

# Boot Camp: Sharpening Intern Contracting Skills

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## Mention boot camp to a service-member and you're likely to hear stories about getting up before

dawn, being yelled at by drill sergeants, endless marching and training, and being indoctrinated into a new way of life. Defense Contract Management Agency's boot camp may not be as physically demanding as the military version, but the training is pretty intense, and the focus is on building a competent and highly skilled workforce.

The Contract Closeout Boot Camp is attended by DCMA employees who are part of the Keystone Program. The Keystone Program is DCMA's internship program; it was established in 1997 as part of DCMA's succession plan to adjust to the demographics of a retiring workforce, principally in the key areas of acquisition and contract management. Attending the boot camp is a graduation requirement for Keystone Program participants, or Keystones.

Contract Closeout Boot Camp is a 90-day program covering a variety of topics in classroom and on-the-job settings. During the first two weeks, classes are taught by subject-matter experts in property, electronic data warehouse, Wide Area Workflow, contract receipt and review, and the Mechanization of Contract Administrative Services system. Mentors work with Keystones to provide practical hands-on training and assistance. Mentors schedule specific times to meet individually with each Keystone to review specific workloads, discuss problems and assist with additional training.

Liz Colarik, DCMA Baltimore Contracting Keystone said, "The Boot Camp was the most focused one-on-one training I have had. It was very helpful to

have two people whose position it was to guide and monitor my progress, as well as answer any questions I had as I went through my workload."

Contract closeout is a key focus area for DCMA, since its coverage contract backlog has risen significantly over the past several years. As of December 2009, there were 17,622 Physically Complete Overage Contracts across DCMA. These are contracts where performance has been completed and payment and closeout are pending. DCMA contract management offices in Manassas, Va., Baltimore, and Hampton, Va., accounted for 63 percent of the agency's total overage.

DCMA Baltimore was the agency's first CMO to implement the Overage Contract Closeout Team, or Contract Closeout Boot Camp, concept. Joyce Blais, DCMA Business Operations Center director, Marcy Parish, DCMA Baltimore contracts director, and Kathy Blauvelt, DCMA Operations Contracts Directorate contract specialist and Boot Camp program manager, developed the prototype program. The boot camp is conducted by a team that includes a supervisor, administrative contract officer and a procurement technician to ensure consistency.

Blauvelt said that it was a team effort to lay the groundwork for the training. She worked closely with Brian Gerst, DCMA Baltimore Contracts team supervisor, to outline the current state of the contract closeout process, determine the desired end state and then set obtainable goals.

"The first goal is to provide on-the-job training, which will allow Keystones to become proficient in closing out

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— Liz Colarik, Defense Contract Management Agency Baltimore Contracting Keystone

various types of contracts. Second, use the Keystone workforce to drive down the number of overage contracts at the three pacing offices," said Gerst.

Aisha Grider, a Keystone from DCMA Baltimore, said she gained a variety of skills that have been instrumental in her development as a contract administrator. "One of the newly obtained proficiencies I acquired was how to successfully research outstanding issues on



contracts with various complexity levels. This allowed me to close overage contracts and provide necessary updates for others,” Grider said.

DCMA Baltimore was selected as the first site to conduct the Contract Closeout Boot Camp prototype in August 2009 because of the increasing number of contract closeout requirements there. DCMA Manassas conducted the training in September 2009. Leaders at DCMA Baltimore and Manassas agreed to provide the resources for the initial team and two mentors to assist the Keystones.

“DCMA Baltimore has two mentors: an administrative contracting officer and a contract administrator. The warranted [ACO] signs all correspondence, reviews

all workload, makes recommendations for the workload reassignments, provides formal on-the-job training and provides feedback to the Keystones,” said Blais.

“The mentors also ensure data integrity by making sure the Keystones verify the correct contract type, update the Overage Reason Codes and the Office of Personal



(Photo courtesy of iStockphoto.com)

Responsibility Codes. These codes identify the reason for the overage and the office responsible for the closeout action. Importantly, the mentors ensure all correspondence to the contractor, Defense Contract Audit Agency, Defense Finance and Accounting Service or other entities are correct, well written and reflect the professionalism of DCMA.”

Brian Grundy, DCMA Burlington Keystone, said he benefited from the training.

“I learned to keep better track of what is going on with each individual contract; it makes life easier when going back,” Grundy said. “Also, it was very helpful to see all the different systems — MOCAS,

WAVE, [Electronic Document Workflow] — and how they work together.”

DCMA Contract Closeout Boot Camp graduated three teams and has another in progress. The three teams successfully closed out a total of 6,793 contracts in a one-year period.

“Contract Closeout Boot Camp’s immediate focus is to close contracts and reduce the backlog, but the larger goal is to build a knowledgeable enterprise-wide future workforce for DCMA,” said Dave Ricci, DCMA Contracts executive director. ☐

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*A group of Defense Contract Management Agency keystones and their mentors pose for a picture during the recent Contract Closeout Boot Camp.*