

(with respect to all elements of responsibility, including, but not limited to, capability, competency, capacity, credit, integrity, perseverance, tenacity, and limitations on subcontracting) for the purpose of receiving and performing a specific Government contract.

(b) The COC program empowers the Small Business Administration (SBA) to certify to Government contracting officers as to all elements of responsibility of any small business concern to receive and perform a specific Government contract. The COC program does not extend to questions concerning regulatory requirements imposed and enforced by other Federal agencies.

(c) The COC program is applicable to all Government acquisitions. A contracting officer shall, upon determining an apparent successful small business offeror to be nonresponsible, refer that small business to the SBA for a possible COC, even if the next acceptable offer is also from a small business.

(d) When a solicitation requires a small business to adhere to the limitations on subcontracting, a contracting officer's finding that a small business cannot comply with the limitation shall be treated as an element of responsibility and shall be subject to the COC process. When a solicitation requires a small business to adhere to the definition of a nonmanufacturer, a contracting officer's determination that the small business does not comply shall be processed in accordance with subpart 19.3.

(e) Contracting officers, including those located overseas, are required to comply with this subpart for U.S. small business concerns.

[48 FR 42240, Sept. 19, 1983, as amended at 51 FR 2664, Jan. 17, 1986; 54 FR 34754, Aug. 21, 1989; 59 FR 67036, Dec. 28, 1994; 61 FR 67410, Dec. 20, 1996; 62 FR 44820, Aug. 22, 1997]

19.602 Procedures.

19.602-1 Referral.

(a) Upon determining and documenting that an apparent successful small business offeror lacks certain elements of responsibility (including, but not limited to, capability, competency, capacity, credit, integrity,

perseverance, tenacity, and limitations on subcontracting), the contracting officer shall—

(1) Withhold contract award (see 19.602-3); and

(2) Refer the matter to the cognizant SBA Government Contracting Area Office (Area Office) serving the area in which the headquarters of the offeror is located, in accordance with agency procedures, except that referral is not necessary if the small business concern—

(i) Is determined to be unqualified and ineligible because it does not meet the standard in 9.104-1(g); *provided*, that the determination is approved by the chief of the contracting office; or

(ii) Is suspended or debarred under Executive Order 11246 or subpart 9.4.

(b) If a partial set-aside is involved, the contracting officer shall refer to the SBA the entire quantity to which the concern may be entitled, if responsible.

(c) The referral shall include—

(1) A notice that a small business concern has been determined to be nonresponsible, specifying the elements of responsibility the contracting officer found lacking; and

(2) If applicable, a copy of the following:

(i) Solicitation.

(ii) Final offer submitted by the concern whose responsibility is at issue for the procurement.

(iii) Abstract of bids or the contracting officer's price negotiation memorandum.

(iv) Preaward survey.

(v) Technical data package (including drawings, specifications and statement of work).

(vi) Any other justification and documentation used to arrive at the non-responsibility determination.

(d) For any single acquisition, the contracting officer shall make only one referral at a time regarding a determination of nonresponsibility.

(e) Contract award shall be withheld by the contracting officer for a period of 15 business days (or longer if agreed to by the SBA and the contracting officer) following receipt by the appropriate SBA Area Office of a referral

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that includes all required documentation.

[48 FR 42240, Sept. 19, 1983, as amended at 51 FR 27489, July 31, 1986; 62 FR 44820, Aug. 22, 1997]

19.602-2 Issuing or denying a Certificate of Competency (COC).

Within 15 business days (or a longer period agreed to by the SBA and the contracting agency) after receiving a notice that a small business concern lacks certain elements of responsibility, the SBA Area Office will take the following actions:

(a) Inform the small business concern of the contracting officer's determination and offer it an opportunity to apply to the SBA for a COC. (A concern wishing to apply for a COC should notify the SBA Area Office serving the geographical area in which the headquarters of the offeror is located.)

(b) Upon timely receipt of a complete and acceptable application, elect to visit the applicant's facility to review its responsibility.

(1) The COC review process is not limited to the areas of nonresponsibility cited by the contracting officer.

(2) The SBA may, at its discretion, independently evaluate the COC applicant for all elements of responsibility, but may presume responsibility exists as to elements other than those cited as deficient.

(c) Consider denying a COC for reasons of nonresponsibility not originally cited by the contracting officer.

(d) When the Area Director determines that a COC is warranted (for contracts valued at \$25,000,000 or less), notify the contracting officer and provide the following options:

(1) Accept the Area Director's decision to issue a COC and award the contract to the concern. The COC issuance letter will then be sent, including as an attachment a detailed rationale for the decision; or

(2) Ask the Area Director to suspend the case for one or more of the following purposes:

(i) To permit the SBA to forward a detailed rationale for the decision to the contracting officer for review within a specified period of time.

(ii) To afford the contracting officer the opportunity to meet with the Area

Office to review all documentation contained in the case file and to attempt to resolve any issues.

(iii) To submit any information to the SBA Area Office that the contracting officer believes the SBA did not consider (at which time the SBA Area Office will establish a new suspense date mutually agreeable to the contracting officer and the SBA).

(iv) To permit resolution of an appeal by the contracting agency to SBA Headquarters under 19.602-3. However, there is no contracting officer's appeal when the Area Office proposes to issue a COC valued at \$100,000 or less.

(e) At the completion of the process, notify the concern and the contracting officer that the COC is denied or is being issued.

(f) Refer recommendations for issuing a COC on contracts greater than \$25,000,000 to SBA Headquarters.

[62 FR 44820, Aug. 22, 1997]

19.602-3 Resolving differences between the agency and the Small Business Administration.

(a) *COCs valued between \$100,000 and \$25,000,000.* (1) When disagreements arise about a concern's ability to perform, the contracting officer and the SBA shall make every effort to reach a resolution before the SBA takes final action on a COC. This shall be done through the complete exchange of information and in accordance with agency procedures. If agreement cannot be reached between the contracting officer and the SBA Area Office, the contracting officer shall request that the Area Office suspend action and refer the matter to SBA Headquarters for review. The SBA Area Office shall honor the request for a review if the contracting officer agrees to withhold award until the review process is concluded. Without an agreement to withhold award, the SBA Area Office will issue the COC in accordance with applicable SBA regulations.

(2) SBA Headquarters will furnish written notice to the procuring agency's Director, Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) or other designated official (with a copy to the contracting officer) that the case file has been received and