

THE LAB'S YEARLY DIGEST

FY2023



Our Fairgoers

- U.S. Census Bureau (USCB)
- Enterprise Services – Acquisition (ES-A)
- FirstNet Authority (FNA)
- National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
- U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO)
- Office of Acquisition Management (OAM)



Reflections from DOC Senior Procurement Executive Olivia Bradley



Olivia J. Bradley, DOC Senior Procurement Executive and Director for Acquisition Management and **Trevor Wagner**, Director of The Lab

Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 was an exciting year for the Department’s Acquisition Innovation Lab, which we simply call ‘The Lab.’

Although The Lab launched in the Spring of 2022, Mid-way through FY 2023, we welcomed our first full-time, permanent Director of The Lab. This year, I personally got to see and feel the excitement and enthusiasm across the Commerce acquisition community at each Bureau. Acquisition teams were sincere in their willingness to try new approaches to delivering mission capabilities. They were accepting of formal coaching from The Lab and learning new approaches that have been proven to increase the likelihood of mission success while lowering entry barriers, increasing competition, shortening the time it takes to get to award, and even lowering the cost to the Department where possible.

This Yearly Digest is designed to share some of the new ventures of The Lab, highlights our very first formally coached procurement project, shares some metrics associated with this growth, and outlines a vision for upcoming activities.

Finally, and most importantly, we see all the essential work you do each and every day. With your workloads, you may not feel you can pause and learn a new process or technique. I encourage you to consider doing just that, and to be open to a different way of doing business. We will continue to support you and work diligently alongside you as we continue to meaningfully enhance the Commerce procurement experience to deliver the important mission of the Department and of each Bureau.

Olivia J. Bradley



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Innovation is Open - Free Admission

Innovation is for Everyone

Or maybe it isn't? There is no cost other than time. At the very least, everyone should be open and willing to continually improve their current processes. This often involves trying something new to add value to a program or process or increase efficiency throughout each phase of a process or acquisition. Just like a fairground, surely there is something for everyone. A snack, a ride, a game, a prize? One thing that is guaranteed is that innovation in our acquisitions, Big 'A' and little 'a', can be fun. Working collaboratively as a team should be rewarding, and fun can often be had by all members of the acquisition team. There is often fun in learning or relearning many steps in the contract formation, evaluation, award and administration process to be more efficient, targeted, and streamlined. This leads to less overall effort but also a higher assurance that the requirement is solid, and the vendor(s) selected are the best available to most successfully meet the government's needs.

At The Lab, there are a lot of opportunities and resources for the acquisition community. All recommendations and strategies provided by The Lab are advisory in nature and non-binding. All feedback provided by The Lab is intended for continuous improvement and further refinement of Commerce procurement practices. Please see a variety of offerings from The Lab in FY23.

The Lab Offerings in FY23

Formal Procurement Coaching

Submit a formal project to The Lab for coaching

JAM Sessions to Develop Evaluation Approach

A 2-3 hour sprint session with all stakeholders to finalize an approach

Tailored Training Sessions

Unique to each acquisition team based on their evaluation approach

Innovative Technique Training

Request trainings based on currently available innovative procurement techniques found on the PTAI

Document Feedback Sessions

Not formal reviews, but feedback on any acquisition related document

Facilitation of Consensus Evaluations

The team sees how the consensus is facilitated and documented before taking it over

All Hands Type Presentations

You pick the topic, and we can do a deep dive on it!

Ad Hoc/Any Support

Just email TheLab@doc.gov for ad hoc support

Monthly Innovation Council Meetings

Join your Bureau Innovation Advocate for exposure to recent hot items in the innovation community

Cross Agency Collaboration

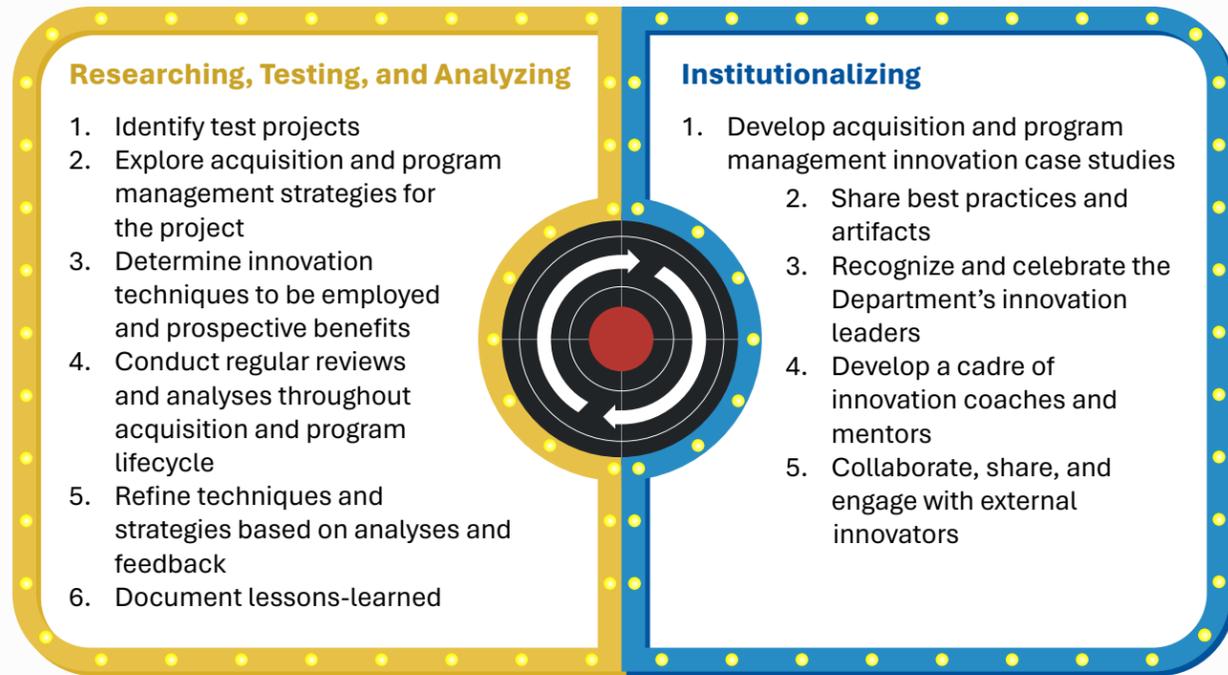
Reach out to TheLab@doc.gov if you want to collaborate but are not within the DOC or a Bureau



Lab Activities

The Lab’s mission statement, vision statement, and value proposition have not changed. Rather than reposting it here, please visit [The Lab’s website](#) or its [FY22 annual report to OMB](#).

The graphic below explains the cycle of coaching and sharing that fuels The Lab.



A major focus in FY23 was on the formal coaching of teams who sought to implement innovative solutions. The Lab views coaching of acquisition teams as critical to the growth, acceptance, and expansion of a more effective and streamlined way of conducting procurements throughout the Department.

We are excited to share the first ever formally completed project with The Lab, ES-A’s acquisition support services project detail on page 5.

Formal Lab Projects

Congratulations to the ES-A and OAM team for awarding the first formal Lab coached project.

Goals

To hold an open competition using FAR 8.405-3 procedures, GSA MAS, to find an excellent Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Businesses (SDVOSB) partner to support OAM’s broad acquisition mission to include: cost analysis, financial assistance, innovation, policy and oversight, program management, and risk analysis. The team sought an efficient evaluation process where they could: ensure mission success, increase vendor participation, lower quote submission costs, decrease the overall time spent by the team in evaluations, and ensure a positive experience for all parties involved.

Innovations

The team issued an RFQ open to all SDVOSBs. The two-phased advisory down-select approach relied on only two factors: 1) Demonstrated Prior Experience and 2) Oral Briefings. Factor 1 focused on three targeted statements in a 5-page written submission. Factor 2 provided three targeted questions in the RFQ, an additional two questions provided the morning of the 45-minute oral briefing, and an interactive dialogue portion. Both factors used confidence ratings, on-the-spot consensus evaluations, and more! A new technique, Sharing Innovations, was used in the RFQ where the team specified some of the

relevant innovative techniques being used including their description, content, samples, and benefits to why they are being implemented.

Results

Nine quotes were received, more than doubling the number expected via market research. The team sent advisory notifications just six days after receipt of quotes, with six of six quoters taking the advice to not proceed to Phase II. The acquisition team spent only 8 hours each in for the training, evaluation, and documentation of both phases. This was possible as the team collaborated in agile contract sprint meetings leading up to this stage. The oral briefings served as a major differentiator and a \$3.5M BPA was established just 77 days after release of the RFQ. The brief explanations shared the evaluation reports while the contracting officer used another new technique, Informal Feedback Sessions, with the six quoters who self-selected out during Phase I. These 15-minute virtual sessions shared the quoter’s evaluation findings.



- Innovative Techniques***
- [Affordability](#)
 - [Brief Quote Submissions](#)
 - [Confidence Ratings](#)
 - [Down-Select \(Advisory\)](#)
 - [Enhanced Contract Type](#)
 - [Informal Feedback Sessions](#)
 - [Interview-Style Questions](#)
 - [Involve End Users](#)
 - [Mission Focused Evaluation Criteria](#)
 - [On-the-Spot Consensus](#)
 - [Oral Briefings](#)
 - [Rates Only Pricing Evaluations](#)
 - [Select Best-Suited, then Negotiate](#)
 - [Share Evaluation Documents](#)
 - [Share Innovations](#)
 - [Streamlined Documentation](#)

*Where possible, the technique links to the PTAI page for it. If not available, please see the Procurement Innovation Lab’s latest [yearbook](#) for full definitions.

Surveying the Workforce

General Information

The first acquisition innovation survey was issued on October 2021 to establish a baseline. The second was issued in October 2022 to measure progress against the baseline. These surveys were the same, and the results are compared below. These surveys are important to measure progress and effectiveness of acquisition innovation throughout DOC, with goals to:

- Identify practitioners based on experience applying various innovative techniques;
- Develop an inventory of innovative techniques used throughout the Department;
- Identify commonly used innovative techniques;
- Determine training needs; and
- Identify perceived barriers to innovation.

The Lab did not release a survey in October 2023, but will issue a modified survey in FY24 to assess innovation and culture throughout the DOC enterprise so the data can be uniquely reviewed for each Bureau and contracting organization to inform the future of acquisition and program management at DOC. This intends to include what was captured in the prior FYs, but adding 16 organizational traits to see how they are prioritized at each Bureau.

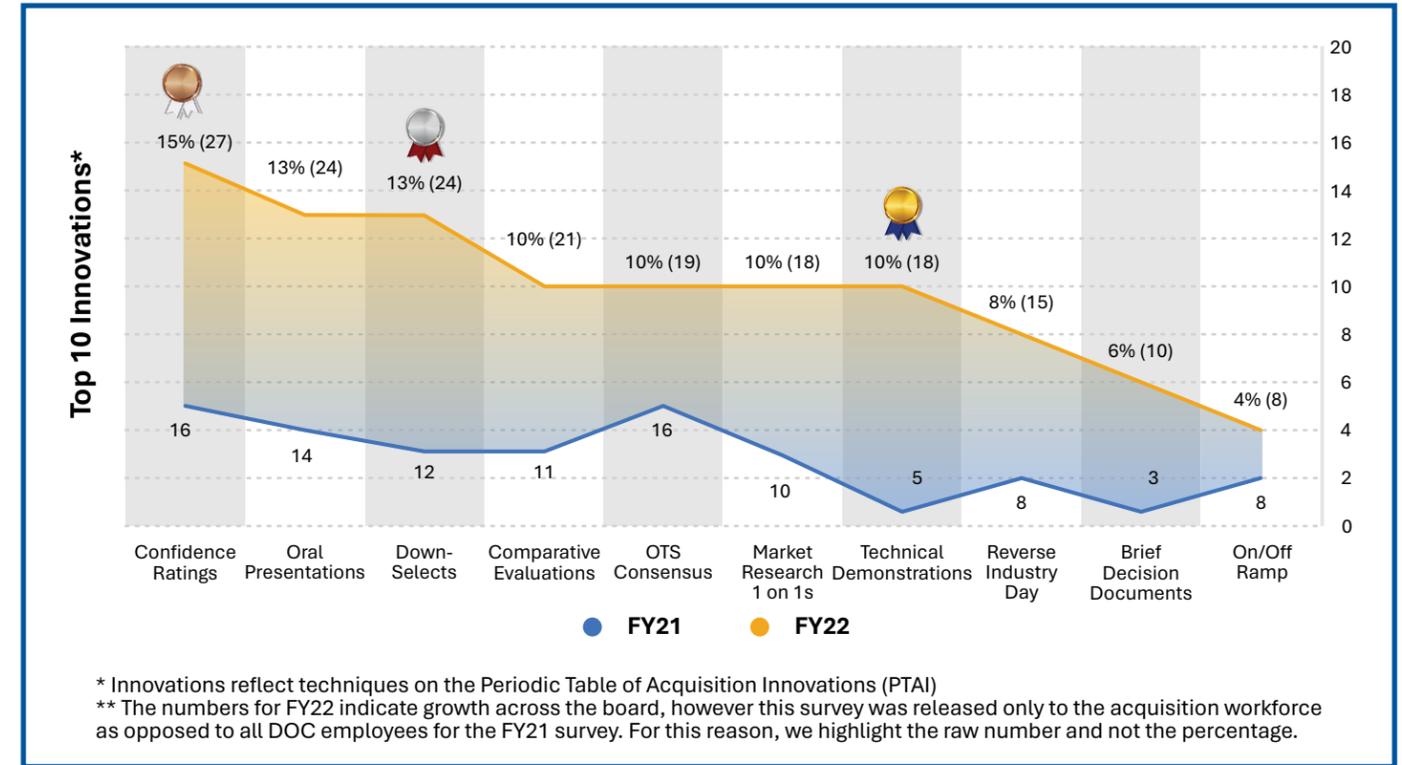
The table represents survey results to both FY21 and FY22, but does come with a caveat. The FY21 survey was issued to the entire acquisition workforce and received 343 responses. The FY22 survey was issued to a subset of that workforce and received 181 responses. The comparisons focus on the percentages rather than the raw numbers for each.

Survey Respondents	FY21	FY22 (%)
Contracting Officer Representative (COR)	30.5	53
Program/Project Management	25.5	13
Other	24	4
Contracting	19	29
Legal	1	2
Total	100	100
Are you familiar with the PTAI	18.6	28

Innovative Techniques

The chart below shows the top 10 techniques used from the PTAI. You can see here substantial growth in both numbers and percentages for each technique. The top 10 generally remained unchanged. It is encouraging to see continued growth on techniques that have been proven to both add value and reduce risk.

While there has been a shuffle on the priority of the most prevalent impediments, most are still felt. The biggest takeaway is the need to roll out targeted training available throughout the Department.



Perceived Barriers to Innovation



Ranking	FY21	FY22
First	Lack of Training/Understanding	Lack of Training/Understanding
Second	Leadership Resistance	Takes more time/Approvals
Third	Takes more time/Approvals	Fear of Change
Fourth	Fear of Change	Fear of Protest
Fifth	Fear of Failure	Lack of an Executive Champion
Sixth	Lack of Legal Support	Leadership Resistance
Seventh	Fear of Protest	Lack of Procurement Support

Badging Program

The innovation micro credentialing program, referred to as the Badging Program, introduced in FY22 grew substantially in FY23.

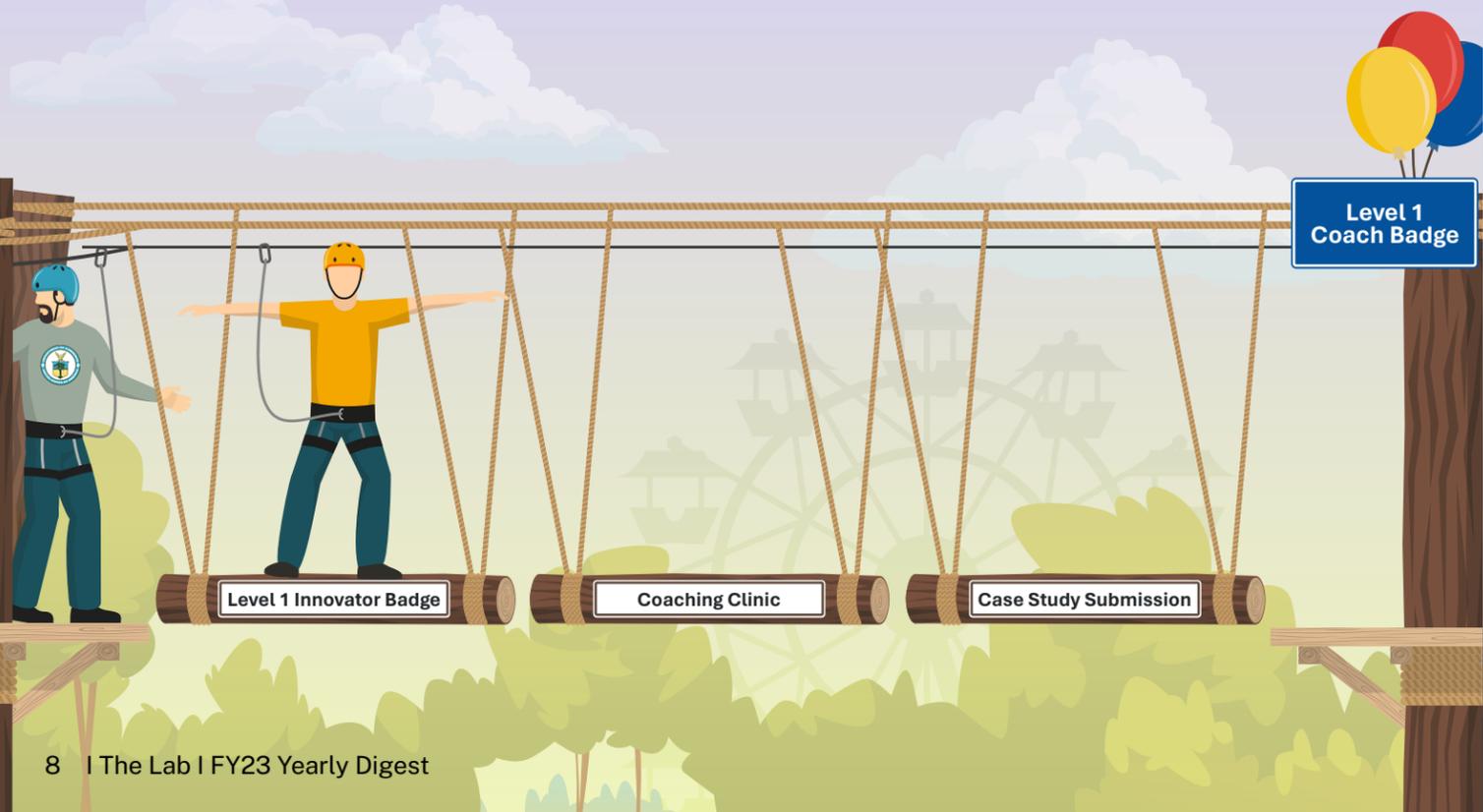
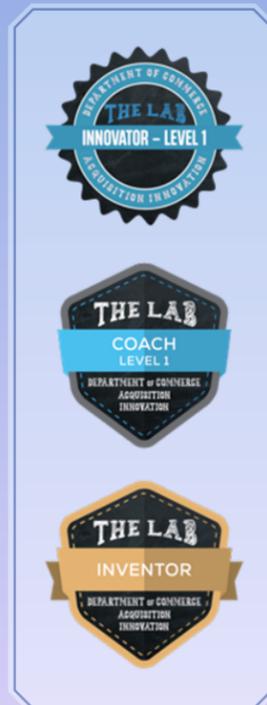
There are three (3) available badges to the workforce: **Innovator (three levels), Coach (three levels), and Inventor.***

While the numbers indicate substantial growth in FY23, it was only for the Innovator – Level 1 badge. There were 43 issued in FY22 and 275 issued in FY23. The goal for FY24 and beyond is to grow higher levels of the all badges, with a focus on finding more Coaches throughout the Department. Check out more below about the Coaching Badge.

Requirements for a Level 1 Coach Badge:

1. Hold Level 1 Innovator Badge (Attend DHS PIL Boot Camp or FAR Flexibilities) or Inventor Badge (create a new technique to DOC);
2. Complete DHS PIL Coaching Clinic or a formal Lab coached project; and
3. Share an example of one technique or successful application. Examples can also be case studies, articles, tip sheets, webinars, or templates.

**Anyone in the acquisition process with various roles such as Contracting Officer Representative, Program/Project Manager, Contracting Officer, Contract Specialist, Legal, Policy, and others who take part in the requirement building, evaluation, procurement and contract management, or other phases of the acquisition process are highly encouraged to pursue these badges. Diversity in functional areas will create a more meaningful program and enrich it with truly new perspectives and content.*



Active Procurement Projects/Getting Started

At the end of FY23, The Lab was formally coaching six (6) procurement projects. These six (6) projects have a combined value of \$2.1B, average over 10 innovative techniques, and are all planned for award in FY24.

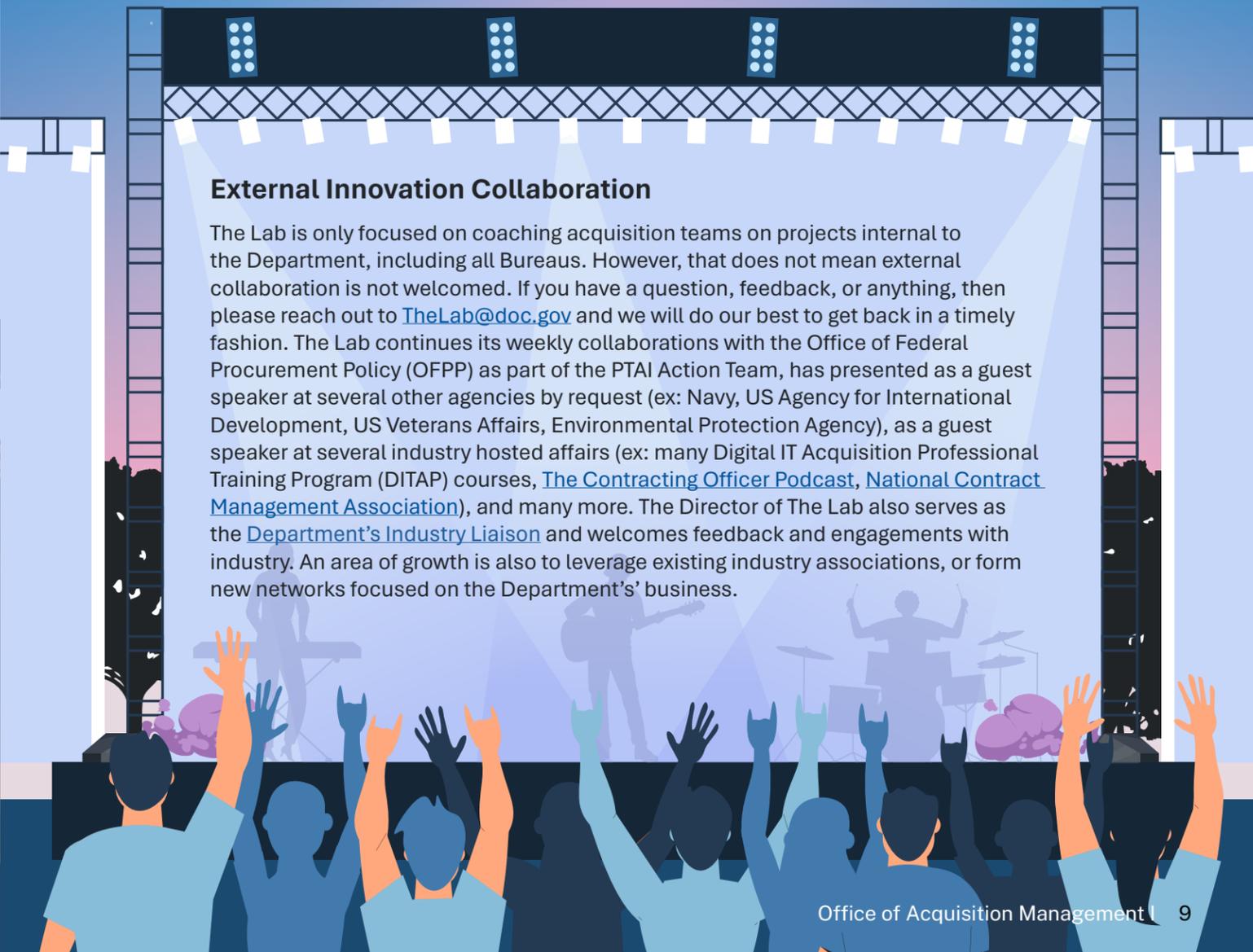
Projects find their way to The Lab in multiple ways, but all end up submitting a 1-page application. There are two requirements for a project to be accepted:

- 1) the acquisition team is trying something new, and
- 2) it is competitive (not sole sourced).

The journey to submission may vary. The teams may have: seen The Lab's website, been working with their Bureau Innovation Advocate (BIA), have been involved with a technique before, received comments via a formal contract review board or similar review, saw training available, emailed for feedback that blossomed into more, or just sought the safe space to be innovative. All teams are welcome throughout the Department.

External Innovation Collaboration

The Lab is only focused on coaching acquisition teams on projects internal to the Department, including all Bureaus. However, that does not mean external collaboration is not welcomed. If you have a question, feedback, or anything, then please reach out to TheLab@doc.gov and we will do our best to get back in a timely fashion. The Lab continues its weekly collaborations with the Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) as part of the PTAI Action Team, has presented as a guest speaker at several other agencies by request (ex: Navy, US Agency for International Development, US Veterans Affairs, Environmental Protection Agency), as a guest speaker at several industry hosted affairs (ex: many Digital IT Acquisition Professional Training Program (DITAP) courses, [The Contracting Officer Podcast](#), [National Contract Management Association](#)), and many more. The Director of The Lab also serves as the [Department's Industry Liaison](#) and welcomes feedback and engagements with industry. An area of growth is also to leverage existing industry associations, or form new networks focused on the Department's' business.



Measuring Impact: Key Performance Indicators

Badging and Training

The Lab's activities are aligned with *Strategic Objective 5.5 Modernize Mission Support Processes and Infrastructure of the Department's 2022-2026 Strategic Plan*. The Key Performance Indicator (KPI) specific to The Lab is "percentage of workforce trained or credentialed in innovative acquisition techniques." The two-part KPI is outlined in the table below (Table 1), and highlights growth in each year.

Table 1. FY 2022 and 2023 KPIs, targets and results, for Strategic Objective 5.5 are as follows:

Key Performance Indicator	FY22 Target	FY22 Actual	FY23 Target	FY23 Actual	FY24 Target
Number of Workforce Credentialed in Innovative Acquisition Techniques	25	33	50	285	75
Number of Workforce Trained in Innovative Acquisition Techniques	350	430	400	538	450

Additionally, we review the results of questions related to innovation for the annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS). The figure below shows these four questions, their governmentwide percentage for FY23, and the Department's results. In the FEVS, the Office of Personnel Management defines Innovation as "Assesses the extent to which the development and implementation of new ideas and approaches are supported by organizational leadership and through daily practices." We are encouraged to exceed the governmentwide average for each question, but there is much more work to be done!

Question	Government-wide %	Department %
Employees in my work unit incorporate new ideas into their work. (Q. 30)	67	72
Employees in my work unit consistently look for new ways to improve how they do their work. (Q. 29)	66	72
Management encourages innovation. (Q. 64)	58	61
My work unit commits resources to develop new ideas (e.g., budget, staff, time, expert support). (Q. 27)	56	57



FY24 & Beyond Vision

The Department is very excited about the future of acquisition innovation, and its widespread understanding and adoption. Transparency is also important, so we want to share our goals for the next FY and beyond with the community at large. We do this knowing that if we don't accomplish everything, then it will not be a point of failure, just more work to get to! If we do fail, then we learn, and we might even end up with a better product.

- Increase the number of formal procurement projects with a goal of 10 in FY24.
- Infuse not just innovation, but streamlined concepts, into the Commerce Acquisition Manual.
- Redesign of The Lab's internal and external website to be more helpful to the community at large. The goal is to share what can be shared on the external website.
- Create resources that can provide value to acquisition teams.
- Focus on micro-trainings on [The Lab's YouTube site](#). More like 5-minute videos than 50 minutes.
- Create more Case Studies that share team's innovation stories and capture their case specific documents. Have a tracker or repository the user can navigate independently.
- Increase the number of badge holders for all three badge types, with a focus on developing Coaches. This may include revamping the entire Badging Program.
- Implement Procurement Innovation Action Plans where senior Bureau acquisition officials work with their BIAs to strategize on identifying impediments to adopting innovation and championing cultural change.
- Shift the prior Department-wide survey to focus on culture and innovation.
- Grow The Lab so it can be more helpful to the Department.
- Implement a project tracker to provide visibility to the senior Bureau acquisition officials and BIAs.
- Consider a Rotation Program to mentor, provide hands-on experience to, and instill contracting best practices to future Coaches at the Bureaus. The goal is to get them back to their Bureaus to be an internal catalyst for change.
- Make acquisition planning, market research, pre-award tasks, forming of evaluation approaches, source selections, all fun again. Maybe they never were, but they can be!

Please consider how you can support the movement of transforming the federal acquisition system into a more efficient, mission-focused, system that is infused with innovation.





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COLAB**

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