

## **NOAA Hydrographic Services Contracting Policy**

NOAA recognizes that qualified commercial sources can provide competent, professional, cost-effective hydrographic services to NOAA in support of its mapping and charting mission for enhancing navigation safety. NOAA also recognizes that the provision of hydrographic services, including the acquisition and dissemination of hydrographic and shoreline data, is a core mission requirement of NOAA under the 1947 Coast and Geodetic Survey Act and the Hydrographic Services Improvement Act of 1998 (as amended). In the interest of public and environmental safety, the Federal government's responsibility for executing its hydrographic services missions is manifest and non-delegable. Therefore, it is incumbent upon NOAA, as recommended by the Hydrographic Services Review Panel (the Panel), to maintain its operational hydrographic services core capability, and contract for the remainder of its hydrographic services to the extent of available funding.

In general, it is the intent of NOAA to contract for hydrographic services when qualified commercial sources exist, and when such contracts are the most cost effective method of conducting these functions. This policy documents the framework and conditions under which contracting will be employed to ensure an open and consistent approach. To support this policy, NOAA will maintain a dialogue with private sector organizations and constituent groups. For the purposes of this policy, the term "hydrographic services" is defined to include: Geodesy, hydrography, photogrammetry, topography, remote sensing, geophysical (gravity, seismological, geomagnetic) measurements, tide and current observations, and data processing. Although this policy is limited to NOAA's hydrographic services, it is NOAA's intent to advance contracting and adhere to the principles of this policy to meet all of its geospatial, surveying and mapping requirements.

NOAA will procure hydrographic data and services from qualified sources in accordance with its legal authorities, the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) and the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949 (40 U.S.C. 541 *et seq.*), including Title IX where appropriate. Commonly known as the "Brooks Act" for Architect/Engineering (A/E) contracts, Title IX is a contract mechanism for use in situations where the professional nature of the services to be procured requires that potential contractors have specialized technical expertise.

NOAA may determine that a particular surveying or mapping activity is inherently governmental. NOAA surveying and mapping activities considered inherently governmental in nature may include services necessary to: (1) Monitor the quality of NOAA products; (2) promulgate and promote national and international technical standards and specifications; (3) conduct basic research and development and ensure the rapid transfer to the private sector of the derived technology; (4) maintain the Federal geodetic and navigational databases necessary to support safe and efficient marine operations; (5) support coastal stewardship ecosystem applications; and (6) support Maritime Domain Awareness and Homeland Security preparation and response

activities. To carry out the above activities, and to adequately monitor contracted services, NOAA will maintain a core capability of field and office expertise.

NOAA may task qualified commercial sources with surveying and mapping services in any part of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone for any NOAA mission-related purpose, irrespective of pre-defined priority categories such as those documented in the NOAA Hydrographic Surveying Priorities. The government's interests and responsibilities for surveying and mapping vary broadly, and experience has shown that maintaining flexibility is key to responding to the nation's changing needs for updated surveying and mapping data.

### **Ancillary Statements and Actions**

As recommended by the Panel, NOAA will continue to utilize a mix of in-house and private-sector resources to accomplish its hydrographic services missions. Costs and productivity will be closely monitored within each category (*i.e.*, public and private) to ensure best use of hydrographic services resources. NOAA will also seek to determine the optimal resource allocation between in-house and private-sector resources based on the strength of the governmental interest, the total requirement for mapping and charting services, and the particular operational capabilities of either government or private-sector resources that may make one more suitable.

NOAA will continue to examine ways to improve its contracting process, such as methods for minimizing the turnover frequency of contracting personnel and for reducing the length of time required to award contracts and task orders. NOAA will maintain its offer of debriefings to successful and unsuccessful hydrographic services contractors after final selection has taken place. The purpose of these debriefings is to assist contractors with identifying significant weaknesses or deficiencies in their submissions. NOAA is also exploring the establishment of an Ocean and Coastal Mapping Training Center. The Training Center was initially conceived as a curriculum to support NOAA's in-house hydrographic surveying training requirements. But NOAA now recognizes value in broadening the Center's scope to include training for NOAA and private sector contractors in techniques, standards, and technologies that support NOAA's many shoreline, coastal and ocean mapping activities. This concept builds on NOAA's annual Hydrographic Training and Field Procedures Workshops currently held for NOAA personnel and its hydrographic services contractors to train and trade valuable lessons learned from surveying experience. Such training would be beneficial to current or prospective NOAA contractors seeking to strengthen their proposal submissions.