

ARMY SSES NEXGEN SMALL BUSINESS ON-RAMP: WHAT WENT WRONG?

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On March 11, 2019, Anh Pena, the Contracting Officer for the [Software and Systems Engineering Services Next Generation \(SSES NexGen\) Restricted Suite On-Ramp](#) Solicitation (W56JSR-17-R-0002), issued a memorandum cancelling the opportunity. The plan was to award up to ten small business awards through the on-ramp. This opportunity had been open for almost two full years and was meant to provide a Small Business component to the existing SSES NexGen contract. In other words, companies were left in limbo for two years after they dedicated boundless, time, money, and personnel resources for a contract that was, we know now, dead on arrival. The fall-out of SSES NexGen is [yet another](#) example of the Government haphazardly promoting a contract vehicle that would eventually hurt the American citizens that allocated their companies' resources towards it.

What happened? Capture2 investigates the Causes

The memorandum states that "Future opportunities under the SSES NexGen are limited over the duration of the ordering period. Therefore, the need for additional contractors on the Restricted Suite is no longer in the best interest of the Government." This implies that the cancellation was ultimately caused by the length of time which the opportunity remained in the acquisition planning phase. This makes sense when the original contract is considered: The initial SSES NexGen contract (W15P7T-12-R-C005) has a five-year period of performance that ends on September 27, 2017. At the time of the on-ramp, it was announced that the original contract would be extended five years, to end in 2022. Any awards added as an on-ramp to this opportunity would inherit the same period of performance end date, making that contract extension necessary for the viability of this RFP. An evaluation of available contracting opportunities in the remaining time-frame, as implied in the cancellation memo, simply made it not worth the effort. The real question is: Why did this entire acquisition process take so long? An on-ramp should have been a simple acquisition effort. The initial RFI was issued in June 2015, proposals were due September 2017, and it took until March 2019 for Army leadership to cancel the solicitation. There has to be more to the story.

Here are a few things that may have led to this failure:

- The requirements for this on-ramp changed significantly from the initial SSES NexGen opportunity, resulting in a more complex process to evaluate the proposals, counter to their intentions. It also leaves significant room for protests based on the changed scope.
- Other contract vehicles, such as the [Responsive Strategic Sourcing For Services \(RS3\)](#), with similar scopes, were developed within the same command and with the ability to take over this work.
- There wasn't enough work to support the awards, as stated in the memorandum. The time lapse between the RFP and release and now has been significant enough that it is no longer valuable to add awardees. Fewer new tasks are being issued through this contract vehicle each year.

A question was asked during the SESS NexGen On-Ramp Industry Day about the changes to the evaluation criteria:





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Q. Section H-22, On and Off Ramp, of the original SSES NexGen Solicitation, and which is presumably included in the current SSES NexGen contract awards, states that “[i]n the event an On Ramp is used, the Government will advertise the On Ramp period by publicizing a notice on FedBizOps and Offerors shall be required to meet the criteria established in the initial SSES NexGen Solicitation. The criteria used for evaluation and selection of Awardees for any On Ramp will be exactly the same evaluation and award used for the SSES NexGen initial basic contract award. The Government will use updated Sample Tasks for evaluation purposes” (emphasis added). Please explain the Government’s rationale for proposing to employ an entirely different proposal structure and evaluation criteria and process than that set forth in the original SSES NexGen Solicitation notwithstanding their commitment to use exactly the same process and criteria.

A. The rationale was to streamline award to obtain additional small businesses as soon as possible.

It seems that while the update was made to streamline the process, it had the opposite effect. More questions ensued, both from the vendors and from the contracting office. Questions asked of the vendors included:

- Can your company propose as a prime and meet all requirements as listed in the Draft Solicitation posted 9 June 2017?
 - If yes, are there any recommended changes the Government should consider and if so, what is the benefit to the Government of making the suggested revision?
 - If no, please identify specific areas of the solicitation by page and paragraph reference that prevent your company from competing. Any response shall include what the benefit to the Government is for making a change to the requirements in the draft solicitation.

In the end, the plans for the on-ramp seemed to diverge enough from the original RFP that it may have been too difficult to properly assess the proposals and issue awards based on their original need for the contract. Another factor may have been concerns about potential protests surrounding the change in the SB on-ramp criteria from the initial contract. With other contract vehicles already in place for SBs such as RS3, the resources required to make awards, coupled with the potential protests, likely negated any value the Government would obtain.

Further, the Army noted that the performance work statement for this on-ramp was kept intentionally broad to cover many CECOM software needs. However, the RS3 Contract Vehicle also came out of the Army through Aberdeen Proving Ground, covering a similar scope and needs. Few ongoing Task orders for the original SSES NexGen awards are being reported through FPDS; CACI Technologies has a Task Order with a period of Performance that extends to 2023, otherwise, all of the currently active Task Orders end in 2019 or earlier. This implies that most work in the area is being redirected to other contracts already. The number of new Task Orders released through SSES NexGen peaked in 2015, when the on-ramp was first conceived, and before RS3 was awarded.



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A link in the cancellation memo directs users to a [monthly summary report](#) for opportunities coming out of this command. In it, even more opportunities with similar scopes can be found. Each of these opportunities has a more refined scope that can capture the evolving needs more clearly. And, since these are new opportunities, there is no concern about a looming performance end date, as there would be with SSES NexGen.

While there are many possible causes for this contract cancellation, the good news is that there are opportunities to replace it. Five different SETA opportunities should be coming down the pipeline that may also be of interest to those who bid on this contract:

- C3T SETA IDIQ –2QFY19
- EIS SETA IDIQ –4QFY19
- Business Operations SETA IDIQ –1QFY19
- Services SETA IDIQ
- Worldwide Field Support –Currently starting market research

Happy Hunting!