

CFCM: A Manager's Perspective

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Managing a multi-person department that performs contract administration presents challenges in the area of personnel administration. Every manager faces personnel turnover through attrition, promotion or other causes. Such turnover generally requires replacement of the individual in the position being vacated. When qualified personnel are available for promotion within the department, the selection is greatly simplified; qualifications are known on a first-hand basis. Recruitment within a large company depends to some extent on the reputation of the individual(s) applying for the position. When recruitment is expanded to outside the company, the selection process can be long and arduous.

Each recruiting effort typically requires qualifications be considered for personnel who apply from a variety of sources. A tool that can be used by those involved in the selection process is certifications to demonstrate a level of professional qualification. The National Contract Management Association (NCMA) offers a series of certifications in the field of contract management. NCMA's Certified Federal Contracts Manager (CFCM) and Certified Commercial Contracts Manager (CCCM) programs identify those individuals that have achieved a defined level of expertise in Federal Government and commercial contracting, respectively.

Departments that administer contracts received by a company that makes sales to the Federal Government typically require individuals that are well-versed in the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) as well as any FAR supplement that might apply to procurements by the agency(ies) to which the company makes sales. Therefore, employees of both small and large businesses must understand certain FAR basics if they are to be successful in the Federal Government procurement arena.

Companies sell to local and state governments generally are not concerned with the FAR. Those sales fall under state law, which is based on the Uniform Commercial Code (UCC) in virtually all states except Louisiana. Subcontracts and purchase orders awarded by a Federal Government prime contractor are, almost without exception, governed by state law and, therefore, the UCC.

Thus, knowledge of both Federal and commercial contracting requirements is desirable in an individual being hired to fill a vacant or new position.

NCMA's CFCM examination is based on procurement under the FAR. When a job applicant is a CFCM, the individuals responsible for the selection to fill a contracts administration, subcontract administrator or buyer position have *prima-facie* evidence of that individual's knowledge of the FAR.

A candidate should have knowledge of the FAR requirements in the following areas that can impact almost any company that is, or desires to become, a government contractor:

- definitions of terms used in Federal Government procurement
- simplified acquisition procedures including micro-purchases
- the difference between invitations for bids (IFBs), requests for quotes (RFQs), requests for information (RFIs), and requests for proposals (RFPs), a prospective contractor's actions in preparing a reply, and expectation of the government's response to the reply
- commercial item contracting (and the narrow scope of the FAR that applies to that type procurement)
- different types of contracts including purchase orders, blanket purchase agreements, simplified contract format, and uniform contract format.
- application of Public Law in the FAR
- small business and other social program requirements.

This list represents the many areas of knowledge covered by the CFCM examination. It only touches on the wide variety of knowledge that will be required on a day-to-day basis to successfully fill a contracts administration position.

An individual desiring to achieve the CFCM certification must meet certain minimum requirements in addition to a detailed knowledge of the FAR. Among these are having achieved academic success as well as having attended relevant courses of continuing professional education (CPE). Thus a CFCM-certified candidate has the education background that indicates

readiness to “hit the ground running” upon entering into employment in the hiring manager’s department.

It is important to know if a candidate maintains current his or her certification. A CFCM certification must be renewed every five years to be current, except for those older professionals who qualify for a lifetime certification by virtue of their age. The recertification process requires evidence of having completed at least 60 hours of relevant CPE over the prior 5-year period. This means that an individual must stay current in the field of contract administration in order to be recertified. The result is an individual that can offer more to your department starting on day 1 of their employment.

A job applicant with a CFCM certification demonstrates a higher level of interest in the field of contract administration and a greater desire for professional excellence than someone who does not hold a certification in the field of contract management. While other certifications are offered by organizations other than NCMA, the CFCM and CCCM certifications are directly aimed at people who are responsible for administering contracts, subcontracts and purchase orders on behalf of a company. The application and study process leading up to achieving a CFCM certification also demonstrates initiative on the part of the individual.

In conclusion, managers involved in the hiring process can use CFCM certifications as a good indicator of individuals that are both interested in contracts administration and qualified at a defined level, to successfully perform contracts administration work. For two or more individuals that appear to be equally qualified in all other respects, having a CFCM certification can be a deciding factor in the selection process.