

PROCUREMENT OFFICIAL VISITS DCMA

By Katherine H. Crawford, Staff Writer



Dan Gordon, Office of Federal Procurement Policy administrator, visited Defense Contract Management Agency headquarters on April 9, to discuss current challenges in the acquisition community, outline his office's priorities and answer questions from audience members. (Photo by Will McCoy, DCMA Congressional Affairs)

Approximately 90 people from the Defense Contract Management Agency's acquisition community gathered at DCMA Headquarters in Alexandria, Va., on April 9, 2010, to listen to guest speaker Dan Gordon, Office of Federal Procurement Policy administrator, speak about hot topics in the acquisition domain and take questions from the audience.

Gordon began by outlining the state of federal acquisition, commenting, "I

think there's much in our acquisition system that works really well. I think that our laws are where they need to be [and] much of our regulations are perfectly fine. I don't think this is a time where we need major legal reform in the acquisition system." He continued, "We've got a system that calls for competition, it calls for transparency. ... We have a pretty good system of accountability."

He lauded the federal acquisition workforce, stating, "There are a couple things that we don't often get credit for: I think we're pretty good about getting best value ... and being sure we buy quality and checking past performance. Not only that, I think we're pretty good at speed, especially when we're buying commercial items [and] relatively commoditized items. I think we're good at buying fast, and that certainly didn't used to be the case."

Gordon then described the top three challenges currently facing the acquisition community:

1. acquisition workforce — there hasn't been sufficient training available to its members
2. unsustainable funding path — procurement spending has been increasing by approximately 10–20 percent each year, and "we have to bend that cost curve," as Gordon worded it, and get back to fiscal responsibility
3. contractor imbalance — the federal government has contracted out so many functions and "outsourced without thinking." Gordon doesn't see the number of contractors as a problem, per se, but he believes the outsourcing has been done without examination of whether it's necessary.

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With these challenges facing the federal acquisition sector, Gordon outlined his office's current priorities:

1. build the acquisition workforce — the latest federal budget includes \$133 million to hire and train acquisition professionals as well as program managers, so funding and priorities are in line on this matter.
2. achieving fiscal responsibility — with ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that require goods and services for warfighters, other ways to save money have to be examined. President Barack Obama has directed that leadership find a seven percent savings in the acquisition budget, an effort that is being supported by the Office of the Secretary of Defense.
3. relationship with contractors — this is a relationship that needs to be rebalanced. Contractors are necessary, but the government has to be in charge. Too many large functions, such as information technology, have been contracted out. To address this, OFP drafted guidance last week to try and organize government work into three categories: work that is inherently a governmental function; work that is closely associated with inherently governmental functions; and work that's best suited for contractors after careful assessment of whether the function

should be contracted out or built up within the government.

Gordon then opened the floor for discussion, welcoming questions and comments from the audience. Following is a summary of his responses to the questions he received. Gordon:

- doesn't really see a significant diminution in the number of contractors in the future but hopes that a side-effect of the government's increasing its own workforce and functions will be a strengthening of its contract management capabilities.
- praised DCMA's quality assurance function, stating, "Quality assurance is something that your director has been explaining to me is one of the contributions DCMA makes that doesn't always get appreciated outside of this agency, so I commend you on your work on quality assurance. It is one of the core aspects when we talk about contract management — being sure that the government gets the benefit of the bargain is not just a question of the schedule and the price, it's also a question of the quality, and your quality assurance function is key to making that happen."
- believes hiring will be a challenge and that mentoring, on-the-job training and retention of new

employees are crucial. The government needs to take advantage of the current once-in-a-generation phenomenon that's occurring of government service being seen as desirable and "cool."

- realizes the hiring process must be changed and streamlined to allow it to move more quickly and prevent the process itself from being a "barrier to entry." It's something that his office is working on and about which he feels optimistic.
- advocates competition, believing it's necessary to get better prices and fight corruption.
- wants to rebalance the role of contracting officers to make sure they're respected and not circumvented.

Throughout the discussion, Gordon repeatedly stated his strong interest in hearing from people in the acquisition community about questions, concerns and ideas, giving the audience his e-mail address and inviting them to contact him. 🍷

