

Industry List of “Top 10” Topics and Issues

[In Industry’s priority order]

The NGA Advisory Working Group (NAWG) is engaged with NGA/DD Poole and his senior staff to develop activities and actions which will lead to improved NGA-Industry interaction and thereby better and quicker solutions to GEOINT mission needs. During the NAWG’s USGIF GEOINT 2018 Symposium “annual summary of progress” panel in April, DD Poole challenged his team and the NAWG to come up with lists of the “Top 10” issues which affect NGA-Industry interaction and adversely impact solution development.

The topics below are Industry’s Top 10. When this list is combined with NGA’s, the NAWG will coordinate with NGA staff to select the topics that will be jointly worked in calendar 2018.

Summary of Industry’s list:

- Establish **committed consistency** to NGA’s Vision and Direction and Strategy so Industry (and internal Agency managers) know where to invest resources, how to prioritize among and between work areas, and understand how strategic initiatives get translated into concrete, tactical actions.
- Develop and provide the **roadmap** linking the Vision and Direction and Strategy to requirements, initiatives, objectives, and capabilities so Industry can better understand where its capabilities and services best fit needs.
- Develop, maintain and publish the acquisition status of current opportunities so Industry can tell **where we are in the movie** and align and commit resources appropriately.
- Provide **feedback** to Industry’s RFI responses so Industry knows if its comments were interpreted correctly.
- Consistently apply the **‘cone of silence’** across the acquisition cadre so the playing field is equitable.
- Fully **answer Industry’s questions** (not waiting until the next sequential document) so Industry can make informed business decisions at the appropriate time.
- Be **consistent in opportunity announcement** vehicles so Industry doesn’t miss a key opportunity merely because we didn’t check an obscure or infrequently used site.
- **Define your terms** consistently and reliably to avoid misunderstanding the technologies, processes or intentions in a procurement.
- **Use an unclassified site** for announcements and procurement references to not artificially restrict potential vendors from participation.
- **Understand Industry’s processes** in order to limit inadvertent misunderstandings and chaotic timing.

Each of these topics is expanded in detail below with background information, impact commentary and recommendations. The NAWG expects to be an active participant in resolving these issues with NGA via the most appropriate venue: Cross-Table exchanges, “Skull sessions”, a “Reverse Industry Day”, or other extended study and analysis processes.

Consistency in Vision and Direction and Strategy: Commitment to a Goal/ Process/ Pursuit/ Purpose

- Even given the realities of all the change confronting NGA (technological, burgeoning source availability, rapidly developing new mission requirements, adversaries with growing capabilities, etc), the Agency's forward-looking posture is uncertain. Where is it going, why, what comes next, how does it get there?
- In the past, there was specificity and certainty:
 - IDEX to IDEX-2 to IEC. Meeting growing digital sources; transitioning to commodity hardware.
 - DPF to Libraries to NCL. Meeting growing need for NRT access to data; meeting worldwide dissemination requirements.
 - USIGS to GeoScout to NSG/ASG systems. Developing and deploying systems across the national security environment; increasing numbers and varieties of users and consumers.
- Now there is only a continuing series of starts and stops.
 - Buzzy and fuzzy words and phrases that 'seem to' define an objective but actually do not provide clarity in purpose, measurable expected benefits, or actions/activities to implement.
 - And, inevitably, these have been followed by insufficient resourcing, frustration with the lack of perceived progress, and creation of new vision/direction with more buzzies and fuzzies.
- The Impact:
 - Industry does not know where to position investment
 - Industry initiatives begun toward a long-announced and assumed opportunity are wasted when the opportunity (or technological/contractual approach) becomes suddenly cancelled
 - NGA middle managers are equally uncertain about what to do next, and frustrated by how much time and effort they have wasted when things change
- Recommendation:
 - Decide and commit: Enterprise-wide where feasible; Non-enterprise-wide initiatives where practical and prudent.
 - What initiatives or approaches is NGA going to pursue. Decide.
 - AAA?
 - Commercial?
 - Achieve in the Open?
 - Public-Private Partnerships?
 - Cloud?
 - Across the NSG or only inside NGA?
 - Xxx as a Service?
 - DevOps?
 - Build Low | Implement high?
 - Data-centered or Process centered?
 - X
 - X
 - X

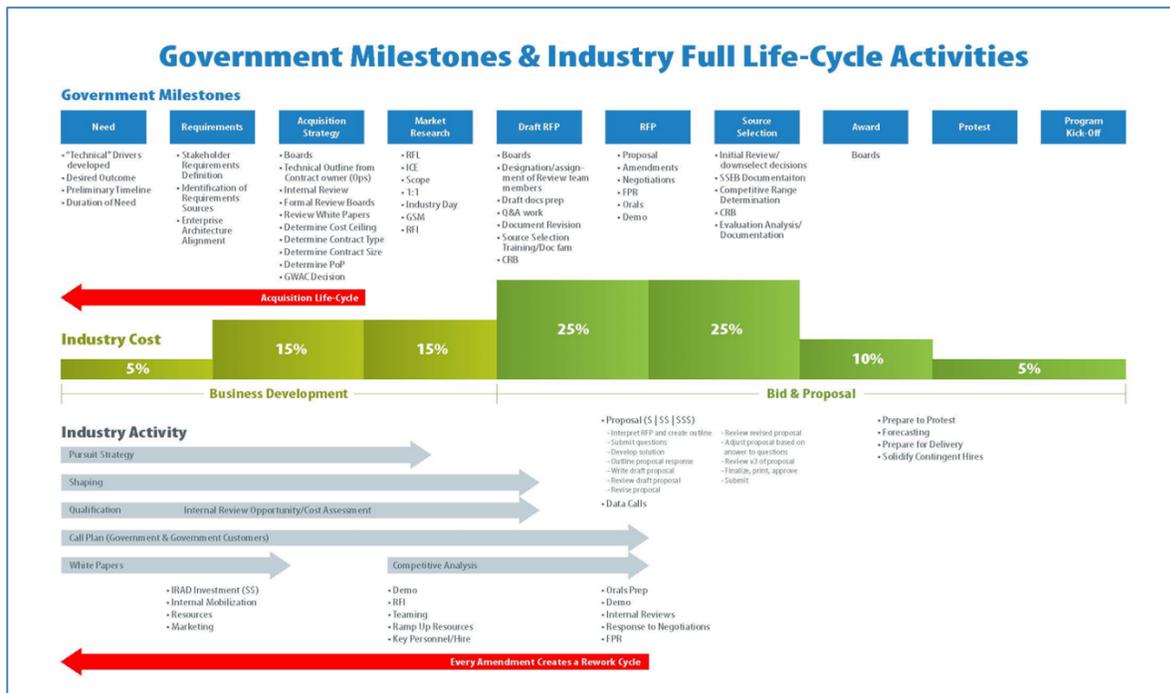
- Prioritize within each decision space/initiative. Consider evaluating through different lenses to gain different perspectives:
 - Highest impact?
 - Fastest deployed?
 - Business area 1 or 2 or 3 first?
 - Operational foundation for the future or stop-gap fix?
- Industry has many hundreds of years of relevant experience and expertise. Engage us.
- Report your results.
- Stick to the decisions made.

Provide the Roadmap

- During the NAWG’s “Mock Acquisition Panel” with NGA a significant ‘aHa’ moment for Industry was understanding broad “Initiatives” were composed of different “Programs” and subsequently into “Projects”. There is no ‘single contract’ envisioned to address the entirety of the “initiative”. This will become more complex as NGA moves to modular contracting and an IPO lexicon (e.g. capabilities and/or vs requirements).
- The Issue:
 - There is no unified portrayal of how initiatives relate to NGA missions and/or gaps
 - There is no available “picture” of the decomposition of Initiatives/Programs/Projects and how the needs/requirements/capabilities are being addressed along each decomposed pathway
- The impact:
 - Understanding how the pieces fit together enables Industry to see how their capabilities/offerings fit into NGA’s near term and long range plans for meeting its mission.
- Recommendation:
 - Develop and produce a single roadmap across entire agency, tying initiatives/requirements/ objectives/capabilities to the strategy and vision that drives the acquisition lineup
 - Publish the roadmap and have periodic industry sessions where the initiatives (and derivative activities) are explained and status provide for each
 - Give industry an avenue for feedback on the roadmap

Where are we in the movie?

- There is no singular place where Industry can access a comprehensive portrayal of where all procurements are in the acquisition process.
- Consider the NAWG graphic below:



- The impact:
 - Industry’s planning and decision making around acquisitions dramatically improves when we know where in the acquisition cycle an opportunity resides. This yields a saving of carried costs to the government.
 - Enables individual businesses to focus on acquisitions that support their core competencies, thus developing solutions that better meet mission need.
- Recommendation:
 - Develop and maintain a list showing where current opportunities are in the acquisition process and post on the ARC or FBO.
 - Provide history of each opportunity (RFI, DRFP, etc.) - e.g. precedent contracts and closed/cancelled/renamed history.
 - If an opportunity is cancelled (no matter where in the acquisition cycle), provide an explanation why.
 - If the acquisition is broken up due to modular contracting address what the pieces are, where they are going to be released, and estimated timeline, e.g. Exploit, Patagonia, Galaxy.
 - Publish updated status regularly (monthly?) via ARC (both unclassified and classified).

Lack of feedback from RFI responses

- Impact:
 - Industry does not know if its comments were understood
 - Industry does not know if its comments affected the acquisition approach or requirements/needs set forth in the RFI’s background information
 - Industry does not know if its initial conceptual solution remains a valid starting point for a proposal
 - Hard for industry to engage in teaming without feedback on RFI responses and how they impact future RFP.

- Industry continues to expend resources against an opportunity which may have been significantly changed by RFI responses
- Delays in DRFP/FRFP following a RFI response lead to outdated RFI responses causing the need for additional RFIs. This costs both government and industry time and money.
- Recommendation:
 - Provide consolidated, overarching feedback on RFI responses. If the RFI asked specific questions about technology, COTS product availability, contracting strategies, etc., provide information about what NGA heard – statistics, choices, options offered, etc.
 - Provide feedback on how Industry RFI responses have affected the prospective acquisition, even if acquisition is cancelled or otherwise restructured.
 - Indicate whether the procurement remains valid or not and when action may be taken on the procurement. This allows industry to resource plan accordingly.

Consistency in applying the ‘cone of silence’

- The issue:
 - There is no consistency in how, when, and where in the acquisition cycle the cone of silence applies and who within NGA governs these restrictions (COR, PM, CO).
 - The inconsistency in the application of the cone of silence varies by opportunity and individual.
- The impact:
 - Depending on when the cone of silence is applied during the acquisition process different degrees of industry insight related to a procurement are gained which, potentially, creates an unfair advantage.
 - Especially exacerbated when opportunities are cancelled, split up, shifted to other vehicles, etc. because that changes who gets access and influence.
- Recommendation:
 - Develop a consistent cone of silence guideline that can be accessed and adhered across all of NGA acquisition process (from PMO to contracts to legal)

Better address Industry questions

- NGA holds Industry Days and participates in other panels and forums (e.g. GEOINT Symposium)
 - The Q&A segments invariably run out of time to respond to all the questions.
 - NGA promises to answer all questions received. However, the responses rarely appear
- Questions asked after a DRFP/FRFP are posed to help Industry prepare to provide the most relevant and technically superior solution to NGA’s needs.
 - Questions illustrate DRFP/FRFP inconsistencies, confusing statements or incomplete facts.
 - An example from the eXploit DRFP:

16	Technical	Submitted: 06/18/14 09:46	Answered: 08/01/14 13:04
		Classification: UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO	Classification: UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO
		Regarding Draft RFP Section M: The relative importance of each subfactor is provided, but the relative importance of the factors is not. What is the relative importance between Factors 1.0, 2.0, 3.0, and 4.0?	Please see the final RFP for this clarification and the weighting of the factors.

- Impact:
 - Lack of NGA response to Industry Day/panel/forum questions impedes industry's ability respond to NGA's need to achieve mission goals.
 - Answers like 'this will be fixed the final RFP' add no value to a potential bidder's understanding of what to propose and how to describe it. Industry starts developing its proposal when the DRFP is released. Waiting until the FRFP is released to get answers to questions that greatly impact proposal development is too late in industry's bid/proposal cycle.
 - Having actual answers to questions is essential for informed industry decision making, e.g. to bid or no bid.
- Recommendation:
 - Release answers to industry day/panel/forum questions on ARC or FBO.
 - Provide the most complete answers possible to RFI/DRFP/FRFP questions. Do not leave an issue raised by a question unresolved.

Inconsistent opportunity announcements

- The announcement of opportunities, and acquisition details, are not posted to enable industry to find them easily. Often opportunities are posted where a limited number of companies can find and access the information (e.g. GWACs)
- Impact:
 - Industry miss opportunities when non-standard/unexpected sites are used.
 - NGA inadvertently limits participation when its Industry Partners are unaware of an opportunity
- Recommendation:
 - Use FBO for all procurement notifications and contract results/actions. Direct Industry to non-standard sites (e.g. GWACs) as appropriate
 - Establish mandatory processes across all NGA organizations for procurement notifications related to RFPs, RFQs, RFIs, and commercial eBuy, e.g. CIBORG EOS SIN

Publish the dictionary that defines words and phrases which are used too illiberally and inconsistently

- Impact:
 - The Agency uses words and phrases that are ill- or vaguely-defined (that is, have different meanings in different contexts or used by different individuals/in different business units)
 - Inconsistency causes confusion about what NGA intends
- Recommendation:
 - Consult with Industry, organizations (e.g., USGIF, AFCEA, DAU, IBM), and academia to identify common definitions, then customizes (only if necessary) for NGA and GEOINT
 - Coordinate consistent language usage across NGA
 - Publish the "dictionary" of words, terms and phrases via an openly available link – keep it current
 - Include as a reference in all relevant procurement documents

More Unclassified ARC; Less Classified ARC

- Impact:
 - When NGA only publishes procurement documentation on the Classified ARC, the population of potential bidders is restricted – perhaps eliminating qualified competitors
 - Sometimes NGA doesn't publish unclassified material on the unclassified ARC because some small components of the documentation set is classified. While this may make NGA's processes easier, it artificially restricts Industry's participation.
- Recommendation:
 - Make maximum use of unclassified documentation venues. Consolidate under one announcement. If needed, cross-reference to the Classified ARC for those unique documents that require it. Limit these as much as possible.

Understand our Industry processes

- Impact:
 - Many individuals in the acquisition process have a limited understanding about how Industry goes about responding to NGA. This was validated during the NGA-NAWG "Mock Acquisition Panel".
 - The lack of appreciation for Industry's processes causes NGA to over- and underestimate Industry's actions.
 - When Industry begins to form teams and initiate solution engineering
 - What goes into a bid/no-bid decision and how government information shapes the decision process
 - How much investment (generally personnel time) is required to develop and execute pursuit plans
 - How little available funding actually exists in Industry and how these limitations result in 'lost opportunity' costs.
- Recommendation:
 - Initiate a training and certification regime for acquisition staff via The Defense Acquisition University ACQ 315 "Understanding Industry Course". This covers a wide range of business acumen competencies including industry orientation, organization, cost and financial planning, business strategy/development, supplier management, incentives, and negotiating strategies.
 - Initiate ongoing USGIF NAWG sponsored X-table discussions, focusing on the Acquisition process
 - Capturing "aha" moments and others "insights", turn these into internal training and refresher courses.
 - Focus should be on discussions with acquisition professionals to enhance their formal DAU training.