of information should be separately numbered (a unique data call number) to enable the level of detailed needed to properly track responses.
   b. Data Calls requiring the development of write ups or gathering detailed information such as past performance reference data needs to be sent as soon as practical and should allow sufficient time (within allowable time within the proposal development schedule) to complete. For larger response requirements, you may choose to identify intermediate milestones and track progress against those milestones.

3. **Proposal Development/Production:** The single biggest driver of data call timing is the proposal development schedule initiated by release of the Final RFP and the proposal due date. It is recommended all data calls directly related to the:
   a. Proposal document development effort be completed prior to the schedule mid-point; often when an initial proposal review (Pink Team) is held.
   b. Cost/Price development effort be completed no later than two thirds into the proposal development effort and prior to the initial cost review.

When possible, ideally during the kick-off meeting, alert the team as to the data calls you anticipate requesting from them. This will enable them to start planning and anticipate needed resources.

Data Calls: Tracking

The Capture and Proposal Managers should create and daily maintain or update a tracking sheet to verify when data calls are sent and received. The purpose is to ensure you are tracking the data and to prevent confusion as to what has been sent, to whom, when, and when received. The tracking sheet should identify the following minimum information:

- Teaming Partner’s Name
- Individuals name data call was sent to
- Date sent
- Requested Response Date

**Key to Success:**

- Tie data calls to the overall proposal development schedule and present as part of the kick-off meeting.
- Make data call requirements and status part of your daily standup meeting.
In conclusion, it’s quite surprising how much data/information is required from teammates to support proposal development. This data call approach offers proposal managers the opportunity to identify and methodically request required information in a way as to make the process painless and highly effective.

It is also critical to store and protect information provided by teaming partners in a secure file location, and not release any consolidated documents without authorization. This applies to internal as well as external access controls to sensitive files and information. For example, controlling access to data on a shared proposal development site accessed by multiple internal company personnel and/or external consultants and/or multiple participating teaming partners.

References:

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