

Army Defensive Cyber Operations (DCO) Recompete

ICF International

VALUE / SCOPE

Recompete win · Army DCO support services · June 2017

SITUATION

During my tenure leading federal cybersecurity growth initiatives at ICF, I was engaged as Capture Executive on the Army Defensive Cyber Operations (DCO) recompete. ICF held the incumbent position on the contract, providing mission-critical analytical, technical, and operational support to protect Army networks and infrastructure from adversarial threats. As the recompete approached, however, the program was in serious difficulty. The program manager had struggled to meet the Army's expectations across multiple dimensions: deliverable quality had declined, on-site leadership presence had become sporadic, and communication with key government stakeholders had grown inconsistent. The Army's technical leads and contracting officer had lost confidence in the program leadership, and informal feedback made clear that the customer felt ICF was no longer treating the contract as a mission partnership. The incumbent advantage ICF should have held was at risk of becoming a liability, and competitors who had tracked the program's performance issues were well-positioned to exploit that dissatisfaction with a credible 'time for a change' narrative.

TASK

My objective was twofold: first, to lead a deliberate program recovery effort that would repair damaged customer relationships and restore the Army's confidence in ICF's commitment before the solicitation was released; and second, to develop and execute a capture strategy that would translate that recovery into a recompete win. This required navigating a difficult internal personnel decision, rebuilding trust with senior and working-level government stakeholders, restoring delivery discipline on the active contract, and crafting a proposal narrative that was honest about past performance while making a forward-looking case grounded in demonstrated change — not promises.

ACTION

Recognizing that the conditions for a successful recompete are set during performance — not in the proposal — I initiated a deliberate recovery effort well before the solicitation was released. The first and most consequential action was a program manager replacement. The underperforming PM was removed and replaced with a senior leader who brought deep Army cyber experience and a demonstrated track record of strong customer partnership. This decision sent a clear signal, both internally and to the government, that ICF was treating the situation with urgency.

I directed the new program manager to immediately increase on-site engagement with Army leadership. Rather than status briefings, these early touchpoints were structured as listening sessions — an opportunity to understand the government's frustrations and unmet needs directly, without defensiveness. In parallel, I oversaw a comprehensive internal review of all active and recurring deliverables. Where quality had slipped, we implemented structured review processes and rebuilt the government's experience of receiving work that was not only on time but substantively stronger — a visible, tangible signal of the program's renewed focus.

Relationship repair was not limited to senior stakeholders. I ensured ICF invested equally in reconnecting with the Army's day-to-day technical staff — the analysts, engineers, and operators working alongside our team. These working-level relationships, often overlooked in recovery efforts, were essential to rebuilding trust across the full program. Internally, I assembled a disciplined cross-functional capture team integrating business development, technical solutioning, pricing, and contracts expertise, with measurable performance indicators to maintain accountability throughout the capture cycle.

The recompetes proposal was built around an honest but forward-looking narrative: ICF acknowledged where performance had fallen short, described specifically what had changed and why, and made a clear case for why the Army's mission would be best served by a team that had already demonstrated the ability to course-correct. The proposal did not ask the government to take our word for the improvements — the evidence was already on the table, visible in months of renewed performance prior to submission. The technical approach was strengthened to reflect the Army's evolved DCO mission requirements, incorporating updated tradecraft and enhanced reporting frameworks. Staffing continuity was positioned as a core risk mitigator — the institutional knowledge held by the cleared, experienced workforce was a genuine competitive advantage no new contractor could replicate.

RESULT

ICF won the Army DCO recompetes in June 2017. Evaluation feedback reflected the core objective of the recovery strategy: the government's confidence in ICF's leadership and commitment to the mission had been restored. The technical approach received strong marks, and the continuity of the cleared, experienced workforce was cited as a meaningful differentiator. The win validated a principle that has guided my approach to recompetes ever since — that incumbent advantage is not a baseline condition, it is earned through consistent delivery, and it can be lost quietly long before the RFP drops.

This capture reinforced several enduring leadership lessons. Difficult personnel decisions made early enough can reshape a customer's perception before it calcifies into an evaluation score. Listening — genuine, non-defensive listening — is one of the most powerful tools available in a competitive recovery. And the most compelling proposal narrative is one the customer has already watched come true. The Army DCO recompetes remains a clear example of how disciplined performance and honest capture strategy can overcome a significant deficit in customer confidence.