

Contract Administrators Dot Contract's I's and Cross its T's

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Barbara Belcastro poses for a picture at her Maryland office. Belcastro is a corporate administrative contracting officer for a large Maryland defense contractor.

Contract administrators have a vital role in the daily operations of the Defense Contract Management

Agency. The agency could not operate without them. After all, what they do is spelled out in the agency's name — contract management.

There are a variety of functional areas within the contract specialist career field at DCMA. There are administrative contracting officers, termination contracting officers, contract administrators, divisional administrative contracting officers and corporate administrative contracting officers. Agency-wide, DCMA only has 26 CACOs that support 30 contractors; Barbara Belcastro is one of them.

“Barbara is tenacious in protecting the government's interests. She is highly sought after to share her vast knowledge and experience.”

— Jean-Marie Faris, Defense Contract Management Agency Cost and Pricing Center Corporate Administrative Contracting Officer Division

Belcastro is assigned to a large defense contractor in Maryland. CACOs are senior contracting staff, certified at Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act Level III, and work with ACOs, DACOs and corporate level contractor employees. They are responsible for the review and approval of corporate-wide policies, procedures and activities that impact the government when it contracts with the corporation.

CACOs negotiate with contractors on such items as the cost impact to the government of a contractor's changes to its cost accounting practices, the cost impact of its noncompliance with government Cost Accounting Standards and its final incurred costs on cost-type contracts. CACOs also are responsible for the establishment of advance agreements or recommendations on corporate/home office expense allocations.

“DCMA CACOs are responsible for ensuring that the appropriate delegated contract oversight functions listed in the Federal Acquisition Regulations and Defense Federal Acquisition Regulations are performed; advising the buying activity of contract status and major areas of concern; making contractual oversight determinations and decisions that legally bind the government; and leading a contract administration team. Leading the

team requires close cooperation between the ACO and all functional specialists involved in administering the contract or contractor business system,” said Felisha Hitt, DCMA Functional Information Resource Management Center director.

In simple terms, CACOs are responsible for negotiating and advising on matters that affect the corporate entity as a whole, rather than just one segment of the company.

Belcastro has had a wide range of contract administration assignments throughout her career, and her work is very important to DCMA's contract management function. Belcastro says that some of her most rewarding actions involve cost impacts and incurred costs negotiations, making final determinations of allowable costs and facilitating meetings between the contractor and the Defense Contract Audit Agency.

There is no typical day for a CACO. Flexibility is a key characteristic required for the job. According to Belcastro, she may have a plan to complete specific work tasks, but things don't always go as planned. “I must be flexible and adjust priorities when I receive a short suspense,” she said.

Belcastro said one of her most important responsibilities as a CACO is assuring taxpayers' money is used wisely.

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“Barbara is tenacious in protecting the government’s interests. She is highly sought after to share her vast knowledge and experience,” said Jean-Marie Faris, DCMA Cost and Pricing Center Corporate ACO Division and Belcastro’s supervisor.

Recently, Belcastro received a DCAA report questioning a contractor’s overhead cost allocations for approximately \$1.7 million with \$300,000 in question related to consultant and professional services.

This report sparked Belcastro’s interest and prompted her to investigate. She reviewed similar costs questioned by

the agency in 2000 through 2002 and conducted a desk audit review of 11 major consultants the corporation employed. Her findings resulted in disallowed costs for an additional \$2.3 million for consultants and professional services for a total of \$3.3 million.

Belcastro’s findings were presented to the agency and the contractor, resulting in reimbursement to the government of more than \$3 million.

“Barbara is the consummate professional; I am very fortunate to work with her. I recently saw her in action in a

meeting with the contractor, and it was obvious to me that she is highly respected and quite effective in protecting the government’s interest,” Faris said.

According to Faris, Belcastro also has developed a very professional and productive working relationship with her DCAA counterparts.

“As a mentor, Barbara has gone above and beyond in providing exceptional on-the-job training and meaningful developmental assignments to her new cost/price analyst. She also is a wonderful resource to DCMA Maryland personnel and has prepared and conducted training for other junior personnel at the contract management office,” Faris said.

Marie Greening, DCMA Operations Directorate chief operating officer, is grateful to have Belcastro on the agency’s team. “DCMA is fortunate to have employees like Barbara Belcastro,” said Greening. “She displays dependability and initiative daily and raises the bar for those that work with her.”

Department of Defense Efficiency Initiative

On Sept. 14, Dr. Ashton B. Carter, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, unveiled a Guidance Roadmap for the acquisition community to follow in support of the Department of Defense Efficiency Initiative. His memorandum outlines 23 principal action items in five major areas the Department will pursue to deliver efficiency results. For the complete memorandum, visit <http://www.acq.osd.mil>.

