As the Federal Landscape Evolves, Contractors Need Resource Management Tools that Can Keep Up

Managing resources and staff for government contracts is no simple task. Resource management begins even before a contract is awarded, lasting the duration and involves managing staff and applicants, requesting resources, engaging with stakeholders, tracking deliverables, staying on budget and more. And it becomes even more challenging to scale.

To add to the complexity, the federal acquisition landscape is evolving and as regulations and compliance standards rise, the supply chain around human capital is becoming even more difficult.

To manage these changing circumstances and ensure contracts can deliver on-time and on-mission, agencies and contractors need better visibility into internal expertise and external resources, a system that can help bring together disparate data sources to drive insights, and a platform stack that can streamline resources and collaboration. Ultimately, they need a comprehensive resource strategy.

"It's very important to have a great resourcing strategy if you want to be really successful, especially in the coming years of how contracts are evolving," says Raj Shankar, Vice President of Digital Transformation and Go-to-Market for Aerospace, Defense and Government Contractors at Salesforce.
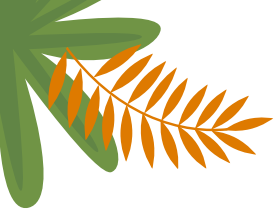
Today's Resource Management Challenges

Resource management is a critical component of government contracting, from the bids and Requests for Proposal through the contract's lifecycle. When contractors are responding to RFPs, they must supply a list of key resources and relevant resumes with the needed characteristics. All of this is supplied during the bidding process, and when a contract is awarded, remains a critical activity throughout the entirety of the contract.

"And then, a lot of your program margins and your commitment to [Service Level Agreements] and so forth depend a lot on resources," says Shankar. "Resourcing is a very central part of any government contract."

Traditional modes of federal acquisition offer enough lead time for contractors to partner with other companies and devise the plan they need to respond to a contract. However, a recent rise in Other Transaction Authority contract vehicles require a faster response time – about a fifth of the traditional six months for a Request for Quotation (RFQ).

"What that means is that even though the response might not be as big as a typical RFQ, however, you still have to do all the things that are required as part of a traditional response," Shankar says.

Contractors need better data and visibility around their resourcing needs to be able to respond fast and accurately, and quicker partnering capabilities to prepare to meet these accelerated cycle times.

"The increasing pressure on response stems from the changing modes of government acquisition is going to put a real challenge to contractors," Shankar says. "And frankly, the ones that are good at this will do really well. It's an opportunity for them. The ones that are not will struggle."

The availability and retainment of skilled resources are also challenging. Onboarding, offboarding and the employee experience while part of a contract are critical, and it's made even more difficult with the executive order on requiring COVID-19 vaccination for federal employees and contractors, and Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification requirements.

"That is certainly putting a lot of pressure on all the contracting organizations, because they have to comply with those same regulations," Shankar says. "They have to invest in technology to manage the attestation process and such, and actually understand that is a big challenge."

Improving Visibility and Insights

To overcome these hurdles, Shankar says contractors must first ensure they have the right processes in place to meet the audit criteria and parameters of regulatory requirements. Then, they must invest in the right technologies. "Technologies will be an enabler in this space," he says.

Investing in the right platforms will go a long way in maintaining compliance, improving employee experience, having data available for decision-making, managing contract lifecycle and more.

Salesforce, complemented by MuleSoft, Tableau and Slack, can manage the entire contracting lifecycle. Its platform stack provides applicant tracking, hire-to-retire and human resources management capabilities for the government. "Salesforce is uniquely positioned right from the bid standpoint, as well as to program execution," Shankar says.

Program execution is the mechanics of managing programs, in terms of resourcing, program margins, forecasting, proper workflows and collaboration. Collaboration is key, considering the various partners and entities involved within a single contract.

Across Salesforce's portfolio of products, users can integrate disparate data sources by tapping into HR systems and enterprise resource planning systems with MuleSoft. Tableau drives the insights on dashboards to provide dynamic views of resource staffing and various program aspects while maintaining workflows in the core Salesforce platform, and Slack offers a faster, better organized and more secure collaboration opportunity across all contractors and customers involved.

Salesforce's purpose-built products for Government, provide full employee lifecycle management from recruitment to onboarding and maintaining employee engagement. Managers and employers are able to initiate and track personnel actions, and complete onboarding activities. A recruiting dashboard provides analytics, data drill downs and mapping so teams can meet targets, while open API capabilities integrate data from internal and external sources.

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Streamlining Resource Management Data for Program Success

The primary advantage of investing in a good platform stack is having all the levers – or the right data and insights – to make right decisions. Contracts fundamentally depend on good supply chain strategies, meaning the right people are in the right places executing on the right work. And having the right data insights can help contractors allocate resources effectively.

For instance, prior to responding to a bid, contractors must first know they have the resources, partners and capabilities to execute. In order to know that, they must have access to past performance data and partners' data of available resources, skill sets and competencies.

"I think the platform stacks are going to be super important because . . . it's almost like a decision assist system. It's pulling all these factors together and helping you make those decisions," Shankar says. This is particularly beneficial when it comes to making quick decisions in today's acquisition landscape.

Another challenge program managers face is ensuring the right resources are doing the right activities on the contract, and employees are staying on board. To execute properly and ensure the contract is not negatively impacted, program managers must understand the current risk profile and risk mitigation. This is also where data comes in.

Program managers managing large contracts focus on people and customer management daily. Data can help them understand key aspects like employee and customer satisfaction, productivity, proper resource allocation and task completions to mitigate any unforeseen risks.

"That is where the employee experience piece comes through, because that's where you've got to keep people happy," Shankar says. "You've got to have access to the information that they require."

This is why solutions like Salesforce's resource management platform stack plays a significant role in tying together all parts of the contract across the organization. By integrating HR systems with ERP systems with collaboration tools like Slack, all the pieces of a contract lifecycle and those involved come together.

"We call it enabling the digital thread across the enterprise," Shankar says. "I think that's equally applicable across a program, of tying all these different pieces together so that you can actually mitigate the risk and keep the program profitable."

Learn more about how Salesforce can help government contractors win more business and efficiently manage resources.