

Return to the Workplace

Acquisition Innovation Roundtable Executive Summary – May 28, 2020

Rationale for the Event

This Acquisition Innovation Roundtable (AIR) held on May 28, 2020 (4 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.) was the third AIR event on this topic. The previous events were held on May 7 and 14. The purpose of this event was to discuss with industry their efforts and thoughts on three deep dive topics.

Attendees

- Industry – Twenty-six industry attendees representing 12 associations/groups signed into the webinar.
- Government – Twenty-eight government personnel signed into the webinar. These attendees included members of the Office of the Chief Procurement Officer (OCPO), Heads of Contracting Activities and Industry Liaisons from six Components, and representatives from the Office of the Chief Security Officer (OCSO), the Office of the Chief Readiness Support Officer (OCRSO), and the Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (OCHCO).

Agenda Overview

Soraya Correa, Chief Procurement Officer, provided opening remarks. Industry provided insights on three deep dive topics: Business risk; Innovative work practices; and Return to the workplace timing. The attendees voted on their top choices for deep dive discussion topics for the next session and identified additional potential topics. Soraya Correa, Chief Procurement Officer, delivered closing remarks.

Key Takeaways & Information

- Business Risk Deep Dive Discussion
 - Companies are hearing that they could be held liable if employees get sick from going into the office. This is likely a bigger risk when the company is on notice that there could be a risk, for example if the company is aware someone was sick but let the employee come back to the office.
 - They can ask employees to sign waivers, however this does not fully protect the company from litigation.
 - Having policies that outline when and employee can return to the workplace after being ill, the precautions that should be taken when in the workplace, and enforcement may help demonstrate that an employer is not negligent.
 - When DHS is aware that there may be a COVID-19 exposure, the communications do not reference a specific individual due to privacy concerns but will inform people who were in the same areas or were potentially in contact with the individual that they should follow the standard protocol.
- Innovative Work Practices Deep Dive Discussion
 - Some companies are shifting their focus from technology to supporting the social interaction and mental health of employees.
 - From a social perspective, companies are looking to new ways to build relationship such as virtual individual and team challenges across multiple divisions.
 - Companies are investing more in mental health support for employees and have executive/top-down focus on checking in with employees on every call.
 - They are also instituting wellness challenges such as virtual 5ks and logging workout hours.

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- Other things companies have implemented include: a “single source of truth” email regarding updates; bringing in external speakers to address COVID-19 issues; promoting an atmosphere of flexibility so employees do not feel that they need to be tied to their desks straight through their workday; and designated focus/quiet time for employees
- Return to the Workplace Timing Deep Dive Discussion
 - Some companies have told their employees that they will receive notice at least a couple of weeks before being able/required to return to the workplace.
 - There is a focus on flexibility and not forcing anyone to return to the workplace currently.
 - Others have provided a specific date in the future (e.g., September 1, 2020) when they anticipate employees will begin returning or when the decision will be revisited.
 - Several companies indicated they planned a phased return based on different criteria.
 - Companies are planning more communications when employees are required to return to the workplace and would like to see the same from DHS when contractors have a date certain when they must return to the federal workplace.
 - DHS agreed that there should be a good amount of communication when a date certain for return is known.
 - Companies are still determining whether they will provide masks/PPE or if employees can/will need to bring their own.
- Topics Selected for Next Session’s Deep Dive Discussions
 - Industry return to the workplace task forces
 - Flexibility for high-risk/dependent family employees
 - Impact on small businesses

Next Steps

As a result of this meeting, DHS will provide this summary and the decision tree referenced by Roland Edwards to participants. A follow up meeting has been scheduled for June 11, 2020.