LESSONS LEARNED/BEST PRACTICES

DAB Milestone Reviews

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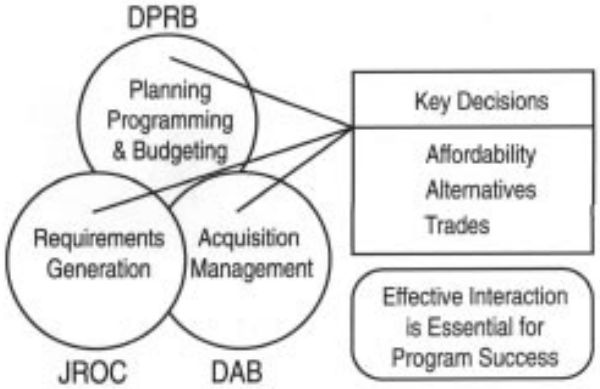
In this article we share with the defense program management community our experiences at Electronic Systems Center (ESC) related to Defense Acquisition Board (DAB) activity. While the scope of this writing is limited to some broad issues and generalities, we believe this article will be a useful source of reference for everyone facing a DAB decision during their careers. An important fact to keep in mind when facing a DAB decision is — *They Are All Different!*

FIGURE 1. Three Systems Interconnectivity



(Figure from DSMC briefing given by Rich Stillman, Eastern Region Director.)

DAB Process and Milestone Review Procedures

Three systems that overlap and must interact effectively in order to attain success are the Planning Programming and Budgeting system (PPBS), the Requirements Generation System, and the Acquisition Management System. The PPBS is subject to the Defense Planning Resources Board (DPRB), the requirements generation process to the Joint Requirements Oversight Council (JROC), and the DAB governs the acquisition management process. Key decisions are based on affordability, alternatives and tradeoffs. Figure 1 shows the relationships of the three systems.

An overall understanding of these three systems and their interconnectivity is imperative if one intends to navigate the choppy waters associated with a milestone review. The primary source of reference is Department of Defense Instruction (DODI) 5000.2, "Defense Acquisition Management Policies and Procedures." This Instruction will be your guidebook for the following:

—Acquisition Process and Procedures
—Requirements Evolution and Affordability
—Acquisition Planning and Risk Management
—Engineering and Manufacturing
—Logistics and Other Infrastructure
—Test and Evaluation
—Configuration and Data Management
—Business Management and Contracts
—Program Control and Review
—Special Situations
—Defense Acquisition Board Process.

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You should become intimately familiar with the last item on this list as soon as possible if there is a remote chance you will face a milestone review. Figure 2 lays out a generic flow for typical milestone reviews and can be used as a rule of thumb. The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and Air Force reviews (see acquisition review process) are listed separately in order for you to view the two distinctively, realizing both will be prepared for concurrently. We have used the Air Force Review Process here as an example because of our familiarity with the process; however, we are confident you can substitute other respective Service review processes for the Air Force approach with little difficulty.

Lessons Learned

The lessons learned are related directly to the formal service and DOD reviews along with the documentation required. The first step is to review thoroughly the processes and procedures necessary to allow for a DAB decision. The "Defense Acquisition Board Process" is found in DODI 5000.2; Part 13 and "Milestone Review Procedures and Documentation" are located in DODI 5000.2, Part 11, Section C. In addition to the familiarization with these areas of the DODIs, we found it absolutely necessary to review all prior DAB assessments, reports, action items, etc., related to our programs. For example, we reviewed prior Cost Analysis Improvement Group (CAIG) reports, Air Force Systems Acquisition Review Council (AFSARC) Implementors, Program Assessments, Documentation Memos, Acquisition Decision Memos (ADMs), Test and Evaluation (T&E) Reports, Planning Meeting Memos, and Acquisition Strategy documents.

Major Issues Guidance Document

This document should be published by OSD seven days following the planning meeting. The Draft Integrated Program Summary (IPS), the primary decision document for the DAB, will be published about 105 days after the Major Issues Guidance Document is released. This document identifies issues pertaining to exit criteria and establishes minimum program accomplishments for presentation to the DAB.

Lessons Learned/Best Practices

—Focus on producing a draft of the IPS as quickly as possible after the planning meeting. Coordinate in parallel and work any issues and any changes in real time. This will take some effort but if you stay a step ahead and coordinate your approach prior to the program review meetings, things will go more smoothly than you think.

—Seek consensus on issues before guidance is released. Make some calls, send some faxes, and ensure you have Service and user agreements, in principle, on the issues. If the user will not support your position, you have a problem.

—The Major Issues Guidance Document becomes a benchmark for all subsequent reviews in the milestone review. Deal with the major issues early because you'll find even if the issue goes away, the questions won't.

Draft Documentation Submission

This documentation is not yet approved by the Milestone Decision Authority, but is approved by the Service. From a program manager's perspec-

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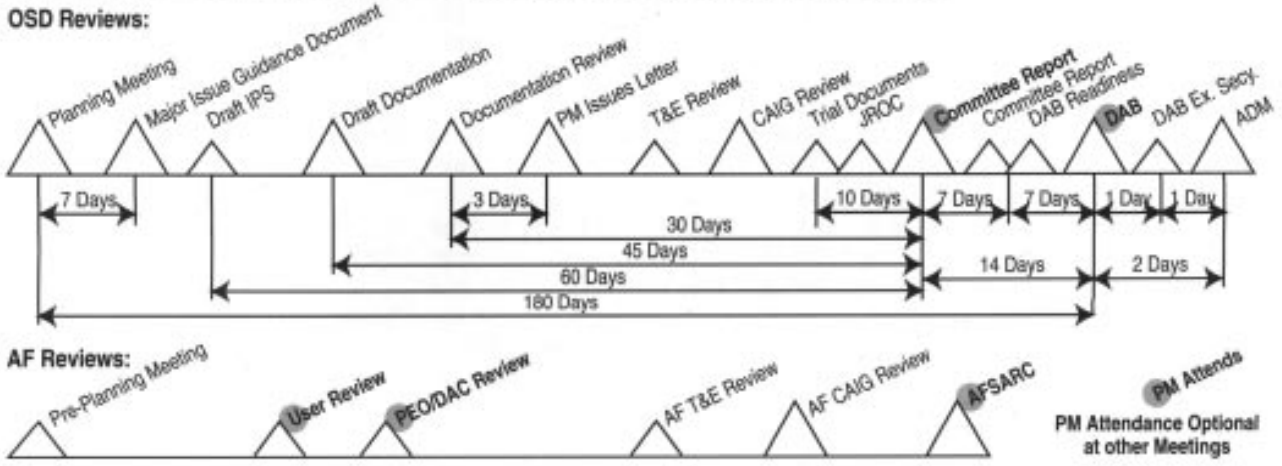
FIGURE 2. Generic DAB Flow (Typical Milestone Reviews).



tive, this is the final draft. All documentation must be approved by the Service and copies are provided to the OSD action officer. The due date is 45 days before the respective committee review and the review date will slip if the documents don't come in on time.

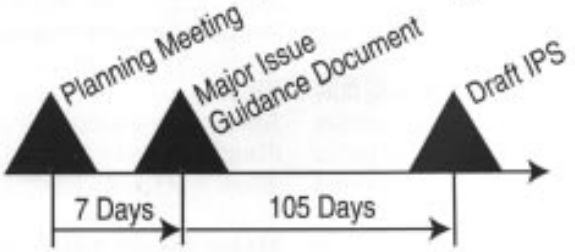
Lessons Learned/Best Practices

—Ensure proper lead time for Service coordination. Run a Program Evaluation Review Technique (PERT) analysis with an optimistic, pessimistic and modal time. The time it will take will most likely fall somewhere in-between the two extremes. Alleviate undue stress and simply do a little up-front planning.

—Provide a program acronym listing. This courtesy will pay dividends. All of us have our Service, command and program specific language. Make it easy on the reader and things will probably be easier for you.

—Establish configuration control procedures and keep an audit trail of all changes to the documents. Devise a documentation matrix to cross-check information consistency. Things can get hectic but without proper change controls, you've got chaos. For example, someone's opinion may slip in that it contradicts the program director's recently coordinated position. It's easier to change it back than to search for the guilty party. Also, with a matrix, you can ensure changes are made that apply to more than one document.

FIGURE 3. Document After Planning Meeting



—Where possible, precoordinate with OSD staff offices months in advance to ensure the approach and content are satisfactory at least in principle. It is understood that your Service may be hesitant to release a less than fully coordinated Service position; however, discuss the information that is common knowledge and see if you can reach early agreements on the format and approach to prevent unnecessary rework. In other words, don't try to outguess OSD; ask the questions. More often than not, you'll get good answers.

—Make sure the documentation answers the Major Issues Guidance. This may sound overly simplistic, but be absolutely sure you've answered the mail.

Test and Evaluation Review

The Test and Evaluation Master Plan (TEMP) is reviewed with the DOD director of operational testing and the DDR&E director of developmental testing. This plan lists critical test objectives and outlines the test approach and methodologies. The review objective, from a program manager's viewpoint, is to obtain TEMP approval.

Lessons Learned/Best Practices

—The entire review cycle is a lengthy process, so start early. Numerous agencies must coordinate and this can take feasibly 9-12 months to complete.

—Work closely with AF, OSD and AFOTEC staff offices throughout the process.

—Seek consensus and work to resolve issues early. As soon as issues arise, get on the phone, write point papers, or send correspondence. Communicate well and try to reduce the possibility of issues getting out of hand; keep them solvable.

—A "red-line" session as soon as possible is suggested for the draft TEMP, with as many coordination agencies. Face-to-face communication can head off or resolve issues quickly.

Documentation Review

This review takes place two weeks after draft documentation submission and is chaired by the OSD oversight office (OSD action officer). Representatives for all OSD committee principles and DOD components attend. Major questions or issues raised by the documentation are identified and reviewed, and new program developments are focused on. The final result is a documentation review memo to the Service acquisition executive.

Lessons Learned/Best Practices

—This review is an ideal opportunity to focus an issue resolution. Close as many issues as possible.

In other words, don't try to outguess OSD; ask the questions. More often than not, you'll get good answers.

—Communication is key. Seek a clear understanding of comments received, which should be provided in writing.

—The user rather than the system program director should brief requirements.

—Help OSD draft the documentation review memo by recapping the issues and categorizing them into three areas — major issues, minor issues and documentation comments.

Committee Review

This review ensures exit criteria are met and program accomplishments are completed. The committee reviews all issues and provides an Integrated Program Assessment to the DAB Principles. The committee also provides a "read-ahead" (one-page issue summaries of all documents) and recommends issues to the DAB. This is the most critical of all pre-DAB reviews and occurs approximately 14 days prior to the DAB.

Lessons Learned/Best Practices

—The program manager usually briefs the Integrated Program Summary and actions to resolve major issues. From the time the draft documents are submitted, all discussions should focus on resolving major issues. Issue resolution should address cost, schedule and performance parameters, including risk-management decisions and affordability trade-offs.

—The committee's purpose is to make recommendations concerning the merits of proceeding with the program and the exit criteria for the next review. If the process is working correctly, the recommendations here should come as no surprise.

A Few Words of Advice from Our DAB Experiences

—As your team progresses through the process, focus on remaining roadblocks so progress is continuous. Make sure you keep moving forward.

—Provide your DAB coordinator with authority and make it clear to the troops that the DAB is a highly important exercise and everyone's help is required — move it to the top of the program office priorities.

—Keep everyone informed and quickly coordinate fast-breaking news.

—Build a "can do" attitude in your team. The DAB process is no easy task and you won't be able to promise a painless process, but you can motivate people and reward the small and more grand accomplishments. Remember, the DAB is a 1-2 hour briefing that is really a culmination of many smaller accomplishments.

—Use experts whenever possible. You'll save time and effort if you have the expert with you to head off questions and clarify issues.

—Be as proactive as possible and ask for advice. Seek out people who have been through the process, see your DSMC regional director, and call anyone you think can offer help.

—Finally, keep an open mind, a good sense of humor, stay flexible, and take your vitamins — you're going to need the energy.

FIGURE 4. Draft Documentation

DSMC JOINS THE INTERNET

The Defense Systems Management College is in the midst of a major program to upgrade the automation facilities for staff, faculty and students. Named the Electronic Campus Project, the future systems at DSMC will improve the College computing capabilities and will allow students to maintain contact with the faculty after graduation. Classrooms will have new computers with CD-ROM players, campus network access, and the latest office automation software. The DSMC library will have a new system with improved cataloging and on-line access to information services. When the Electronic Campus is completed, a fiber optic backbone network will interconnect automation assets throughout the campus.

In January 1994, the DSMC Electronic Campus e-mail system was integrated initially into the MILNET and the Internet. As the Electronic Campus grows during 1994, eventually everyone on campus will have worldwide access via e-mail. When the Electronic Campus Project is completed, full Internet services, including TELNET and FTP, will be available. Additionally, a bulletin board system, open for public use and focused on acquisition and program management information, will be installed.

The Internet e-mail addresses at DSMC are of the form username@dsmc.dsm.mil, where username is normally a person's last name and first initial. All DSMC staff and faculty will be registered in the MILNET, so savvy users can use the WHOIS service on MILNET to look up names and e-mail addresses. The DSMC host computer is a Sun Microsystems Model 4-370, and the IP address is 198.97.207.254.

For assistance with the DSMC Electronic Campus, contact LTC Bert Garcia, USA, (703) 805-3462, or via e-mail at garciab@dsmc.dsm.mil.