



Anne Abbott, DC Alliance of Youth Advocates  
Testimony to Committee on Government Operations: Roundtable on Office of Contracting and  
Procurement  
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Good morning Council member Bowser and thank you for the opportunity to testify on the performance of the District's Office of Contracting and Procurement. My name is Anne Abbott, and I am a policy analyst for the DC Alliance of Youth Advocates (DCAYA), a city-wide coalition of approximately 120 local youth-serving organizations dedicated to ensuring policies, programs, and practices within the District of Columbia enhance the quality of life and create opportunities for District youth.

DCAYA's primary interest in OCP stems from what we believe to be its unacceptable performance in the granting of In-School and Out-Of-School Year Round Workforce Development contracts on behalf of the District's Department of Employment Services during the 2010-2011 service year. The Year-Round Programs at DOES are one of the few resources available to the District's population of disconnected youth (youth that are neither in school or working) and when executed correctly have the capacity to positively affect the lives of hundreds of young people who are currently struggling to enter or remain in the labor market. Furthermore, the year round programs at DOES represent a precious infusion of federal grant money via the Workforce Investment Act that in this time of economic scarcity the District cannot afford to jeopardize through mismanagement or lacking oversight.

While significant pressure should be (and has been) put upon the Department of Employment Services to ensure that their staff writes quality RFPs and monitors and evaluates program quality once contracts are let, DOES' progress in facilitating positive workforce outcomes for young people has and will remain limited because of the ineffectiveness of OCP. It is important to note that DCAYA did not bid on any of the contracts for year round WIA programming, but as a youth advocacy group and a convener of youth serving organizations we have tracked the DOES-OCP contracting process closely and received an abundance of feedback from community vendors throughout this process.

While these contracts may seem a blip on the radar screen of government contracting, the impact for children and youth is very real; as are the opportunity costs and wasted funding that contracting problems like this cause.

I'd like to highlight that currently DOES runs a number of its programs "in house" that could easily be contracted out to high performing non-profits and community based organizations rather than forcing agencies like DOES to go far outside their mandate and provide services like case management and direct client support. There are plenty of outcomes driven organizations here in the District and we must look to those organizations, not untrained agency staffers to provide meaningful interventions for young people.

We must demand outcomes from all youth serving agencies in the District, but outcomes that contribute to something as important as unemployment seem especially pertinent given the District's current struggle. Employment outcomes will remain inconsistent when subject to a flawed contracting process occurs. Thus I would like to make the following recommendations as a way to ensure that in the future agencies' interactions with OCP are fruitful.

1) A system must be put in place to ensure that contract officers are communicating with their assigned vendors in a timely and efficient manner. This system must ensure that ALL contract officers are held to the same standard. Given that the final proposals organizations submit rely heavily on information passed along by contract officers, it is only fair that all vendors receive the same information and that the information is passed along on a timeline that allows vendors ample opportunity to include it in their proposals. The overall feeling among vendors throughout the last contracting process was one of extreme confusion, frustration and dissatisfaction and a large part of this problem is attributable to the extreme fluctuations in both the frequency and quality of communications by OCP.

2) OCP currently divides itself into four commodity groups one of which is “services”. Certainly this makes sense given the difference between contracting for an area like human services and procuring desks for a school building. However, OCP needs to further split up their “Services” commodity group so that certain contract officers can be subject matter experts in areas like workforce or youth development. Vendors need contract officers that bring a deeper level of knowledge than simple random assignment.

3) OCP must improve its transparency. Youth providers and the public still have no definitive explanation as to why the original round of contracts from the fall of 2010 were cancelled. Also despite numerous FOIA requests, I was unable to receive copies of the many solicitations that were put out to accurately document the flawed process. Lastly, OCP currently must post all contracts to its website over that are valued over \$ 100,000. OCP should post ALL of its contracts online so the public can may have a better understanding of where District funds are going.

4) OCP must better cooperate and communicate with its agency partners. While we understand the need to move vendors toward a better system of outcomes and accountability, contracts for extremely at-risk populations, like disconnected youth, must take into account the actual amount of time, resources and organizational infrastructure and supports it takes to truly effect the disconnected youth population. While an agency like DOES is responsible for writing the original RFP, OCP must then author the actual solicitation and vendors clearly were confused by the solicitation language. Furthermore, OCP must pay greater attention to ensuring that the final solicitation they issue is representative of the original intent put forth by the agency and more importantly is enforceable and easily monitored.

In closing, I look forward to continuing to work with the committee and officials at OCP at rectifying these barriers to effective contracting. I am happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.