



FAIR EVALUATIONS & ANONYMOUS REVIEWS (FEAR)

Overview

The Government has heard concerns from industry that solicitations appear “wired”. Perhaps the timing of the solicitation release to expected date of award fuels those concerns. Government contracting officers (COs) and specialists have also experienced apprehension, albeit rarely, that our evaluators may be relying on factors outside the parameters established in the solicitation. The Fair Evaluation and Anonymous Review (FEAR) methodology directly addresses these challenges by masking contractor identities throughout the proposal or quote submission and evaluation phases, ensuring evaluators focus exclusively on the substantive merits of each submission. It is worth noting that the Government has been conducting various methods of the FEAR process for decades, from defense to intel acquisitions.

FEAR minimizes bias, halo effects, and brand influence by assigning government-issued anonymous identifiers and requiring fully anonymized submissions that are free of logos, names, or any identifying information. This approach can strengthen the integrity of the evaluation and documentation process, enhancing industry’s confidence in the Government acquisition team.

FEAR can also align naturally with a Draft RFQ + Q&A + Opt-In Phase, enabling agencies to refine the evaluation strategy and right-size the competitive pool before issuing the final solicitation. These practices promote fairness, transparency, and more defensible acquisition outcomes.

Include in your solicitation the language contained in the [Consider This Language](#) section below. There is nothing in the RFO FAR, FAR Companion, or other memos, policy, or other guidance that prohibits this concept.

Implementing FEAR:

Combine w/ the Opt-In Technique

- Contractors must Opt-in to receive the final solicitation and the unique identifier assignment.

Unique Identifier Assignment

- Each contractor is assigned an identifier that will be used in-leu of contractor identifying information.

Masked Submissions

- Submissions must not include company names, logos, images, watermarks, metadata, or other identifying information

De-Masking at Award

- Once evaluations have concluded, the CO may notify evaluators of contractor specific information.



Key Considerations

Establish criteria:

- What must be masked?
- What is exempt?
- How will identifiers be assigned and used in each phase?
- How is the CO maintaining traceability of contractors?

Communicate Submission Requirements:

- Include clear rules for formatting, page limits, metadata removal, and masking compliance.
- Non-compliance may result in removal from consideration at the CO's discretion.

Maintain Strict Internal Controls:

- Only the CO or contract specialist should have access to the mapping of real company names to anonymous identifiers.

Masked Name Samples:

- The CO should feel free to have some fun with the masking of names, while remaining professional: favorite television shows, games, book characters, you name it!
- Alternatively, for the more traditionalists you can use colors, Greek letters, and more.

Double Masks:

- Some contractors feel incumbents or other close to the program office can float their own masked names to the program office individuals. To alleviate the appearance or allowance of this occurrence, you can add another layer. The contractor gets one name, example is **OMEGA**. The CO has a key where they label contractor **OMEGA** to contractor **PURPLE**. Three layers of masking may not be necessary.

Consider This Language

FEAR Technique: Contractor submissions shall not contain logos, company names, or images/marks that identify the contractor. Submissions shall reference the contractor only by the Government-provided Identifier. Failure to comply may result in immediate removal from consideration.

Quotes must not include company names, logos, images, watermarks, metadata, or other identifying information. Non-compliant submissions may be removed from consideration.

Combined Opt-In and FEAR Techniques: The Government will release the Draft RFQ and attachments and hold the Q&A exclusively during the Draft phase. To receive the Final RFQ, each Quoter must submit a one-page Opt-In cover letter (UEI, MAS contract number/SIN, POC, and an Opt-In statement) by the deadline. Only Quoters who Opt-In will receive the Final RFQ and may submit



subsequent volumes. The Government will assign each Opt-In Quoter a unique Identifier to be used in all subsequent submissions.

Why Is This Innovative?

FEAR is innovative because it introduces a structured masked-quote process that removes contractor identity from evaluator review, eliminating the perception of bias and leveling the playing field for all contractors. By combining this anonymity with the Opt-In model, FEAR modernizes procurement planning by allowing agencies to right-size evaluations based on actual vendor interest, while increasing transparency, strengthening integrity, and improving fairness across evaluations. This approach aligns with emerging acquisition techniques, enhances small-business competitiveness, and supports more objective, confidence-based source selections.

Questions? Contact The LAB at thelab@doc.gov. The LAB is happy to connect and think through the next steps with you.

***Disclaimer:** The information contained in this document is merely an idea or opinion of The LAB and does not constitute formal legal or policy guidance of any kind.

