## Chapter 1: Understanding the Federal Acquisition Process

Every federal proposal is shaped by the rules, structures, and decision-making pathways of the federal acquisition process. To write a winning proposal, you must first understand the system behind the solicitation. This chapter introduces the federal acquisition framework—how the government plans procurements, issues solicitations, evaluates offers, and awards contracts.

It outlines the core phases of the acquisition lifecycle, the regulatory foundations such as the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), and the roles of key players, including contracting officers, program managers, and source selection authorities. Understanding these elements provides essential context for every proposal activity—from opportunity qualification and capture to submission and award.

Whether you're supporting pre-RFP positioning or developing a final volume, this chapter equips you with the knowledge to align your strategy with how the government buys.

This chapter introduces the structure and flow of the federal acquisition process—from early planning and market research through solicitation, evaluation, award, and contract execution. It explains the key roles played by contracting officers, program managers, and industry partners, and highlights how the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) governs each phase. Understanding this process provides critical context for how opportunities are shaped, how decisions are made, and how contractors must align their capture and proposal efforts to succeed.

**Federal Acquisition Lifecycle**

 **What They Mean for Proposal Writers**

| **Phase** | **Government Activity** | **Proposal Writer’s Focus** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Market Research** (FAR Part 10) | Issues RFIs, Sources Sought, conducts industry outreach. | Prepare capability statements, articulate differentiators, and begin shaping. |
| **Pre-Solicitation** | Releases draft RFPs, schedules industry days. | Help respond to draft language, begin outlining proposal sections, support Capture. |
| **Solicitation** (FAR Part 5, 12, or 15) | Publishes RFP, RFQ, or Combined Synopsis/Solicitation. | Read RFP *carefully*. Build compliance matrix, identify Section L (instructions) and M (evaluation criteria), start writing volumes. |
| **Proposal Evaluation** (FAR Part 15.3) | Uses source selection panels, often applies Best Value or LPTA. | Ensure your proposal is easy to score—address each criterion explicitly and persuasively. |
| **Discussions & Clarifications** | May ask for BAFOs, answers to ENs, or revised pricing. | Prepare responses quickly, often under tight deadlines. Maintain a traceable logic from original submittal. |
| **Award and Debriefing** | Agency notifies awardees, offers debriefs. | Analyze win/loss feedback; incorporate lessons learned into proposal library and templates. |

**Core FAR Concepts Proposal Writers Must Understand**

| **FAR Concept** | **Relevance to Proposal Writing** |
| --- | --- |
| **Section L & M** | These define the instructions and evaluation criteria. Your proposal should be *structured to follow them exactly.* |
| **Best Value Tradeoff** | Price is not the only factor; technical and management strengths can outweigh lower costs. |
| **Lowest Price Technically Acceptable (LPTA)** | Proposal must meet every technical requirement; no extra credit for innovation. Keep it lean, compliant, and cost-efficient. |
| **Set-Asides and Socioeconomic Programs** | Tailor your proposal narrative to match the priorities of small business programs (8(a), SDVOSB, WOSB, HUBZone, etc.). |
| **Types of** Contracts (FFP, T&M, CPFF) | Affects risk profile and pricing strategy. The technical volume should reflect understanding of how performance will be managed. |