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As with the other speakers on the program, my assignment is to discuss our experiences in coping with Federal Requests-for-Proposal and to suggest possible improvements which, I believe, would benefit the sponsoring agencies, the research contractors, and--ultimately--the citizen for whose benefit the research must be construed as having been undertaken and who must pay the bill.

The simplest approach to defining the roles of the Government agency and the research contractor is to try to compare them with the situation in private industry.

The research contractor, in general, attempts to play three roles: First, as an advisor on problem definition and methodological specification; second, as the executor of the research; and third, as the analyst who summarizes the survey findings.

In industry, in an increasing number of instances contracting companies will present the research agencies with carefully written specifications, reducing its first role. This is particularly true in the case of large corporations where internal research staffs may be large and available. The modal case, however, remains the one in which company research staffs are either small or too busy to try to do everything. In these cases, the representatives of the potential client and research company meet to discuss the problem and to try to reach a mutual understanding of the problem and the data needs. The research company then retires to prepare a detailed proposal which does the following:

1. Defines the problem;
2. Establishes that it has a competent grasp of the problem;
3. Outlines the methodological procedures for the study;
4. Establishes the technical, financial, logistic competence to get the job done.

The client company then finds itself with proposals from several bidding research companies, all of which may differ significantly in their design aspects and their estimated costs.

What is important and noteworthy in this situation is that it permits the research agency a great deal of flexibility in design and, in effect, encourages imaginative efforts in this area.

If the research company is assigned the study, it then has the additional responsibilities of executing the study, analyzing the data and writing a detailed summary of those findings. The research agency may even be invited into the

corporate board rooms to discuss the findings and their implications with those who manage the company and must in some way implement the findings.

A final characteristic of survey research done for industry is its action orientation. In general, an existing problem motivates the research; the research, if successful, must provide guidance to the solution of the problem.

In dealings with the government, the situation is somewhat different. Taking the matter of project orientation first, we find that much of government sponsored research is policy-oriented rather than action-oriented. The deadlines for policy statements are often more slippery than those for actions and policy statements tend to be made on a more general level than action decisions. But that's only part of the difference between industry and government sponsored research.

In our experience, dealings with government agencies are initiated by an RFP. This is usually a very formal document in which the instructions on how to respond and the legal responsibilities of doing business with the government usually overwhelm the Statement of Work. The dealings with the government agency issuing the RFP are conducted at beyond arm's length. For example, all questions are to be directed to the Contract Officer who is usually not equipped to discuss any technical matters of the study design, analysis, etc. Ultimately, such questions are answered by a Technical Officer, via the Contract Officer, and sometimes even before the response to the RFP is due. When the contracting agency thinks there is a need for it, there may even be a briefing meeting to which bidders are invited. These have served some useful purposes. On one occasion, at least, the barrage of questions from the bidders was so devastating that the study had to be delayed over a year to permit the RFP-issuing agency to regroup and rewrite the RFP.

The goal of objective and fair evaluation of all proposals is absolutely vital. But the steps taken to achieve the goal sometimes work to limit the effectiveness of the research ultimately conducted. For example, the RFPs generally invite questions, but the lag between asking the questions and receiving the responses which must be broadcast to all bidders eats up valuable proposal-writing time. The RFPs, although often quite explicit in procedures to be employed, recognize that other alternatives are available and invite presentation of those alternatives as well. The burden, then, is on the bidder to prepare several proposals, all with equal enthusiasm. It's hard to write in detail and with promotional ardor on a plan which the research agency feels is either inadequate for the task, too expensive, or just plain poor.

In addition, the detailed specification of

research procedures often acts as a straitjacket and limits the contribution a research contractor can make to designing and executing the most effective study possible (either in terms of minimizing error for fixed expenditure or minimizing cost for required error). On the other hand, experience has taught us to be wary of invitations to be innovative. A recent RFP requested bidders to "stretch the limits of their imagination" in designing a study. One response, however, was turned down because it was "too new, it hadn't been tested."

In another instance, in an obvious attempt to give guidance to those responding to the RFP, it was specified that results be reported "...with an expected sampling error of $\pm 3\%$ at the 95% confidence level". But, 3% of what? The same RFP did not even clearly designate the eligible respondent.

Writing a proposal is, for the research agency, a dance to entice the shy contracting agency. But writing a proposal for a government agency often makes the research agency feel it is dancing in galoshes. For example, the statement of work of an RFP often includes a good discussion of the background of the problem. The RFP then goes on to request a restatement of the problem in the bidder's own words to demonstrate his understanding of the problem. A simple reproduction of the RFP's description is non-responsive. If the RFP says, "You will count apples", the response cannot say, "We will count apples". Instead, to be responsive, one might say, "The research contractor will determine the number of units in the class of fleshy and usually rounded and red or edible pome of fruit of a tree (genus Malus) of the rose family". Having carefully translated a simple declarative statement of four words and five syllables into something that most people can't understand, we have demonstrated an "understanding" of the problem. Why not a simple attestation that the bidder understands the problem and then let the study design itself testify to that understanding?

A final point -- because responding to a Government RFP is basically an expensive operation, tying up considerable man-hours, it is very troubling to discover after the RFPs have all been submitted that the selection of the successful bidder has been held up because the study hasn't yet been funded.

The relative importance of each of the three parts of the contractor's enterprise--advisor, executor, analyst--of course varies from study to study, but there appears to be a growing tendency to reduce the roles of advisor and analyst and to increase the role of doer. That, in itself, is a disappointing trend. The interesting parts of research projects are in the planning and analyzing. The room for innovation is essentially here.

The comparisons below are made to illustrate the differences between government and commercial

surveys at the risk of overstating those differences.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOVERNMENT AND COMMERCIAL SURVEYS

PURPOSES

GOVERNMENT

ENUMERATIVE

- TO ESTIMATE POPULATION PARAMETERS (E.G., POPULATION, UNEMPLOYMENT, PRICE LEVEL).
- PURPOSES ARE NOT USUALLY FRAMED IN TERMS OF IMMEDIATE ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE RESEARCH.
- STRATEGIC GUIDANCE
- FACTUAL DATA
- HOUSEHOLD DATA

COMMERCIAL

ANALYTIC

- TO TEST HYPOTHESES; TO SEEK BEST ALTERNATIVES.
- CONSEQUENCES OF DECISION ARE USUALLY SEEN MORE IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY: RISK EVALUATION IS PART OF RESEARCH DESIGN.
- TACTICAL GUIDANCE
- ATTITUDINAL DATA
- INDIVIDUAL DATA

SAMPLING

GOVERNMENT

ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT RECORDS (E.G., SOCIAL SECURITY, TAX ROLLS) FOR SAMPLING PURPOSES.

COMMERCIAL

INGENUITY IS OFTEN THE ONLY WAY TO CONSTRUCT GOOD SAMPLING FRAMES (E.G., AREA SAMPLING). ACCESS TO CUSTOMER LISTS.

SCHEDULING

GOVERNMENT

LONGER PERIODS FOR STUDY EXECUTION. SCHEDULES GOVERNED BY LONG-RANGE PLANNING NEEDS FOR INFORMATION.

COMMERCIAL

INFORMATION NEEDS ARISE FROM IMMEDIATE PROBLEMS. THEREFORE, TIGHT SCHEDULES AND "YESTERDAY" DEADLINES.

RESPONSE PROBLEMS

GOVERNMENT

GOVERNMENT SPONSORSHIP OFTEN IMPLIES FORCE OF LAW AND ENHANCES RESPONSE RATES. THIS CAN, AT TIMES, ACT NEGATIVELY TO AROUSE SUSPICIONS OF RESPONDENT.

COMMERCIAL

RESPONSE DEPENDS ON RESPONDENT'S GOOD WILL.

BUDGET

GOVERNMENT

DATA ARE USUALLY PUBLISHED; GOVERNMENT HAS MANY CLIENTS.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE: MINIMIZE COST TO DELIVER FIXED VARIANCE.

COMMERCIAL

DATA ARE USED INTERNALLY; AGENCY HAS ONE CLIENT.

MINIMIZE VARIANCE FOR FIXED COST.

In order not to leave the impression that all is difficult in dealing with Government agencies, there are RFPs that are well-written, there are attempts on the part of the writers to 'ballpark' the study's budget, there are even attempts to establish lists of qualified bidders from which to select research agencies for given projects. But these instances tend to be the exceptions, making dealing with the government an extremely costly and time-consuming operation.

The following suggestions are made on the basis of our general experience with the bidding operation and with the feeling that improvements in these areas would, as we stated in our opening remarks, help all parties concerned, the Govern-

ment agencies that require information, the research agencies, and the citizen:

1. Invite the participation of research agencies in the planning stages of a study.
2. On complex projects, select a small number of qualified agencies and, if necessary, give each a contract to develop a competitive design proposal.
3. Provide the responding research agency with greater design initiatives; don't specify all the details of the survey in the RFP.
4. The sampling specifications of an RFP should be written (or, at least, reviewed) by a sampling statistician; equally, the response to the RFP should be reviewed by a similar individual.
5. Make briefing sessions a matter of course for all projects; limit the size of each briefing session, scheduling more than one, if necessary.
6. The RFP should announce the budget level for each study.
7. Reduce the 'boiler plate' of the RFP.