



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
WASHINGTON DC

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

18 December 2023

**MEMORANDUM FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF AIR FORCE SPACE ACQUISITION
WORKFORCE**

**SUBJECT: Essential Program Management Skills for Government Space Acquisition
Professionals**

We have defined our 9 Space Acquisition Tenets to drive space acquisition, as well as our Formula for going fast. The third and final piece of the puzzle is you - our amazing and dedicated space program managers and acquisition professionals. Here are some of the things you need to learn and gain experience with that will allow you to drive acquisition speed, deliver programs on cost and schedule, and be successful in your career.

1) Master the Fundamentals of Acquisition

Learn the different contract types and incentive strategies and when to apply them. Be able to develop an acquisition strategy, statement of work, and elements of a competitive request for proposal including Section L and M. Get source selection experience by leading or being part of a team and learn how to negotiate a contract. As part of the proposal evaluation process, be able to evaluate schedule, cost, staffing realism, and whether the company has the skills and expertise to successfully execute the program on cost and schedule. Know the acquisition rules and take advantage of flexibility provided in the DoD 5000 series and Adaptive Acquisition Framework.

The ability to develop a good acquisition strategy, well crafted request for proposals, and awarding executable contracts are key to successful space acquisition.

2) Develop Expertise in Satellite Development and/or Ground Software Development

Having a deep technical understanding of what it takes to acquire and develop a satellite or ground system allows you to proactively solve technical issues, review contractor design material, challenge technical assumptions, effectively evaluate technical proposals, make better decisions, reduce technical risks, and drive the acquisition to deliver on cost and schedule.

3) Relentlessly Manage Your Program Baseline

Learn how to effectively manage a program once under contract and how to measure technical and programmatic progress. Engage daily and take action to solve technical issues early.

Learn how to evaluate and analyze a contractor schedule and critical path. Track schedule, cost, technical, and staffing status by routinely reviewing planned vs actual achievements.

Understand the different types of margin including cost and schedule and how to apply them. Actively address and manage risks by using a simple risk management process to track and address risks.

Delivering on cost and schedule is a critical element of speed. We need to execute and meet our commitments by delivering programs that work, on schedule and on cost.

4) Utilize Critical Thinking and Effective Communication Skills

Develop and use critical thinking skills when reviewing program status information, and when reviewing data to assess and solve difficult technical issues. Be able to effectively present programmatic data and technical status of your program to all stakeholders. Have good written, presentation, and email skills.

Being able to think critically and communicate effectively are key skills that will allow you to ask the right questions and convey complex technical information effectively.

5) Understand How Industry Operates and What Motivates Them

Learn how industry operates and what motivates them by analyzing financial statements, and top level financial ratios. Review industry annual 10-Ks and quarterly reports. Understand the role of revenue, growth, profit, free cash flow, and contract backlog play on company financial reporting.

Track industry capabilities of both traditional defense contractors, and commercial space companies. Know what industry can and can't do. Avoid awarding new non-recurring engineering for capabilities that already exist at a different company. Take advantage of commercial capabilities and services to drive speed.

6) Team with Mission Operations

Team with operations early on in the acquisition life cycle. Work with operations to develop easy to operate user interfaces, test and acceptance strategies, training plans, and facility implications of your system (e.g., power and floor space).

Understand how the current system is operated and make sure you are replacing it with a better capability.

Think life cycle costs and plan accordingly in the budget for sustainment and maintenance.

7) Share, Collaborate, and Help Each Other

Help each other be successful. Share best practices on request for proposals, statements of work, test and transition plans, etc. Share lessons learned on successful and challenged programs. Ask for help on tough programs and do peer reviews to help each other solve difficult issues.

We are all in this together across the Department. We all need to help each other, learn from each other, and help everyone succeed across the Department for the mission.

8) Know Your Mission Area and Drive the Future

Whether its space domain awareness, missile warning, positioning navigation and timing, military satellite communications, space sensing, or other missions, develop a deep technical understanding of your mission area. It is critical to keep up to date with current intelligence and threats your mission area may be facing.

Use your understanding of the mission to identify mission gaps and shortfalls, drive research and development, and define future acquisitions to provide additional capabilities needed for the mission.

9) Become Proficient with the Budget Cycle and Working with Congress

Understand how the budget process works within your organization, at the Pentagon, and in Congress. Get experience developing budgets for your program and defending them in the budget process. Look for opportunities to brief Congressional Staffers and Members of Congress on your program and create an environment of program transparency.

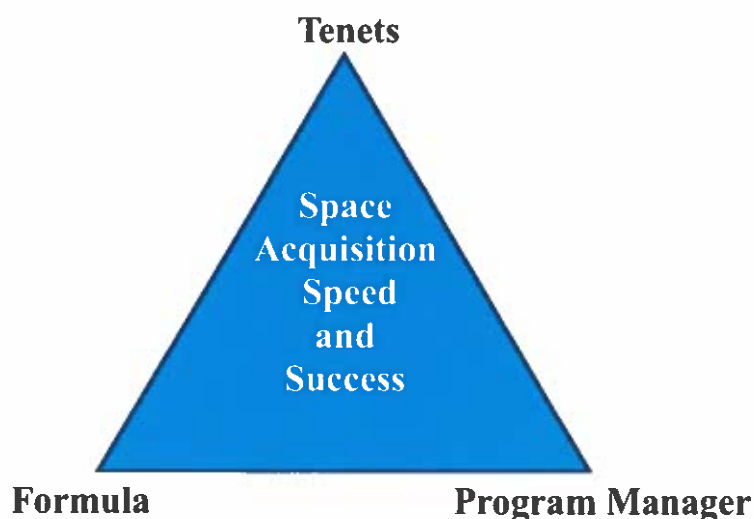
A key part of program management is your ability to define and defend your budget, as well as interacting and keeping Congress informed.

10) Ensure Your Program Integrates End to End and Works as a System

Understand the bigger picture of how your system fits in to the mission and interfaces with other programs. Make sure your portion of the program integrates with other pieces to form a complete system or capability. Develop systems engineering skills to compliment your program management skills and ensure cross program interfaces are defined and properly tested.

What you are developing may only be one part of an overall system. It is critical that you have the systems engineering skills and perspective to ensure your program integrates properly with other elements to form an end-to-end system.

Experience takes time. These are essential skills you need to learn and use over your career in space acquisition. If you use all three pieces of the puzzle, the 9 “Space Acquisition Tenets”, the “Simple Formula to Go Fast in Space Acquisition” and the “Essential Program Management Skills for Government Space Acquisition Professionals” we will rapidly transform our space architecture to be more proliferated, more resilient, and provide needed capabilities for our Nation at speed.



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