

## Transcript for June 20, 2023 Lunch 'n Learn meeting

**[This transcript was edited for accuracy and clarity.]**

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Zavatsky, Drew (DES)

Good afternoon, everybody. This is Drew Zavatsky with the Department of Enterprise Services. I work in the policy part of the Contracts and Procurement Division of the agency and with me today are Alexander Kenesson and Bart Potter. I'm super glad they agreed to be a part of this presentation on pre-bid conferences.

There will be a couple of introductory slides and then we'll get straight into their presentation. Our objective is to have at least a half hour for Q&A during our session. The Q&A will go as follows. We will be keeping an eye on the chat, and collect questions as they come in. If there's a couple that seem to be hot topics, we're trying to get to those in the moment. Otherwise, we'll just take them in sequence and get to as many as we can.

After this presentation, about two to four weeks later, you will see a couple of different documents or items on our website. One is going to be this PowerPoint; another is going to be an edited version of this transcript of this presentation so that you don't have to read through all of my hums and haws. And then the third is the Q&A. For the questions and answers, we clean up the grammar and try to eliminate repetition. Otherwise, all of the questions that are asked in this session, we feed back to you with our answers. The reason for that is that we don't like the idea of editorializing questions from the group, mostly because a lot of the questions we never thought of anyway, but also if you were not able to make this meeting, we believe that those questions and quite frankly the transcript and the PowerPoint will all be helpful to the non-participants. With that being said, I am going to start going through the slide deck.

**Slide 2, Slide 3** I mentioned Alex and Bart are both here as presenters. The Department of Enterprise Services is the state procurement agency. We procure and manage about 200 statewide contracts (contracts that used to be called master contracts). We think that it's a more apt statement to say they're statewide contracts and they have about 1500 vendors on them.

**Slide 4** We're responsible for developing and implementing procurement policies and procedures, for all Washington agencies. Our organic statute is RCW 39.26.090. Between that and RCW 39.26.005, and also the recent executive order 22-01 there is an initiative to improve what we do by way of our business with small and veteran-owned businesses.

**Slide 5** There are many reasons for these directives; the Disparity Study put in very clear focus that minorities and women don't enjoy equal access to all aspects of state contracting opportunities. It's necessary to ensure nondiscrimination in state contracting and one recommendation of the 13 or 14 recommendations in that Study was to conduct pre-bid conferences in order to increase the possibility for small firms to win state contracts. We all know that small firms do the vast majority of all work in the state of Washington, either for state government or in private industry, and so it makes perfect sense for us to diversify in that way.

**Slide 7, Slide 8** OK, so let's talk about the policy very briefly. The policy is available on our website. It's policy POL-DES-090-06, and associated with the policy is our Virtual Handbook. The procurement strategies we're focused on today are the pre-bid conferences, and in conjunction with all of the tools and strategies provided, they are intended to open the market to small and veteran businesses.

**Slide 9** What do we mean by pre-bid conference? Well, it's a meeting that's held by an agency with potential bidders shortly after you put out the solicitation. I'm always posting my solicitations to WEBS because it's required by statute, and there are several purposes to using WEBS, including using it to answer any vendor questions and clarify any ambiguities that confuse vendors about what the state is trying to purchase in a solicitation. WEBS is also designed to be used by agencies respond to general issues raised by potential bidders, and to give a common basis of understanding of all the requirements of the solicitation to everybody at the same time. It is one of the ways that the State preserves the fairness of its solicitations.

One of the things that the Diversity Study showed is that like many other areas of professional work, the state was developing a kind of language that was opaque to outsiders – the people who are not already working under state contracts.

**Slide 10** What are the benefits of having a pre-bid conference? Well, dialogue and information; opening up the possibility of commerce to a lot of vendors; obtain insight from the bidder community on the things that the state is trying to get as a buyer; and it also allows agencies to hear from vendors about the solicitation requirements and if they work or they don't. It is always good to have feedback from vendors. An environment of listen to learn benefits the solicitation, and also gives an opportunity to help educate new bidders on the solicitation process. And if there's a bunch of savvy bidders, we tend to get better value for money through holding pre-bid conferences. The point here is that using them in addition to the Q&A period makes it easier to actually connect with bidders.

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Kenesson, Alexander (DES)

Hi everyone. My name is Alex. I'm a procurement supervisor with the DES and manage a team of contract specialists, pseudo statewide contracts specialists. I will be going over more points about pre-bid conferences. Why? Because of my procurement experiences. I want to highlight the bullet point on slide #8, and discuss whether the conferences are really a way to open the market to new businesses.

**Slide 11** Consider: You're an incumbent vendor. The agency is familiar with your past bids and bidding behavior, they know your work, and they know how you've been doing business. Now it may be true that bids change every time there is a new solicitation. But if I have experience doing the previous bid, I'm kind of inherently at an advantage to know what doing business with the state is like and what the scopes are like. So, when thinking about why we do pre-bid conferences, particularly at DES, I want us to think about Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Basically, this is at a really high level the understanding that says I can't even think about higher level needs like social needs until my core needs – like food and water and bread and shelter – are met. Well, let's take that analogy to a purchasing stand front. If I'm a new business, I'm not going to, and I don't know how to, do business with the state. I don't know what the scope of this contract is going to be. I don't know exactly what we're going to be bidding on. I'm not going to have the mental energy to even pay attention to the bid tab and the cost sheet and the responses that you're looking for. I really need to

know how I do business with the state. I really need to know what this opportunity is for. I really need a conversation that opens that door.

Your incumbents already know this. Your newer businesses, probably most of your small businesses, they may need a primer on how to do business from the state. The pre-bid conferences open that conversation. It also allows purchasing agencies, team members, or your team to hear from the bidding community regarding the solicitation requirements. Yes, you can do RFIs, but we've also heard from many businesses, particularly small businesses, that they don't necessarily have the time to respond to an RFI and will not act until the solicitation goes live. "Until I know there's money on the table for this, I don't have the time to really look at this." As I indicate on my last bullet point on the slide, pre-bids kind of open up the Q&A period. It's separate from the Q&A period, but it kind of primes the conversation and really gets your businesses thinking about it many times more so than without a pre-bid.

Consider: I've noticed businesses don't open the solicitation until way, way, way, way later in the bid. Let's get some vendors thinking about the solicitation much earlier. How? Pre-bid. I think in all solicitations, most of us would agree, that vendors have any questions, problems, or concerns? If so, we'd love to address the questions as early as possible in that process, be that in the Q&A period versus a complaint, a complaint versus a protest or what have you.

The pre-bid conference kind of injects some adrenaline into the solicitation process and it really gets the bidders looking at the opportunity that the state is offering and provides agencies a chance to educate new bidders on the solicitation process.

I want to highlight too that you don't want to breeze through the boilerplate. I know as many of my contract specialists are doing pretty big contracts, they're really excited to get in the fiddly bits of the solicitation – "I want to go over the price sheet. I want to go over the questions and non-cost questions. I want to go over the essays."

Now, I want to stress going back to the point of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. If I don't know what the scope of the solicitation is, if I don't know what the size of the contract is, if I don't know what working with the state's going to be like, if I don't know the background of the procurement, I'm not going to be able to pay attention to all of those little fiddly bits that you're really excited to present. And I know that you – the soliciting agency – has put a lot of time and energy into your solicitations. Don't we need to ensure that all of that hard work wasn't wasted? We need to make sure that vendor businesses are able to gain the same level of understanding – that the playing field is fair. So don't breeze through your boilerplate.

Embrace your pre-bid conferences. What I mean by that is you want to go over several topics in the conference: a) we are a state agency, and this is how the procurements work; b) this is what the procurement is about; and c) this is logistically what you can expect if you're awarded this contract. You need to go over these items before you go into the little fiddly bits of your solicitations in the conference.

**Slide 12** So let's go over when you have to do a pre-bid conference. Well, according to the supplier diversity policy, they're required for any solicitation that a) has a value of \$500,000 or more; b) a duration of longer than four months; c) or if it could result in a multiple-awarded contract (if you're aware that more than 50% of the cost resulting from this contract could be distributed amongst multiple

subcontractors); or where a statement of work contains technical language, and the substance is difficult to understand from there. But I breezed through that because at the DES, almost all of our statewide contracts have three bids. I think it's just our standing internal policy right now. Because who wouldn't want the benefits of bringing more bidders to the table? Who wouldn't want the benefits of more bidders understanding our bids?

I do want questions and answers about my bids, and I want relevant and valid ones, and having a pre-bid conference, like I say, starts that process earlier, gets people excited about that, gets that energy going, and can really kind of save my bacon. No one likes getting that Q&A at the last minute. Well, if you have a pretty big pre-bid conference, you might start to get some of those questions from vendors in earlier, which is generally in my opinion better from otherwise. And so this is what's required, but as much as your time permits, it really is a good way to level the playing field against incumbents, against bigs.

You know, Granger's going to have someone whose job it is all day, every day to look at bids and to dissect this stuff, but a small business leader they may not have 4 hours to dissect your bid. So, let's dissect your forum. Let's bring the table to them. Let's present this opportunity in a way that they (small or veteran businesses) can understand, would be my biggest suggestion for that. So now I'm going to the presentation turn over to Bart.

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Potter, Bart B. (DES)

**Slide 13** Good afternoon. I'm Bart Potter. I'm part of the contract strategy team at DES, and I'm going to talk a little bit about some more specifics of the Q&A period, and pre-bids as part of the Q&A period. And this is kind of some of the nitty gritty stuff that in practice really can help.

In a pre-bid conference, I'll assign a note taker to capture all the questions of the vendors in the room. I'll also consider recording the meeting in Teams or Zoom, and of course if you do that, make a recording of the meeting available to the vendors afterwards.

You're going to be doing a lot of talking of your own in a pre-bid conference. Even so, it's very important to listen carefully to the vendors and ask questions of the vendors. It's a pre-bid, and an opportunity for the vendors to learn about the solicitation and what we envision for the contract. But it's also a learning opportunity for the agency too, so it's great to listen very carefully to what the vendors have to say. They're in the industry, they know it. We can learn from them.

And also, vendor questions at the pre-bid, they can point out unforeseen holes in a solicitation, or any errors that we might have made, or things that we need to clarify. Also, vendors might identify issues because they have a closer and better relationship to the industry that they work in. If we hear about it at the pre-bid, we have time to amend the solicitation (if it's something that's critical enough, that needs to be amended).

**Slide 14** The Q&A period we talked about a little bit earlier, but it typically starts the day after a solicitation is posted to webs and lasts until a week before a bid closes. Many times, it's good to observe that one week period before a bid closes. But sometimes good questions come in after that stopping point, and I've always believed that we should make every effort to answer a good question, even if it's after the close of the Q&A period.

All the questions that you will be answering should be answered, and they have to be answered, publicly. So, if one vendor, whether in the pre-bid conference or during the Q&A period, if it's a good enough question, it needs to be answered and needs to be asked publicly and it needs to be answered publicly and that means the Q&A amendment must be posted to WEBS. Similarly, any question asked in the pre-bid is posted in a Q&A amendment to the solicitation. Now, not every question rises to the level of needing a Q&A amendment. Many questions that come in are simple procedural questions that can be answered directly with the vendor and don't necessarily need to be shared with the entire vendor community in WEBS. But typically, most questions will be asked and answered to the best of our knowledge in a Q&A amendment filed in WEBS. And that's about all I have today.

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Zavatsky, Drew (DES)

**Slide 15** Alright, thank you, Alex and Bart. So, a couple of notes about some resources. The Supplier Diversity Handbook has a list of best practices. If you go to the section about pre-bid conferences, it'll show it to you and then if you just scroll down to the bottom of the section, you will find a Q&A section on pre-bid conferences. Just above that section is a list of resources that contain best practices for conducting a pre-bid conference. There's a template and a checklist as well.

**Slide 16** We can get to questions now. I'm going to introduce Zoe Mroz, she is going to help out with presenting the questions. Doug Mora, from OMWBE, and Zoe will be helping with collating and presenting the questions from the chat.

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Mroz, Zoe (DES)

**Question #1** We have a few questions already, but please keep them coming and it looks like our first question is about the definition of complex solicitations, which I believe Alex had shown earlier. It looks like we have a question, is there any consideration about making a change to the definition?

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Zavatsky, Drew (DES)

**Answer #1** Generally speaking, this just became an official policy in April 2023, and I believe that its sunset date is in 2028. This means that we will not be doing any large changes to the policy or the handbook until that point, unless something comes up legally, such that we have to change something about the language to address a legal issue. But that's been our practice regardless of the type of policy.

Now, that being said, there are some slight modifications to a policy that can occur from time to time. Just as an aside, for everybody's awareness if you haven't heard me say this before, we sort of have an escalator in terms of policy development. At the top of the escalator is the policy itself. Farther down on the escalator is the procedure. So, the policy is sort of set in stone. The procedure (for this policy, it's the Handbook) can be changed somewhat more easily than the policy. Even easier to change are the frequently asked questions. And then even easier to change are the guidelines or best practices.

The idea is that if some practice comes up as a suggested change for a policy, we'll start to test that idea at the guidelines/best practice level. If the suggested change addresses a concern coming from multiple sources, the idea may be elevated to the frequently asked question level. In turn, if the suggested change remains relevant for long enough, it can become part of the "Architecture" of the policy – new

text in either the procedure, or the policy. In that case, changing the actual policy typically occurs at the sunset time for the policy.

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Kenesson, Alexander (DES)

**Question #2** I want to mention a question from the chat. Julie said there was a concern that four months' duration for a contract (making it complex), some agreements based on that time frame may not make it complex. And so I'll admit, I don't really know the verbiage of that solicitation that Julie is speaking of, but I would say if you're looking to do pre-bids for solicitations that are less than four months, go for it, you can always do more pre-bids. But if the concern is, hey, I've got a lot of four-month contracts that aren't complex, and I'd like those four months to be larger (more than four months). Well, the procedure says four months and that was decided upon, and nothing set in stone.

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Zavatsky, Drew (DES)

**Answer #2** Well, one thing that we knew is that as the first version of the policy, it would not be perfect; we didn't know everything and there was a lot that we didn't know. Because of that, the very last section, I think it's section D5 of the policy, makes it possible for an agency to request an exception to the policy for various stated reasons. And so, if that ends up being something that is really not workable about the policy, then that is something to consider as a future policy change. And I welcome you to enter into a conversation with us about that and then we can advise you on whether or not requesting an exception to the policy is the best way to proceed, the most efficient way to proceed. But we specifically put in that possibility of asking for an exception for that reason.

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Mroz, Zoe (DES)

**Question #3** The Agency's program staff understand the value of the pre-bid conference but are still resistant to holding them due to soft skills issues like social anxiety, or fear that they'll say the wrong thing. Are there any trainings or other resources that address these issues?

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Kenesson, Alexander (DES)

**Answer #3** I want to jump in a little bit, so if program staff (i.e., subject matter experts) were also your solicitation team members, at DES we don't always agree that SMEs should attend a pre-bid. I mean, this is a procurement practice for the most part and sometimes SMEs will be able to help answer questions from vendors.

But if the question is about procurement staff, there's doubtlessly some public speaking classes that are available on the Washington LMS site, they can help with that. But one thing I want to ask Drew if I can have you open up, go to the resources slide and then open up the pre-bid template that's on the last slide there. While we do that, there's a disclaimer on there and I'll just read it out loud. While Drew's doing the visual of it, it says that "bidder should only rely on written postings and amendments issued via WEBS. All other communications shall be considered unofficial and nonbinding. Should bidders rely on any other communication they do so at their own expense." So, there is a little hedging of our bets. The point of a pre-bid is to present this information on questions that come out of it. It should be answered in an official Q&A, so if you don't know the answer, don't lie is what I would say to my contract specialist. Just be transparent that you don't know the answer. Say that you'll include them in

the Q&A if you're not comfortable answering that question, the pre-bid. Say, "that's a great question. We'll jot it down and we'll answer it in the Q&A."

The point of the pre-bid is to get people excited and to get these questions out and I may not be able to answer every question pertaining to a business consulting solicitation live in a pre-bid conference (I don't think that would be a fair ask for me to have answers for all questions on-the-spot), but it's designed to reduce those barriers to information that will be helpful to all potential bidders.

**Question #4** If we posted a Q&A amendment to webs and questions come in after that, are we allowed to answer them then?

**Answer #4** I would assume post another amendment to WEBS. Many of our solicitations that we did post several Q&A documents. It's a more loaded question of whether more questions come in after whatever you post as the question-and-answer period. Whether a response is going to be made after that deadline is more of a mixed answer, but if you get questions on day one after your Q&A deadline and you want to answer them, go ahead and answer them and then you can always do more Q&A and more amendments if needed. From there – and I would actually recommend that because again some questions and answers might be two steps forward and one step back - I'd rather go through responding to the Q&A process earlier rather than later. I want all these concerns aired out and the businesses deserve to know what your answer to their questions are too. They shouldn't have to wait till the end of the Q&A for those. So, I agree with what most are saying: post two amendments or more if you need to after the pre-bid conference.

What we do at DES typically is we compile all the questions from the pre-bid. It might take us a day or two to answer them. Post that out on WEBS. Then usually, there's another question a week later, as questions about those responses may come to the agency. And then there's a final Q&A. It all depends, but yes, you can certainly do multiple Q&As.

In the pre-bid conference template, it says "all oral and written communications will be considered unofficial and nonbinding by DES." That's saying basically that anything shared in the pre-bid conference is not binding, what really counts is what's posted in WEBS. So, play fair. The point of the pre-bid is to introduce the solicitation and get these questions out there, sure, but for your staff, who is a little nervous about saying the wrong things, you can show them this and you can rely on this and you can always defer the question too: "Let me think it over and I'll get put it in the Q&A" is totally fine too.

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Mroz, Zoe (DES)

**Question #5** We had another question about can we get an example timeline for a solicitation? When we post it to WEBS, when's the pre-bid and when are questions due, what are the things that DES is doing for that? If you want to speak to that, Alex.

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Kenesson, Alexander (DES)

**Answer #5** Sure, the answer is always yes, no, and it depends. But there is a general timeline in my mind for it. I typically have my team's schedule pre-bid conferences about a week after the bid posting. I want bidders to have an opportunity to at least skim and/or read the solicitation. Quite frankly, they almost never do. But that's still OK. As long as they have the chance to digest the solicitation a little bit first. But



I want a lot of time for their questions and our answers. That's more based off of when your bid closes, so some of our bids are open for 30 days. But most of our bids are 45 days. Some of our bids are 60 days.

Our complaint and protests document says that the Q&A period has to end at least five business days before bids are closed. I personally like two weeks. It gives me a little bit of management reserve if I need to extend the Q&A period without having to extend the bid due date from there. And as always, as you know, there will be some vendors who will wait till the last minute to post their Q&A. So that gives me a little bit more time to go to my sourcing team if I need to, or to dive into those questions. So, there's different schools of thought within DES on that. I would say either one week is the latest, two weeks is probably the recommended time period before the bid closes. But it depends on how long your solicitation is out for. I want Q&A to be open for as long as I can because I want people to submit their questions. I want that feedback. I want to know what danger points I'm looking at, for my solicitation, if I need to change it.

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Mroz, Zoe (DES)

**Question #6** The next one is the expectation that pre-bid conference questions are answered separately from when we post the Q&A amendment or can the pre-bid questions, answers and Q&A be combined in one posted document?

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Kenesson, Alexander (DES)

**Answer #6** In theory they could be combined by a highly recommend against it. The point of doing a pre-bid is to get this information out and get the conversations flowing from there. If I am a business and I had a question in my pre-bid I'm going to be waiting for that answer. Like I said before, this might be a two steps forward, one step back kind of process. What I mean by that is, your answer to a vendor question maybe get more questions from them. I don't want to be on pins and needles waiting for your question and answer if you've got now. The point of the pre-bid is to instill enthusiasm for the solicitation and maintain that enthusiasm. Get that Q&A out there, get those questions from that pre-bid out there in WEBS. It'll help you and it'll help the vendors go through that iterative process. There's nothing saying you have to, but I can't think of a reason why I wouldn't want to.

It might be easier to have one Q&A, but then we're just wasting more Q&A time during which you might get more questions about the solicitation. So, I'm not going to say don't do it, but I just say I would recommend posting your Q&A relatively quickly after our pre-bid for use by bidders. It's sometimes the same day, sometimes a couple of days, two or three days afterwards.

If we want to really go back to our sourcing team and get our experts like one of the other people said, I'm not a scientist, I'm a procurement specialist on that, so I may want my scientist to help answer these questions, but I would recommend getting questions related to the pre-bid out quickly.

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Zavatsky, Drew (DES)

And you know this, this question actually points out something that is implied in the disparity study: there's a certain amount of work that we in the state of Washington and state employees have to do to in part of the vendor communities to rekindle interest in working with the state. Faith in us. Part of that



is because over time, we haven't necessarily been the best trading partner as a group, as a whole. There are individuals who are fantastic, but as a group we have a certain reputation and it is not the reputation that whenever we ask a question as a vendor, we get an answer from the state as soon as we need it. That's part of it. So, part of it is a customer service issue, but part of it too is we don't necessarily get the best vendor in a given solicitation. Think of it in terms of repairing perhaps some damage to the state's reputation from past practices. That now we embody the idea that no matter what happened in the past, we are in fact a very effective professional organization that provides great customer service regularly.

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Potter, Bart B. (DES)

May I interject really quickly just to terminology clarification. We're calling these Q&A documents and sometimes we call them amendments and it's partly because our mechanism for posting them is the amendment queue in WEBS. But most of the Q&A documents don't actually include solicitation amendments, that is, amendments to the actual solicitation. Those should be posted separately and clearly labeled as a solicitation amendment.

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Kenesson, Alexander (DES)

Yeah, I want to agree on that. An example is our current electrical supplies solicitation. We just posted that we have Q&A documents that are posted using the amendment feature in WEBS, but in the computer are called Q&As, not Solicitation Amendments.

Q&A documents do not amend this solicitation, they're just answering questions. If a Q&A results in a solicitation amendment, those are usually two separate documents. In that case, we say "this Q&A document did result in changes and there will be an amendment posted in soon that will detail those changes."

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Mroz, Zoe (DES)

**Question #7** The individual asked, "I work for a small agency with a lot of scientists. I feel like it would be extremely beneficial for program staff to be a part of pre-bids." In this case, they're asking is this acceptable?

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Mroz, Zoe (DES)

**Answer #7** I don't think there are any rules against who's in the room with these.

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Kenesson, Alexander (DES)

No, there aren't. In my professional experience, it's six of one and a half dozen of the other. What I mean by that is I do like generally having my program, my scientists, or my R&D people in the room with us, but the pre-bid is a procurement process and procedure. I want to manage that procurement process or procedure. I the subject matter experts, they haven't had this pre-bid training. They aren't going through a rudimentary bias training, but I've gone through a lot more training. I would typically make a soft recommendation about having subject matter experts in the room. But you should also be ready to reign them in and control the room if they start going off on a procurement tangent. To direct

them and say, “Now this is where I want to go now.” You don't want them leading your pre-bid conference in a direction you don't want it to go in. You want them there to be able to answer questions and you want to thank them for their time and their support, but you want to maintain control of the pre-bid conference is what I would say.

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Zavatsky, Drew (DES)

Yeah, it's a good point and it's similar to meetings in which you've got voting members and non-voting members. And subject matter experts are non-voting members, and they need to be reminded of that. They may be essential to getting the solicitation done, but they are not there for the solicitation. They're there for the subject matter expertise, so it's always good to remind them.

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Mroz, Zoe (DES)

**Question #8** What are the authorized file types to upload to webs after a pre-bid conference?

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Kenesson, Alexander (DES)

**Answer #8** From my experience, we've been able to do word documents, or PowerPoints. I think there's also a size limitation. So, when we record a pretty big conference, we typically have to do something maybe outside of WEBS for that, which is never good. I think we've had dropboxes for super long presentations before. Hmm, I think we should probably take that back and answer that offline to be thorough, but it wouldn't surprise me if videos or long form team presentations may not be loadable to WEBS. To preserve the conference, you should probably have a separate mechanism to have those available to vendors, which is a burden. And if you're recording, it could be a public record. So, complex, let's take that back and let's discuss that more offline.

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Mroz, Zoe (DES)

**Question #9** Similar vein, our pre-bids are conducted via teams and require an RSVP. They're usually scheduled a couple days before the deadline for questions. This allows us to address any raised concerns during the pre-bid. Isn't RSVP a good practice? Or should we consider making changes?

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Kenesson, Alexander (DES)

**Answer #9** My thought would be I have no problems asking for RSVPs, but I'm a little yellow flagging requiring them for the same reason of requiring pre-bid attendance to be mandatory to bid. Those requirements could represent some of the barrier to participation by small or veteran-owned businesses. What if I if I'm a small and I may not have time to get to that RSVP? Or maybe I just work with my area PCAG and found out about this bid yesterday and I want to be on the pre-bid conference, and I didn't have time to respond. Access issues. On the other hand, having RSVPs are great for you to know roughly how many people will attend the conference and maybe even get an idea of who's going to be in the room. So, I'm not saying don't do RSVPs, but I would soft recommend to – maybe even medium recommend against – making it a requirement to RSVP in order to attend the pre-bid. It's more barriers that way, but I defer to others. Drew, Bart, if you've got anything to add to that.

0:42:25.890 --> 0:42:26.660

Zavatsky, Drew (DES)

Requirements only hurt when you find out that they hurt, right? I guess creating any barriers is what we are counseling against. Well, who knows which things could be a barrier? I mean, if some of the best vendors only have Apple computers and they've got old Apple computers, so they don't really converse very well with, you know, non-apple, then maybe that's going to be barrier. I mean, we just don't know.

0:43:11.160 --> 0:43:18.410

Mroz, Zoe (DES)

All right, we've got a few more questions that are about Q&A S, but I want to say we have addressed a lot of that already.

0:43:27.620 --> 0:43:33.330

Kenesson, Alexander (DES)

**Question #10** I do want to address Shirley Yang specifically on "if questions are answered during pre-bid meetings. I'm assuming we don't need to answer them in a formal document."

0:43:36.740 --> 0:43:38.310

Kenesson, Alexander (DES)

**Answer #10** I would say incorrect. The reason for that is we want our questions and answers to be public. There's a reason why we post our questions and answers generally anyway, and that's because I want all bidders to know what these questions and the answers are. If I answer it in the pre-bid conference, you can say well, why not give people who attended the pre-bid a benefit? Well, that's an inappropriate barrier. What if I couldn't attend the pre-bid, but I'm still interested in bidding? I should have every opportunity for the same information that everyone else has publicly available from there, so it is our standing practice that we write down the questions and publish them in WEBS.

Like Bart was saying. I have someone else there at the conference to help take notes. I always require my contract assistants to help my contract specialists at conferences. I don't care how they help, but it's got to be non-zero and one of the common requests is we have an assistant just write down all the questions that and if you don't have an assistant that's fine. But find someone else to help write down all the questions and answers and publish that officially in a Q&A in WEBS. From there, don't shy away from answering in the pre-bid, but again the disclaimer that I showed it doesn't really count unless it's in WEBS. You should post your questions and answers, even the ones that you answered in the pre-bid, to WEBS.

0:44:54.190 --> 0:45:7.340

Zavatsky, Drew (DES)

And you know it's very similar to what Zoe's been saying all along, which is I think we've answered a lot of these Q&A questions that are similar, but we're going to be addressing all of them in writing after the fact. It's the best practice for transparency. From times when I've been in the audience, if I have a question and I take the time to ask it, I get pretty miffed if it's never acknowledged let alone responded to. Once again, there is a customer service reason for this practice.

0:45:44.370 --> 0:45:51.700

Mroz, Zoe (DES)

**Question #11** All right, I saw a really quick question about when pre-bids are required. This individual

says they have contracts that are at least six months of duration even for a \$5000 value. Would this qualify for the exemption?

0:45:59.870 --> 0:46:9.30

Mroz, Zoe (DES)

**Answer #11** So this is for a competitive solicitation, a \$5000 contract. I would assume it would be a direct buy purchase. I suppose it's possible that it isn't, and that you might compete it, but I'm maybe Erica, you could provide some additional details to us about that, but this guidance today is only for competitive solicitations.

0:46:41.170 --> 0:46:49.690

Mroz, Zoe (DES)

**Question #12** Is that type of Q&A not an amendment document, so the Q&A document is allowed to be addressed after the Q&A deadline laid out in the solicitation?

0:46:51.190 --> 0:47:3.600

Kenesson, Alexander (DES)

**Answer #12** My answer is yes, but it should be ASAP and let me explain that a little bit, as I'm sure we've all had that scenario where we get a question that comes in at 4:59 PM on a Friday, the last day of the Q&A. It's not fair to give me only one minute to answer that question, especially since I'm not the scientist. I may need to go to my scientist for answers on that the following business day, which means I will answer Q&A's after the deadline. I'm more concerned I may still answer questions that come in after the deadline, but it's rarer that that happens. So, the question came in before the deadline and it's going to take me a day to process, or I want to get to my sourcing team members. I will happily answer that Q&A. I might also respond that day to say we've received this question, but I'm going to take an extra day to go to my sourcing team so that the person like Drew was saying customer service, the person who asked that question knows that it's going to be addressed.

So, a lot of words to say, yeah, you're going to respond after the Q&A deadline, but that gets to be rough. And the point of the Q&A deadline is to get those questions in and answered one for you, but also so the vendors know that the solicitation is kind of ready and done from there. So, you can answer, but just be quick about it is what I would say.

0:48:16.640 --> 0:48:20.830

Zavatsky, Drew (DES)

So I'm going to call it to an end here. Thank you for all of your questions and your attention today. It's about a two-to-four-week lag time between the end of one of these lunches and learns, and when we believe will get the materials on to our website, they'll be available on the supplier diversity page, the DES website.