

Innovation Technique 10— Group Oral Debriefings

Can we do oral debriefings when we have a large number of offerors?

Benefits of Debriefings Generally—

- Shared understanding of award decisions and process.
- Mutual appreciation of value of relationships, which incentivizes our industry partners to continue to want to do business with us, whether successful or unsuccessful.
- Creates better comfort for the offerors and appears less defensive and more respectful.
- Focus on shared lessons learned.
- May reduce risk of protest.



Thoughts from Industry:

“It really does save time to put together a two-way dialogue, sufficient, detailed debriefing because it results in less protests.

The more that you do have time for detailed dialogue, where it is two ways, and it’s not just ‘Here’s what you did wrong’ it’s also ‘Here’s what you did right’ and the question ‘What did we do right?’ and ‘What did we do wrong?’ enabled, ultimately down the line, for the next procurement to come out to have even better results.

I will say for the record today, I want to applaud the team that did this procurement, because from [this offeror’s] perspective, it was the best debriefing and procurement experience that we had in our entire executive team’s career. We all walked away and we were like ‘Wow! Did that just happen? Did we really have open and honest dialogue? That was so fantastic!’ Rather than walking away saying ‘What just happened?’ in a negative sort of way.”

Recommendations for a group oral post-award debriefing—

1. Give each offeror a post-award debriefing by letter (or e-mail) that satisfies FAR 15.506(d)(1) through (5). In that letter, invite the offeror to participate in a group call with all unsuccessful offerors to satisfy FAR 15.506(d)(6): *“Reasonable responses to relevant questions about whether source selection procedures contained in the solicitation, applicable regulations, and other applicable authorities were followed.”* Say that the offeror’s participation is voluntary, and that the phone call will conclude the debriefing. Send the debriefing letter and do the group oral debriefing as quickly as possible after award notices are sent.
2. For a two-phase down-select, maybe it is one call for the unsuccessful offerors in Phase 1 and another call, on the same day, for unsuccessful offerors in Phase 2. Remember, you should only accept and answer questions about procedures, regulations, and authorities. Answer the question or not, as you choose, while you are on the call – do not promise to deliver an answer later.
3. Don’t try to take the roll – it’s a phone call. You don’t need a list of participants. However, whenever anyone asks a question, you should ask that caller to identify him- or herself. Don’t record the call.

This approach was first used in DHS, in a PIL acquisition – then, OMB’s Myth-Busting 3 memo highlighted it for the entire federal acquisition community!