

Background: The United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) hosts Small Business (SB) Roundtables approximately every two months. Government participants typically will be the USSOCOM Acquisition Executive, Director of Procurement, and Director of the Office of Small Business Programs. USSOCOM also invites 25 SBs to attend each session (limited to 1 person per firm).

SB Roundtables are intended to allow small businesses to discuss barriers to doing business with USSOCOM, provide input as to what USSOCOM is doing well, and provide suggestions for ways to make doing business with USSOCOM easier. These roundtables are not meant to be an opportunity for firms to present their capabilities to USSOCOM, or to receive a forecast of upcoming requirements.

We don't have any set agenda for the meeting. The OSBP gives a couple of housekeeping notes, the AE usually gives a couple opening remarks, and then we open it to the floor to discuss whatever the SBs would like to talk about. The OSBP takes minutes, but does not attribute comments to anyone (we want to keep the events non-attributional and foster open, honest communication).

The criteria considered when selecting attendees (in no particular order and not listed in order of importance):

1. Socioeconomic status (we would like representation from each socioeconomic category (SB, SDB, WOSB, HUBZone, VOSB, and SDVOSB);
2. Products and/or services provided (we lean more towards firms that provide what we buy, but want a variety of industries represented);
3. Experience with USSOCOM (we would like a mix of experienced and inexperienced firms);
4. The last time the firm has attended a SB Roundtable (we want to afford all firms an opportunity to attend a roundtable).
5. When the request to attend was received; and
6. Where the firm is located (we would like a mix of local and non-local firms).

Below is a conformed copy of the minutes from the first eight sessions.

SB Roundtable Discussion Summary

Conformed as of 8 Aug 2018

1. Intent of roundtables
 - a. Continue dialogue with industry
 - b. Get good feedback.
 - i. Although we think we have a good small business program, we are sure we can do better.
 - ii. What is the command doing right?
 - iii. What barriers do SBs face?
 - iv. What could we do better?
 - v. Tips/suggestions that other organizations are doing that support SB.

2. USSOCOM Thoughts/Comments:
 - a. Talent drain. We as a group are not growing talent to support the SOF Community.
 - b. Comments/concerns are more powerful when brought to USSOCOM as a group vs individuals.
 - c. AT&L has 26 contracting shops around the world
 - d. Approx. \$9B awarded in FY17, either directly by AT&L or through other agencies.
 - e. In FY17, 31% of awards went to SB primes
 - f. SB is considered at the start of requirement, not as an afterthought
 - g. The OSBP is your advocate for any small business issues, whether on a specific procurement or general issue
 - h. The SOF AT&L is the ombudsman for the command, and is not involved in the source selection process other than to be the ombudsman. This is intentional so that the position retains independence from the process.
 - i. The OSBP holds office hours every Thursday at SOFWERX facility. Send email to osbp@socom.mil to sign up.

3. SB Roundtables
 - a. How does USSOCOM know if the meetings are working
 - b. Transparency is huge. Recordings of meetings/minutes keep a pool of dialogue
 - c. Industry wouldn't care if meetings were recorded
 - i. USSOCOM considered, but in an effort to maintain open dialogue, sessions won't be recorded.
 - ii. USSOCOM will keep a conformed copy of the minutes from each session, and will post to the USSOCOM website.

4. General Topics/Areas to discuss
 - a. USSOCOM Engagement with Industry

- i. SOFWERX is a good engagement tool
 - 1. SOFWERX offers tours every Tuesday and Thursday at 9am and 4pm. Go to www.sofwerx.org to sign up.
- ii. Industry needs to know about upcoming requirements earlier in the process
 - 1. The dynamic is currently industry “pulling” information from USSOCOM. USSOCOM should try to shift to more of a “push” methodology
 - a. One contracting officer’s spreadsheet regarding IT requirements and when they should post to Alliant SB was mentioned as extremely helpful.
 - b. There is a forecast on the SOF AT&L page, but it is out of date and only contains minimal information.
 - c. The forecast has been updated and will continue to be updated. It is not all inclusive but highlights many of our larger procurements.
 - 2. There are limitations on the amount of engagement USSOCOM can do due to workload/bandwidth issues
 - 3. Industry would like better access to PEOs staff, as well as components and users
 - 4. It was mentioned that most contracting officers, program managers, and users don’t know the limits of what they can and cannot say, so they don’t say anything.
 - a. One example given was a firm had a program manager that they worked with for a couple of years that knew his limits and would share what he could. When the new program manager took over, he was new to acquisition and didn’t know what his limits were. So he didn’t share anything.
 - b. Some companies are successful in gathering information from existing support contractors who share what they can (legally). The support contractors know what can be shared better than the government employees.
 - 5. USSOCOM should consider training components and users on what can and cannot be shared
 - a. Users should understand what can and cannot be shared.
 - b. Industry needs to understand that while understanding individual user’s needs/desires are important, USSOCOM does not have the resources to support every desire from each user. PEO’s and PMs have to balance what individual users want with what the organization can support.
 - 6. Methods to share information
 - a. USSOCOM is concerned that having more in person events creates additional expenses for SBs which SBs either have to eat or will end up increasing G&A rates on USSOCOM requirements.
 - i. Meetings could potentially be held at different locations (similarly to how TE events are done)
 - ii. It was discussed that firms will travel wherever if they are truly interested in doing business with USSOCOM, and the decision to travel is a business

decision (such as the decision for some to travel to Tampa for the SB Roundtable).

iii. Webinars were suggested

1. They would allow more people to at least watch/listen into an event, even if they couldn't actively participate. But at least they would be able to hear what is going on and receive the information.
2. Suggested that they be limited to specific areas so that people would only have to listen if they support that area and wouldn't have to listen each time "just in case".

iv. Podcasts were also suggested

1. Some concern over controlling who can view the information.

iii. FBO

1. Industry stated that (especially for services), once a solicitation is posted it is too late for the firm to be successful. The firm needs information sooner so that they can start building a team
2. Sources sought notices and Industry days are good. But the notices and engagement need to happen as early in the process as possible, and need to be interactive with dialog. Not just the contracting officer and program manager just reading a draft of the RFP
3. Industry rarely hears back or gets feedback/questions in response to RFI submissions and are left wondering if the information submitted went into a black hole.

iv. Management should track engagements to ensure PEO's/PMs are engaging with industry

v. USSOCOM needs to provide better feedback to industry in response to any inquiries (similar to the detailed feedback they receive from TE events)

vi. SOFWERX also needs to provide better feedback to industry.

vii. USSOCOM envisions VULCAN as a potential tool to help with engagement with industry

1. VULCAN allows individual operators/users to identify technology and submit to the tool, allowing program managers and other users to see what's available.

viii. Capability Collaboration Events

1. A different PEO presents each month – way left of RFP. Here is what PEO is working on in 1or 2 yrs.
2. Events tend to be more product vs services

ix. Forecasts

1. USSOCOM has forecast, not much information available
2. US AID does quarterly updates
 - a. Posted on website
 - b. Highlights what has changed
 - c. Even states when event will be posted

- d. Steer away from face to face events
 - i. Call in 2 ask questions on x date.
 - ii. US AID records phone call and posts it on website for those who can't call in.
- 3. PEO STRI has an industry engagement called the PALT, which provides input on pending acquisitions.
 - a. PEO STRI has a more targeted audience (mainly Simulation and Training)
 - b. USSOCOM much broader mission set. And a lot of interest for events. A USSOCOM PALT could turn into a "mini SOFIC" every month
 - c. USSOCOM already a lean org. monthly PALT meetings would increase time demand
 - d. PEO STRI has the facilities and infrastructure on site to support
 - i. Not on base, so no base access issues
 - ii. Big enough room in facility to host event
 - e. USSOCOM would have to host event offsite, which would be logistically more challenging
 - i. With people offsite, a 2 hour meeting would result in half a day lost
 - f. Monthly PEO CCE events are an attempt to do this – usually only one event per month. Only one PEO presents, and usually only one focus area is discussed
- 4. Need to make it easier for PEOs and PMs to support
 - a. Monthly PEO CCE events are an attempt to do this as well
- x. Mock Source Selection
 - 1. Would USSOCOM consider doing a mock source selection demonstrating how the evaluation is actually conducted?
- b. Doing Business with USSOCOM
 - i. Important for companies to respond to RFIs on FBO. The OSBP and contracting use these responses in determining whether the rule of two can be met
 - ii. Innovation
 - 1. Biggest challenge facing contractors is where to start. How does a contractor tell USSOCOM what they have to show?
 - 2. A plane ticket and 10 minute taxi ride to SOFWERX can get contractor here and get product in front of the OSBP and TILO to see if users are interested in product.
 - 3. Contractors want USSOCOM to let them know if they will never have any value to USSOCOM.
 - iii. Not many requirements posted on FBO for new companies not already working with USSOCOM
 - iv. In recent years, USSOCOM has moved \$1B from full & open competition to small business set-asides.

- v. Opportunities at USSOCOM tend to be larger @ HQ USSOCOM compared to other SOCOM Locations
 - 1. Look at the components and field offices. That is where more opportunities at smaller dollar values are.
 - 2. There are 27 contracting offices that fall under USSOCOM
 - vi. 3 out of 4 requirements at USSOCOM are competed
 - vii. Is FBO a good source to see what's going on? Are there better or more effective ways to see what's going on?
 - 1. If 1st time seeing requirement is RFP on FBO, its too late.
 - 2. Need to level playing field for SBs with limited resources
 - 3. Try to release drafts earlier
 - a. USSOCOM pretty good with releasing draft RFPs and holding industry days.
 - viii. The Acquisition Executive and the Director of Contracting meet with both the awardee and unsuccessful offerors on source selections to see how the source selection went: good communication, schedule, flawed criteria, etc.
 - 1. Flawed criteria – everyone knew it, but no one said anything
 - 2. Equally unfair to everyone
 - ix. SBs are to contact the ombudsman early on and not wait until after the fact
 - 1. Better to catch issues early than late
 - 2. The ombudsman is the Military Deputy, and is never directly involved in a source selection (by design to maintain independence)
 - x. If a SB wants to voice concern over an issue, but want to remain anonymous, they may contact Paul or Chris, who will forward the concern without identifying the source of the concern.
- c. Talent Drain
- i. How to build the pool of junior employees (SMEs to support USSOCOM mission)?
 - 1. Needs to be joint area of concern between Government and Industry
 - 2. Consider some sort of accelerator program
 - ii. Clearance levels limit available talent; government doesn't just want to trade bodies around each time contract is re-competed
 - 1. Consider some sort of accelerator program
 - 2. Could USSOCOM talk to DSS about improving/shortening lead time to get interim/final clearances for "cold start" hires?
 - iii. USSOCOM should provide a better definition of the skills they are looking for.
 - 1. Basic ground level skills e.g. university accreditation
 - iv. A lot of organic talent in the Tampa area. How do we collectively leverage pools
 - v. Would USSOCOM consider a Co-op program? So many months at USSOCOM, so many months at a SB contractor?
 - vi. Insourcing
- d. Security Clearances
- i. Why does everybody on contract at USSOCOM need TS/SCI clearance?

1. Most work on a procurement does not require work at the classification level of the procurement.
 2. Allow firms to hire individuals without clearance to perform work that isn't actually classified so that companies can hire new individuals and give them work while going through the investigation process
 3. Requirements should be structured to only require the minimum clearance for work being done (x positions on requirement require TS/SCI, x positions require SECRET, x positions don't require clearance). Would also help with talent drain discussion above.
- ii. Intern programs
 1. Create way prime contractors hire interns and maybe Government could sponsor clearance.
 - iii. It is important to discuss the possibility of security clearance requirements early on in the process with interns. Discuss with interns the potential barriers to being able to obtain a clearance and the importance of planning personal life around potential barriers.
 1. Too late to discuss when a junior/senior team member is trying to get a clearance for a specific requirement.
 2. Decisions made as junior in high school can mess up chances later.
 - iv. Security office not cooperative at USSOCOM when industry trying to obtain clearances
 - v. Not easy for contractors to sponsor subcontractors for security clearances through security office
 - vi. DSS won't allow a subcontractor to get a clearance without a requirement/dd254
 1. DSS does not have the resources to clear every potential firm.
 2. CRADAs may be a potential way to get subcontractors on DD254s
 - vii. Look at NSA PISA program.
- e. Trade-offs vs LPTA
 - i. How to differentiate between the two.
 1. Even trade-offs end up looking like LPTAs after evaluations are done
 2. It may seem that way to industry since they don't see technical evaluations.
 - ii. USSOCOM prefers best value
 1. 30% of actions at SOCOM are LPTA
 2. Government willing to pay a premium when it makes sense
 - iii. LPTA leads to race to bottom
 1. Not always race to bottom, oftentimes it is resetting to what the Government actually needs
 - iv. Price Realism vs Price Reasonableness
 1. Realism ensures price not too low
 2. Reasonableness ensures price not too high
 3. What looks reasonable to the market may not be reasonable to the user

- v. Differentiators
 1. Government doesn't evaluate all parameters; pick key parameters that should create discriminators.
 - a. Relatively simple to do with supplies. Very difficult with services.
 - b. Customer not sure of what they want. They don't want qualifications, they want "Joe" or "Sally" because they have been doing it.
 2. Government asks for compensation plan, and contractor provides.
 - a. Industry doesn't know what the government does with the plan
 - b. How is the plan actually evaluated?
 3. Technical Evaluations (expansion from compensation plan discussion)
 - a. How was the contractor looked at?
 - b. What does the Government care about, and how did the contractor do?
 - c. Where should the government address?
 - i. Industry day?
 - ii. Section M (or other part of RFP)?
 4. Consider LOI's and names/salaries on resumes after award
 - a. Resumes are one way to differentiate offerors. However, with the length of time it takes to finish an evaluation, the person identified by the resume is no longer available.
 5. GS Equivalentents
 - a. Does it help industry if the Government provides GS Equivalentents
 - i. It helps, but it is just one factor
 - ii. How important is it compared to other aspects (Education, team player, experience, etc)
 6. SB Targets
 - a. Do SB targets help in Unrestricted Procurements?
 - i. No. Targets are targets, and not requirements
 - ii. Mandatory use of SBs helps
 7. During 1st Day of SOFIC, Contracting did have a sit down with industry on Sections L&M
- f. Procurement tools/vehicles
 - i. USSOCOM Contracting Officers are having to do more with less. The Command is looking to offload work that is not SOF specific and having our Contracting Officers focus on SOF Specific work.
 - ii. Industry should become familiar with Strategic Sourcing and start looking at Best in Class vehicles.
 - iii. Industry should also look into the All-small Mentor-Protégé Program and understand Mentor-Protégé Joint ventures.
 1. Allows small business (protégés) to partner with Mentors (either large or established smalls) to go after bigger projects
 2. Mentor-Protégé JVs additional benefit

- a. JV gets to use the past performance of individual members (can use the Mentor's past Performance)
 - b. For set aside work, the small would only have to do 20% of total contract value (JV has to do 50%, protégé only has to do 40% of what JV does 40% of 50% is 20%).
- iv. Last year, USSOCOM used a GSA rep onsite. How well did it meet AT&L'S needs and will it continue in FY18
 - 1. It is used as another tool. It is not an exclusive route but if available, we will use and try to see if it can fulfill our requirements.
 - 2. We rather focus our efforts on awarding tasks vs crating another pool of contractors. Part of the assessment is whether the existing pool is broad enough for our requirements
 - a. Can be tough on USSOCOM side to review the # of proposals,
 - b. Don't want contractors to feel like they have to propose even if they aren't competitive
 - c. Not fair to business owners if government drags contractors on. If no chance, its best to know early
 - 3. Don't want to spend a lot of resources on both sides to set up own IDIQ vs leveraging existing vehicles (where it makes sense).
- v. GSA
 - 1. Certain challenges with GSA POC. IT Software site is self-loading. Don't assume information is accurate. Need to verify.
 - 2. Great strategy on paper, need to ensure we are getting what we ask for.
 - 3. Does USSOCOM consider vehicle success rate?
 - a. Not what we ask. We ask if there is a vehicle that will fill our requirements.
 - b. Likely won't put highest priority requirements on a new vehicle
- g. Simplified Acquisitions
 - i. How often does USSOCOM use Simplified acquisitions
 - 1. Don't have a percentage, but the office uses when appropriate
 - 2. 85% of simplified acquisitions at USSOCOM are awarded to SBs
- h. Small Business Participation
 - i. When using GWAC's, what if Small Businesses don't accurately respond to SB
 - 1. USSOCOM can't control SB Participation at the Prime level, but can put requirements into the task.
 - 2. On many of our contracts (both our vehicles and orders against other vehicles), we often put SB mandates into the solicitation (primes must subcontract a certain percentage to SBs) with penalties for not complying.
 - a. Note that these dollars don't count in our prime goals
 - 3. The OSBP is working with policy to include a CDRL to track Prime is subcontracting to SBs. We are paying attention.
- i. SBIR/STTR

- i. USSOCOM has one of the highest commercialization rates in the entire SBIR Program.
 - ii. Congressional Language being drafted to make it easier for SBIRs.
- j. Big Data
 - i. USSOCOM struggles when it comes to big data/data analytics
 - ii. Tend to take a weapon systems approach – may stand up a PEO Data
- k. Professional services
 - i. Government trying to get away from butts in seat and move towards working more collaboratively
- l. USSOCOM Resource challenges
 - i. Age of USSOCOM SOF AT&L Staff
 - 1. Both ends of spectrum (20+ and 50+)
 - 2. A lot just starting out and a lot retirement eligible. Some concern with talent loss
 - ii. Contracting has a lot of turnover
 - 1. Contributed to the “gold standard” – our contracting officers are being poached because of their knowledge and willingness to take risks
 - a. Result of the culture at SOF AT&L
 - iii. Big concern when AE took over was users going straight to contracting officers
 - 1. Contracting officers busy
 - 2. Requirement speak versus contracting speak
 - 3. Need program managers to convert requirement speak to contracting speak so that all work more efficiently
- m. Barriers to meaningful competition
 - i. Educate workforce on tools to help SBs
 - ii. Consider evaluation scoring to incentivize those with good mentoring programs
 - iii. Narrow KP requirements makes competition difficult
 - iv. Requirements are written for one skill level when the customer wants the skill level of the person currently performing the work
 - v. Seems hard to get into SOCOM Business – ex: mission planning – trying to find someone with SOF experience
- n. Classified Procurement
 - i. It would be handy if SBs had access to a reading room since some do not have SCIFs within their facilities.
- o. Consortiums
 - i. PEO STRI is looking at consortiums. Has USSOCOM considered them?
 - ii. USSOCOM concern is that many people use Consortiums to get out of contracts.
 - iii. USSOCOM would rather use other people’s consortiums for prototyping
 - iv. Training and TTP is where USSOCOM struggles; not sure how to use consortium for services without large prime subbing all the work out and keeping profit.