Welcome to Lesson 3: Enter Proposed Ratings! Now that we have registered our contract, we are ready to move on to the next step in the CPARS workflow, which is where we will enter our proposed Contract Effort Description, ratings, and narratives.

Let’s begin by discussing the Contract Effort Description. We must enter a comprehensive description which summarizes the contract requirements as indicated in the contract’s statement of work or performance work statement.

When writing the Contract Effort Description, we should remember that it will be viewed by source selection officials throughout the entire federal government. Many of these source selection officials may not be familiar with our program or project. Therefore, our Contract Effort Description must be as descriptive as possible so that those unfamiliar with our contract can still understand it. We should be sure to include detailed descriptions of key technologies, components, and subsystems, as well as the complexity of the contract, or risk. We should also spell out any acronyms that we use as well as define any technical terms that we discuss. An accurate, detailed Contract Effort Description is a critical part of the evaluation because it will enable source selection officials to determine if our evaluation is relevant to their procurement.

In addition, if our evaluation is a follow-on to a prior year’s evaluation and the contract’s scope of work has changed since the last evaluation, we should update the Contract Effort Description accordingly. Next, we will enter our proposed ratings and narratives.

When we write the evaluation, we will be grading the contractor’s performance in a number of areas, such as Quality, Schedule, and Cost Control. For each area that we grade, we must provide a narrative to describe the contractor’s efforts in that area and to indicate why we assigned the rating that we have chosen. We have a total of 24,000 characters available per evaluation area for our supporting narratives and an additional 24,000 characters available for general comments. This section of the evaluation also displays the past ratings and current ratings. It is important to remember that our narratives are the most important part of the evaluation. The evaluation ratings alone are not enough information to enable the source selection officials reading our evaluation to make an effective award decision. The narratives are used to tell the story behind the ratings. For instance, we may have rated our contractor as Satisfactory in the area of Cost Control. The Satisfactory rating would indicate to source selection officials that the contractor met the Cost Control requirements of the contract by keeping the project on budget.

However, the contractor may have experienced challenges that had to be overcome in order to keep costs on track. The Cost Control narrative would describe those challenges as well as the contractor’s methods for overcoming them, thus providing valuable information to source selection officials who may anticipate encountering similar challenges on their own contract. We should cite objective documentation of the contractor’s performance in our narrative wherever possible. Sources of documentation to consider include items such as earned value management data, cost performance reports, inspection results, earned contract incentives and award fees, achievement against service level agreements, status and progress reviews, production and management reviews, audits, and quality assurance evaluations.

Now that we know the evaluation areas, let’s take a look at the grading scale that we use to evaluate performance in each of these areas. The grading scale, or ratings, come from FAR 42.1503, Table 42-1. Before choosing a rating for an evaluation area, it is important that we thoroughly review the rating definitions in the FAR so that we can choose the correct rating to accurately reflect the contractor’s performance.

Let’s review the rating scale. Starting in the middle of the scale, we have the Satisfactory rating. A rating of Satisfactory indicates that the contractor’s performance met the contract requirements. Performance neither exceeded the requirements nor was less than required by the contract. However, in order to achieve a Satisfactory rating, the problems and issues must have been minor and the contractor must have been able to respond to those problems and issues with acceptable, satisfactory corrective actions.

At the next level up the grading scale is the Very Good rating. A rating of Very Good indicates that the contractor has exceeded a contract requirement, which has resulted in a benefit to the government. It is important to remember that, in order to justify a Very Good rating, we must be able to identify the benefit to the government when writing our narrative. It is important to note that a contractor can still receive a Very Good rating even if there are some minor performance problems. In order to receive that rating, the contractor must have implemented effective corrective actions.

At the top of the grading scale is the Exceptional rating. An Exceptional rating indicates that the contractor exceeded a major contract requirement or many requirements, resulting in a benefit to the government. Once again, the government is not necessarily expecting perfect contractor performance. However, in order to achieve an Exceptional rating, problems should have been few and minor and the contractor should have implemented highly effective corrective actions. It is important to remember that the decision of whether to exceed a contract requirement in order to achieve a Very Good or Exceptional rating is the contractor’s choice. At no time should the government be requesting out of scope work or asking the contractor to perform additional tasking without payment. Doing so is a serious violation of contracting regulations and could result in a contract claim. The government is only allowed to require performance in accordance with those requirements stated in the contract.

We have so far seen the ratings for when the contractor meets or exceeds contract requirements. Next, let’s take a look at the ratings we use in cases where the contractor fails to fulfill the requirements in the contract.

Just below the Satisfactory rating is the rating of Marginal. A Marginal rating indicates that the contractor did not meet some of the contract requirements, resulting in a negative impact to the government. Occurrences such as late deliveries, cost over-runs, and quality control issues could all result in a rating of Marginal. In the case of Marginal performance, there may have been major problems, but recovery is still possible.

The lowest rating on the grading scale is Unsatisfactory. An Unsatisfactory rating indicates that the contractor did not meet most contract requirements, resulting in a serious impact to the government. When there are serious performance problems on a contract and recovery from those problems is not likely, we would assign a rating of Unsatisfactory.

It is important to remember that whenever we rate an evaluation area as Marginal or Unsatisfactory, we must justify that rating in our narrative by specifically describing which requirements were not met and the associated impact to the government. In such cases, it is particularly important to have documentation, such as cure notices, show cause notices, and written communications with the contractor, in order to provide solid justification for the rating.

The grading scale that was just described provides the criteria for rating each of the evaluation areas, with the exception of Small Business Subcontracting. The Small Business Subcontracting evaluation area is rated using its own scale, which is contained in FAR 42.1503, Table 42-2. This scale assesses the contractor’s effectiveness at meeting or exceeding the small business subcontracting goals, its good faith efforts to achieve the goals, its ability to achieve the key elements of the subcontracting plan, and the accuracy and timeliness of Individual Subcontracting Report, or ISR, and Summary Subcontracting Report, or SSR, submissions. When rating this evaluation area, it is important to review these definitions and to seek input from the Contracting Officer and Small Business Specialist as appropriate. We should evaluate Small Business Subcontracting whenever there is a small business subcontracting plan in our contract or order. This includes orders against BOAs, BPAs, GWACs and MACs, and single agency task and delivery orders when the Contracting Officer deems it appropriate. In the case of multi-agency indefinite delivery vehicles, Small Business Subcontracting is evaluated by the agency that awarded the contract unless there are separate small business subcontracting goals in each individual order.

Sometimes, we will encounter a situation where no performance evaluations have been written on a contract for a number of years. When this happens, the Assessing Official or Assessing Official Representative who was there at the time performance occurred is often no longer available to complete the evaluation. In such a case, it is the current Assessing Official’s responsibility to use all means available, to include the contract file, to document the performance during this period. In other words, an evaluation is still required even if the Assessing Official who was there at the time of contractor performance is no longer available to write the evaluation. The bottom line is that accurate and complete evaluations help ensure better quality products and services. At 365 days after contract award, it is the responsibility of the Assessing Official Representative or the Assessing Official to log into CPARS and enter the proposed ratings and narratives. If the evaluation is started by the Assessing Official Representative, they will need to send the evaluation to the Assessing Official once the ratings and narratives have been entered.

The evaluation writing process should be started in adequate time to ensure that it is completed by the 120 day deadline, which includes a 60 day contractor comment period.

Let’s look at this step in detail. In our example, we will login to CPARS as the Assessing Official Representative and enter the proposed ratings and narratives. First, we will review the administrative information that was entered during contract registration for accuracy. We will select a rating for each evaluation area and enter narratives of up to 24,000 characters per evaluation area and 24,000 characters of general comments. Once we have finished entering our ratings and narratives, we can either save the evaluation and notify another Assessing Official Representative to log in and complete their part, or we can send the evaluation to the Assessing Official for further processing.

Let’s go into the system and enter our proposed ratings. We’ll login as the Assessing Official Representative.

Let’s click To-Do List. The To-Do List displays a list of evaluations that are awaiting our action. We should note that the list includes the Action Required for each evaluation. In this case, we can see that our evaluation needs to be updated and then forwarded to the Assessing Official. We will select our contract from the To-Do List by clicking on the Document Number. If no AOR is assigned, the evaluation will automatically show up on the AO’s To-Do list in drafted status.

In order to perform the Enter Proposed Ratings step, we must ensure that each of these six sections are completed. It is a best practice to start with the Contractor Information section and work down to the Assessor section. Let’s begin with Contractor Information. This information was pulled in from FPDS at the time of contract registration. If updates are needed, the appropriate changes must be made in FPDS.

Let’s move on to Contract Information. As we learned in the previous lesson, the Evaluation Type has been pre-populated for us based on the other dates on the evaluation. Since this is the first evaluation that we are writing on our contract, CPARS has pre-populated an Evaluation Type of Interim. We will note that Interim is the appropriate choice in this situation. In addition, we will remember that it is generally advisable to accept the pre-populated Evaluation Type in order to prevent errors. Therefore, we will leave the Evaluation Type as is. Next we have the Period of Performance being Assessed. As we have previously learned, the Period of Performance has also been automatically populated for us by CPARS based on the other dates on the evaluation. We should review the pre-populated Period of Performance to ensure that it is correct. Because this is the first evaluation on our contract, the From Date should be the same as the Date Signed or the Effective Date, if entered. In this case, there is an Effective Date entered, so the From Date is the same as the Effective Date. The To Date in the Period of Performance should be one year after the From Date. If changes to the Period of Performance are needed, we can change the dates by typing them in manually or using the pop up calendar feature. However, we will remember that it is a best practice to use the Period of Performance automatically selected by CPARS in lieu of making manual changes in order to prevent errors. We'll notice that the majority of information in the Contract Information section has already been entered for us at the time of contract registration. If changes to any of this information is required, those changes must be made in FPDS. Let’s enter the remaining information. First, we’ll enter Location of Work, if performance will not take place at the contractor’s address. We’ll next enter a Contracting Officer Name and Phone Number. On an Interim evaluation, we have the option to enter an Estimated/Actual Completion Date. We will note that, if this was a Final or Addendum Report, the Estimated/Actual Completion Date would be required. We’ll enter the Contract Percent Complete and then we’ll select the Complexity from the drop down. Finally, we will select the Termination Type.

Now, let’s suppose we want to save our evaluation at this point and then come back and complete the Enter Proposed Ratings step at a later time. We can do this by clicking the Save icon at the top of the screen. We will receive a pop up indicating that our save was successful and we will then click OK.

Next, we will exit the evaluation by clicking Home. Once we are ready to continue work on our evaluation, it is easy to access from the Home screen. In order to retrieve it, we will simply click on Pending Actions. We will select our evaluation by clicking on the Document Number.

Since we have already completed the Contractor Information and Contract Information sections, we will move on to Miscellaneous Information. We will notice that since we completed the previous sections, a green checkmark is displayed identifying that those sections have been completed. This checkmark along with the Evaluation Status bar shows how far along we are in the evaluation process. When an evaluation is ready to be sent to the AO, all sections will display a green checkmark and the evaluation status will show 100%. We can enter our Project Number if we have one. We will enter the name of our program or project in the Project Title block. We will notice the box with the red check mark next to many of the blocks on this screen. This is the Spell Check feature. Next, we will enter our Contract Effort Description. It is important to remember that the Contract Effort Description should cite key requirements in the contract’s statement of work or performance work statement and that it should be clear and comprehensive. It is often helpful to type the Contract Effort Description using a word processing program and then copy and paste it into CPARS. When doing so, it is important to note that we must save the word processing document as a plain text or .txt file prior to copying and pasting it in order to ensure that it is formatted correctly in CPARS. Once the document has been saved as a plain text file and copied, we simply click in the Contract Effort Description block, right click, and select Paste. Next, we can enter information for our Key Subcontractors and Effort Performed. We should include the subcontractor’s Unique Entity ID in the Unique Entity ID block. In the Effort block, we should enter the subcontractor’s company name and a description of the effort they have performed. It is important to remember that here we are simply providing a description of the subcontractor’s tasking and that we are not evaluating their performance, although we may evaluate the prime contractor’s ability to effectively manage the subcontractor later in the evaluation. We can enter information for up to three subcontractors. We have the option to include an attachment in our evaluation. For example, our attachment may provide additional documentation such as status reports, cost performance reports, spreadsheets, drawings, and technical documentation. The attachment must include the “FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY” and “SOURCE SELECTION INFORMATION” markings. Our attachment must be in PDF format and be 5 MB or less in size. To add the attachment, we will click the Choose File button, select our file, and click the Open button.

Let’s move on to Small Business Subcontracting. Here, we must answer the question, “Does this contract include a subcontracting plan?” Let’s select Yes. Whenever we answer Yes to this question, we must also enter the Date of last Individual Subcontracting Report or ISR or Summary Subcontracting Report or SSR below. We will select the date from the dropdown list.

Next, we will select Ratings. We will notice that we have the following evaluation areas: Quality, Schedule, Cost Control, Management, Small Business, Regulatory Compliance, and Other Areas. The individual evaluation areas are where we enter our ratings of the contractor’s performance and our narratives to describe that performance.

We’ll start with the Quality evaluation area. We’ll first notice the blue question mark next to the Quality heading. If we click the blue question mark, the help for this evaluation area will open. The help provides a very useful guide as to the factors we should consider when we assess Quality, and is particularly good to review if this is our first time writing an evaluation. Next, we will notice that the Past Rating is displayed. Since this is the first Interim evaluation for our contract, there is no prior rating for Quality and the Past Rating is displayed as N/A, or not applicable. When we write another evaluation next year, this year’s Quality rating will display as the Past Rating on that subsequent evaluation. Now, we must select a rating for the Quality evaluation area. We can do this by clicking the Rating dropdown list. The adjectives N/A, Exceptional, Very Good, Satisfactory, Marginal, and Unsatisfactory will be displayed. We will select the appropriate rating based on the rating definitions in the FAR. We have selected a rating of Very Good. Notice that the definition for a Very Good rating is displayed to the right of the Assessing Official Comments block. We should review the definition to ensure our contractor’s performance meets the criteria for the rating. It is important for us to remember that we must provide a narrative to support any rating that we assign. We will enter our narrative for the Quality evaluation area in the Assessing Official Comments block. We will note that we have a total of 24,000 characters available for the narrative for each evaluation area. The total number of characters we have entered so far is displayed above the Assessing Official Comments block. After we have finished entering our Quality narrative, let’s click on Schedule. We will notice that Quality now displays a red checkmark. The red checkmark indicates that we have rated the Quality evaluation area. When writing an evaluation, it is helpful to look for the checkmarks to see which areas we have rated and if any areas have been missed.

We will now enter a Rating and Narrative for the Schedule evaluation area. Next, we’ll click on Cost Control. Let’s assume that we have a fixed price contract. In this case, the Cost Control evaluation area would not be rated. Therefore, we would select a Rating of N/A, or not applicable. When an evaluation area is not applicable, there is no need to provide a corresponding narrative.

We’ll move on to Management. Let’s say that the contractor has exhibited performance problems in this area. We’ll select a Rating of Marginal and enter our supporting narrative.

Next, we have Small Business Subcontracting. Here we will evaluate the contractor’s efforts toward achieving the goals in the contract’s Small Business Subcontracting plan. We’ll enter a Rating. If there was no Small Business Subcontracting plan, we would have entered the rating of N/A. We’ll also remember that, if we rated this evaluation area, we must provide a supporting narrative.

We’ll move on to Regulatory Compliance and enter a Rating and narrative. The final evaluation area under Ratings is for Other Areas.

If there are important areas of performance that were not covered elsewhere on the evaluation, we can enter and rate those areas here. We can enter up to three Other Areas. For example, let’s say we wanted to evaluate the contractor’s compliance with the contract’s security requirements. We would enter Security in the first Other Areas block and select a Rating from the corresponding dropdown list. Next, we will enter our supporting narrative for this evaluation area in the Assessing Official Comments block below.

The final section we must complete is Assessor. In the Assessor section, we have an area where can enter up to 24,000 characters of additional general comments to discuss performance which was not previously addressed elsewhere on the evaluation. The general comments are optional. Next, we must answer the question, “Given what I know today about the contractor’s ability to perform in accordance with this contract or order’s most significant requirements, I would or would not recommend them for similar requirements in the future.” It is important to remember that the answer we give to this question should be consistent with the ratings and narratives that we have provided elsewhere on the evaluation. For instance, if we have chosen many Very Good or Exceptional ratings, we would expect to answer this question with “I would recommend them.” Now that have completed entering the proposed ratings and narratives, we must send the evaluation to the Assessing Official for their review and signature. We can do this by clicking on the Validate and Send to the Assessing Official button. Once we have sent the evaluation to the Assessing Official, we will receive a pop up box stating that a notice of the action has been sent to the Assessing Official. At this point, the Assessing Official will have received an email notification letting them know that the evaluation is ready for their review and action. The evaluation will have moved from our To-Do List to the Assessing Official’s To-Do List. The pop up also gives us the option to view the evaluation.

Let’s select OK in order to view the evaluation. We can scroll through the evaluation to see the information that we have entered. The view contains the administrative contract information and the ratings and narratives. We’ll notice that the signature blocks are blank at this point because the evaluation has not yet been signed. Now, we’ll click Home. At this point, we have completed the Enter Proposed Ratings step and are done working in CPARS. We will click Log Out in order to exit the system.

Congratulations! You have completed Lesson 3: Enter Proposed Ratings. In this lesson we logged in as an Assessing Official Representative, initiated the evaluation, entered the ratings and narratives, and sent the evaluation to the Assessing Official. You are now ready to move onto Lesson 4: Validate Proposed Ratings.