

**HOW TO DO  
BUSINESS WITH  
THE GOVERNMENT:**

**QUESTIONS  
YOU NEVER THOUGHT  
TO ASK**

# INTRODUCTION

Periscope Holdings is dedicated to sharing best practices on how to sell to the government. We often host webinars and conferences attended by folks just like you who are looking to get the most out of their BidSync Links and Links Plus accounts and open new channels into government purchasing. Ken McFarland, Vice President of Solutions for Periscope Holdings and Jean Clark, President of NIGP Code for Periscope Holdings are two of the best in the business. Between the two of them there is over 35 years of experience in buying for, and selling to the public sector.

At a recent event Ken and Jean fielded questions asked by suppliers from the construction, janitorial, landscaping and other industries. These questions and answers should help you to hone your abilities and help you produce better results in your efforts to break into and succeed in public sector procurement.

## *Industry Highlights*

### **Opportunity Overview:**

- 2015 Federal Spend = \$3.8 Trillion
- 2015 State Spend = \$1.5 Trillion
- 2015 Local Spend = \$1.6 Trillion
- Expected to Increase in 2016 & 2017

### **Why Sell to the Government:**

- Guaranteed Marketplace
- Standard Procurement Practices
- Fair/Open Competition
- Wide Variety of Needs
- Small to Large Scale Products/Services Needed
- Multiple Opportunities
- Policies/Procedures to Protect the Vendor
- Guaranteed Payment
- Transparency
- Potential for Long-Term Relationship

# MEET OUR EXPERTS

## BUYER



### Jean A. Clark

*President, NIGP Code & Consulting Services*

Jean A. Clark, FNIGP, CPPO, CPPB, CPM is currently the President, NIGP Code & Consulting Services at Periscope Holdings and the former Procurement Administrator for the State of Arizona.

## VENDOR

### Ken McFarland

*Vice President, Solutions & Field Operations*

Ken McFarland is Vice President, Solutions & Field Operations at Periscope Holdings with over 20 years' experience selling to Government.





# Q & A

## ON HOW TO SELL TO THE GOVERNMENT

## *Is it better to contact procurement only when there's an active procurement plan?*

**JEAN**

No — You should not wait for a bid to contact the procurement office. It is important to establish a relationship with any agency you wish to do business with prior to them releasing a bid.

**KEN**

Deals are won by having an established relationship. Set up a meeting and get to know the Buying Agent, this can help to provide you with insight into their processes and potentially keep you top of mind when and RFP is written.

## *What is the best way to present my product or service to a buyer?*

**JEAN**

You first need to understand what an agency is trying to accomplish and then you need to explain how your products/services can help the agency meet their goals.

**KEN**

It is important to know the problems an agency is looking to solve. It is equally important that you approach these problems in a helpful manner. Don't just go in with a hard sell.

## *What things are big turn-offs in RFP responses?*

**JEAN**

A big turn off is using “standard” sales propaganda. You need to tailor your message to align with the agencies need. Be sure to pay attention to the RFP's requirement, be clear and make sure you fill out required fields.

**KEN**

Keep it concise, don't load your proposal down with long paragraphs and unneeded details.

## *How can I use certifications to my advantage in the procurement process?*

**JEAN**

Be sure to identify your firm's certifications and call out those that provide a market differentiation.

**KEN**

These are great to have and can place your firm in a higher “bracket” for success.

## *I have written over 60 proposals and only won 5 of them...any advice?*

**KEN**

I would absolutely select the top 3 or so where you felt like you had a great product at the right price, etc. I would first ask for a “debrief” to understand the organizations decision to not move forward with your company. I would frame the debrief request as an opportunity for your company to improve, e.g. “we want to understand where we need to improve to win business like this in the future”. In addition, I would do a FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) request on the proposals that did win the business. Both of these activities should give you an excellent idea on your areas and items that need to improve.

## *How do you find out if agencies have days set aside to meet with new vendors?*

**JEAN**

There are two available options to find out if an agency has set vendor office hours. One option is to review the agency’s procurement office website to see if there is a posting of vendor office hours. The other option would be to call the general procurement office number and inquire.

## *What is the maximum value for a holiday gift that would be acceptable for a Government Purchasing or other Government employee to legally accept?*

**JEAN**

Usually the policies reference a “nominal” value which typically falls below \$25. Even with this policy reference, the vast majority of public agencies will adopt a zero-tolerance policy. The safest business approach is to expect a zero-tolerance policy is in place.

## *Why are many RFI’s or RFP’s only open for a week? What’s driving that timeline?*

**JEAN**

Informal quotations can be posted for relatively short periods of time; 3–7 days while typically formal solicitations are posted for a minimum of a 14-day period. If some RFI’s or RFP’s are posted for a week time frame, it may be due to unforeseen demands for the procurement to be conducted to initiate the services. It may be beneficial to ask the individual agency.

## *Are all bids submitted electronically?*

**KEN**

More and more agencies are moving to electronic submittal of offers. However, all agencies do not currently have the technology and still receive “hard copy” offers. The prescribed method for response will be stated in the solicitation document.

## *How do we connect with buyers before they issue bids?*

**JEAN**

Research the website and resource tools to “find” the right Buyer and then e-mail asking for a meeting and determine the procurement plan and cycle for your commodity and services. If you happen to be told that it’s a year or two away don’t just go away, periodically keep in touch to inquire on status and show your continued interest and willingness to assist.

**KEN**

This is a key activity. I would use tools (contact list provided by BidSync, agency or entity website, etc.) to identify the buyer for your commodity/ service. Then reach out to make an introduction and request a meeting. The meeting is to understand their plans for procuring your commodity/ service. Then, you will have connected prior to the bid.

## *Are references from non-government entities acceptable for organizations just starting out with government contracts?*

**JEAN**

Yes. However, it is important to ask that question as part of your initial discussions (prior to any bid/solicitation) and during a formal question and answer period.

**KEN**

References from non-government organizations are a good start, but acceptance will be based on the solicitation requirements. Another strategy to get in the door is to begin small with an inexpensive small dollar contract to gain the public sector references.

## *There is a belief that procurement is nothing but a collection hub for RFPs and then they direct them to the department that is needing services. Can we reach out to the KDM?*

**JEAN**

Many procurement organizations are “gatekeepers” for business interactions and communications. To ensure development of a long standing positive relationship, it would be beneficial to first touch base with procurement.

## *What is the proper protocol for receiving the awarded vendor’s proposal?*

**KEN**

If you wish to review a copy of the award contract and proposal, providing the procurement office with a written request for the information is the prescribed process. Some agencies have procurement technology that supports the public access of the contracts and proposals, so it may be just as easy as a couple of clicks without a written request.

# CONCLUSION



## Research:

When it comes to locating opportunities that matter to you it is critical to have a bid matching service like [Links](#) or [Links Plus](#). This is the only way to ensure you are seeing the right bids in one place and you are not wasting your time searching site after site looking for the right fit. You need to learn where your products and services fit within a public sectors organization before you set down the road of doing business with an agency. This will save you time and energy and not waste the time of the agency. Take advantage of research tools like Spend Analytics to find opportunities contacts.

## Target Entry:

Start small to get your foot in the door and have a few successes under your belt. This will help you tackle larger contracts in the future and have references to back you up. Take advantage of proposal helping services like ProposalHelper. This is a great way to learn the basics from the pros and eliminate frustration on your part when filling out complicated RFP's.

## Quality:

Landing a contract is just the beginning. You as a supplier need to be dependable and deliver on your promises. Keep in communication with your agency, provide updates and remember...be polite.

## *Who is Periscope Holdings?*

### Our Purpose

- Eradicate Waste & Maximize the Value of Every Dollar Spent
- Our Focus
- Public Sector & Higher Education

### Our Solutions:

- eProcurement Software — BuySpeed
- Administrator for NIGP Code & Consulting
- Acquired BidSync December 2014
- Added BidSync's eProcurement Solutions & Vendor Solutions Including Links & Links Plus Products
- Now Serve Entire Procurement Ecosystem — Buyers & Vendors
- Benefits to Buyers & Vendors

Periscope  
HOLDINGS INC

[www.periscopeholdings.com](http://www.periscopeholdings.com)