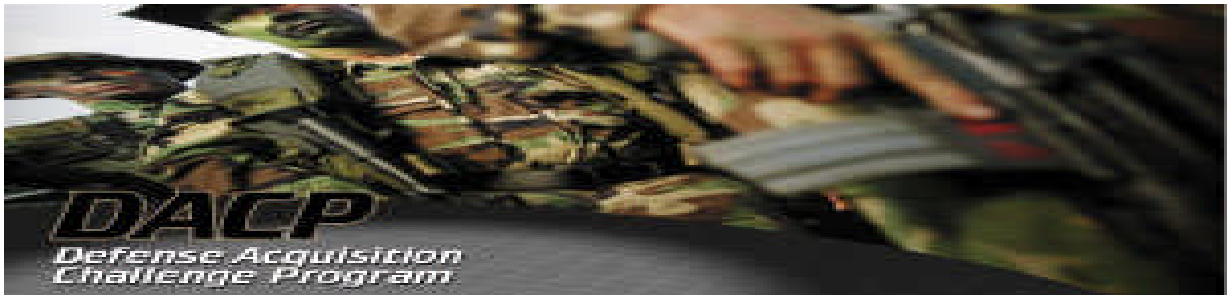


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Defense Acquisition Challenge Program



This program serves as the bridge to transition new technology from industry to acquisition programs, where the acquisition program manager is able to fund procurement of the new technologies and insert them quickly into a program of record.

By Marty Kauchak

An array of urgent requirements challenges the ability of the DoD to rapidly react to priority needs issued by operational combatant commanders.

Improvised explosive devices are a daily threat to U.S. and coalition forces supporting operations in Iraq. Beyond the Iraqi theater, combatant commanders are concerned about their forces' other readiness shortfalls. These readiness gaps seldom earn headlines and span the spectrum of missions—from increasing the effectiveness of satellite communications in a certain frequency band, to decreasing the wear and tear of engine parts in a large fleet of waterborne combatant craft.

The Defense Acquisition Challenge Program (DACP) is providing relief for many of USSOCOM and other warfighters' urgent technology needs. The congressionally-mandated effort allows acquisition program managers (PMs) to more rapidly insert innovative and cost-saving technologies into their programs of record by providing additional test and evaluation resources to meet emergent operational requirements and placing new technology options in an accelerated (six-month to three-year) testing and evaluation process.

DACP as a Bridge

The Office of the Secretary of Defense's (OSD) Comparative Testing Office (CTO) has policy oversight of DACP. The program serves as "the bridge to transition new technology from industry to acquisition programs, where the acquisition program manager is able to fund procurement of the new technologies and insert them quickly into a program of record," Thomas "Dan" Cundiff, CTO acting director, said.

DACP provides any person or organization within, or outside, the department a chance to submit proposals that would improve the performance, affordability, manufacturability or

operational capability of an acquisition program at the component, subsystem or system level.

Annual Process

The DACP process is based on an annual cycle. Four milestones from DoD's Office of the Secretary of Defense Comparative Testing Office Procedures Handbook, (November 2004) that are important to industry include:

- January-February: The release of broad area announcements and submission of initial proposals
- March-June: CTO review and acceptance of proposals
- August-September: OSD review and selection
- October: Start of fiscal year (FY), submitter and program manager notified; start project upon release of funding

The handbook contains additional details and requirements for requesting DACP funding for the fiscal year 2006 cycle. The document is accessible on the CTO homepage listed in the contact information section.

Competition for finite DACP resources is keen. During the FY 2003 to 2005 cycles, the CTO received almost 900 proposals for funding with the office only able "to fund about 45 projects with fiscal year 2003 to 2005 funds," Cundiff said. He expects between five and 15 projects to be funded department wide in FY 2006.

While there are no legislative impediments to prevent foreign companies from bidding on a DACP project, CTO "primarily looks to DACP as a domestic-driven program, with the Foreign Comparative Testing [FCT] program as our ability to reach out to our allies to obtain their best technologies and products," Cundiff said.

The DACP can, however, optimize the gains from an FCT project when domestic and overseas companies enter into partnering relationships.

USSOCOM Participation

Cundiff observed that since USSOCOM has Title 10 and acquisition authority, it has a predisposition toward DAC. "Having the global war on terror mission, it has a special incentive to look to programs such as DAC for providing the near-term capability to address terrorism issues," he said.

USSOCOM and the services have DACP offices, which help the CTO process requests for test and evaluation funds. Selected projects that meet warfighter needs are placed in an accelerated testing and evaluation environment, with an approximate six-month to three-year turnaround for near-term warfighter items of interest.

The command's DACP projects address various community missions and requirements. The command has 12 ongoing projects and five new FY 2005 projects.

Focus on Smaller Companies

About 70 percent of DACP projects are supported by small to mid-size companies. Stuart, FL-based Universal Chemical Technologies Inc., one representative company that supports a FY 2005 project, has 35 employees. This company, and other similar-sized entities, is a source of technological innovation. “Historically, our new and innovative solutions, which provide the leap ahead capabilities that are inserted into our weapons systems, come from a small or medium enterprise,” Cundiff said.

While he noted that larger, prime contractors are also technology providers, “the longer term development tends to come from our smaller businesses, which often have more flexibility to deal with new technology insertion and development.” And it is the prime contractor that will then insert the technology gains into the major system.

FY 2005 USSOCOM Projects

Five new projects are scheduled for testing and evaluation with fiscal year 2005 funding

Field Interrogation Support Tool (FIST)

USSOCOM, Army and Marines will evaluate the Concurrent Technologies Corp., Johnstown, PA, and NITV Federal Services, West Palm Beach, FL, FIST project for use in conducting interpersonal operations and interrogation while in a combat environment.

Deployed SOF and other military and government personnel involved in law enforcement require a system that provides a capability to determine, with a high degree of accuracy and reliability, truthfulness or deception while conducting interpersonal operations and interrogation in combat, tactical, field and operational settings.

FIST will employ proven software currently used in the Computer Voice Stress Analyzer hosted on a laptop for processing voice—with several changes. First, the two vendors will rewrite the software algorithms making it possible to re-host the software in a handheld personnel digital assistant device for SOF. Second, automated graphical display features, which currently require manual evaluation by a trained technician, will also be enhanced for field use. Finally, on-the-spot evaluation, by personnel without specialized skills training, will be made possible.

The FIST reduces cost, size and weight, while increasing system capability over existing systems.

SOF DACP Requirements

The three leading SOF needs for which the CTO is interested in obtaining project applications are: “force protection for U.S. personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan; anything having to do with counterinsurgency—to help us better find, locate and track terrorist cells and activity; and anything in the unattended ground sensor mission to enable personnel or vehicle detection,” Cundiff said.

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