

INFLUENCE YOUR CPAR:



USE **EARLY ENGAGEMENT** TO OPTIMIZE
**CONTRACTOR PERFORMANCE
ASSESSMENT REPORTS**

BY JANE GREEN

WAS YOUR COMPANY UNPLEASANTLY SURPRISED BY A RECENT CONTRACTOR PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT REPORT (CPAR)?

Your team performed excellent work and the government contracting officer's representative (COR) expressed satisfaction. You assumed all was well. The CPAR, however, told a different story: Tepid ratings; brief, generic government comments; no mention of exceeding expectations; or even worse—it contained inaccurate statistics and poor ratings.

Your options are limited at this point. You'll need to act fast, prior to the 60-day lock-out date. You can contact the assessing official, state your case, and ask him or her to pull back the CPAR to change the ratings and/or comments to something you can mutually agree upon. The assessing official will likely ask you to enter a nonconurrence in the CPAR system so the change can be made. If you use this route, it's prudent to enter a statement in the "Contractor Comments" field that you are nonconcurring to allow the assessing official to make changes.

If you are unsuccessful in negotiating changes, you can enter a nonconurrence and provide detailed information in the Contractor Comments that support your nonconurrence, including empirical evidence of higher performance. A reviewing official will then review the assessing official's original ratings and comments—along with your Contractor Comments and argument for a better CPAR—and make a final determination as to whether any ratings or government comments should be changed.

Please note, however, that while reviewing officials have been known to overrule assessing official ratings, they are also just as likely to support the original ratings.

BUT—there's a way to avoid all this shock and hassle: Engage early and influence the CPAR.

EARLY ENGAGEMENT

The CPAR system encourages government reviewing officials, contracting officers, and CORs to engage with contractors throughout the year on performance. As a best practice, these officials are also encouraged to provide draft evaluations to contractors for discussion prior to entering them into the CPAR system.¹

It's becoming more common for agencies to require well-documented justification for CPAR ratings higher than a "satisfactory." Understanding how busy their federal government customers are, savvy federal contractors can support their clients, save them time and effort, and simultaneously influence the CPARS they receive by proactively initiating the dialogue.

To do so, build your CPAR early engagement tool kit. Establish your engagement schedule to begin 90 days from the end of your contract's performance period. Write your narratives to support the ratings you believe you deserve.

The CPARS.gov website training section² provides detailed video training and guidance³ on how to write detailed, descriptive CPAR narratives. Also, the Defense Logistics Agency has an excellent PowerPoint presentation⁴ on CPARS Quality Narrative Writing. A draft CPAR form is shown on pages 56–57.⁵

Train all of your program/project managers, site leads, or other client-facing managers and adopt the early engagement program across your entire portfolio of federal contracts.

You'll be pleasantly surprised when you notice ratings begin to track higher. **CM**

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ENDNOTES

1. See <https://www.cpars.gov/pdfs/CPARS-Guidance.pdf>.
2. <https://www.cpars.gov/webtrain.htm>.
3. <https://www.cpars.gov/refmatl.htm>.
4. Available for download at https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rc=t=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKewi-8vrm9MrgAhVQMd8KHYYtJD6QQFJAegQIBhAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.dla.mil%2FPortals%2F104%2FDocuments%2FEnergy%2FUtility%2520Services%2FE_CPARSQuality_NarrativeWriting_Writing_Effective_CPARS.pptx%3Fver%3D2017-07-155150-890&usq=AOvVaw3_Zgj1EX-xZiInC0d230YF.
5. If you'd like this pre-formatted draft CPAR form in Word or Adobe Acrobat formats, email me at jane.green@logistics-sys.com.

ARTICLE CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

EARLY ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT



KNOW THE REQUIREMENTS

Hold a kick-off meeting with your client. Discuss metrics and QASPs. Tell the client you take CPARs seriously. Ask them to agree to an early engagement program.



PROOF OF PERFORMANCE

Provide periodic written progress reports that document accomplishments, address metrics. Include measurable data on work projects.



CONTINUOUS CLIENT FEEDBACK

Request periodic progress meetings with your client. Actively seek client feedback and document the feedback.



WORK THE SCHEDULE

Establish your early-engagement schedule and follow the steps in a timely manner to stay on track.

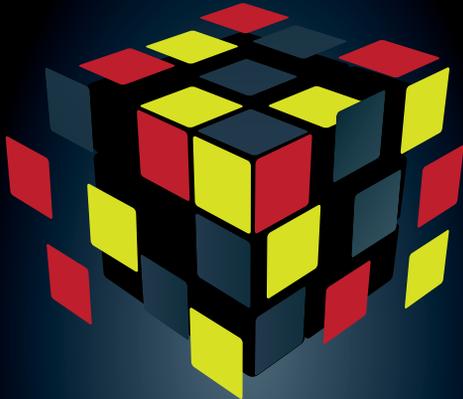


SUBMIT DRAFT CPAR OR SELF-EVALUATION

Use information from your periodic progress reports, deliverables, and client feedback to help write a great CPAR you can submit to your client.

FIGURE 1.

Complex acquisition challenges?



Simplify your acquisition life-cycle process



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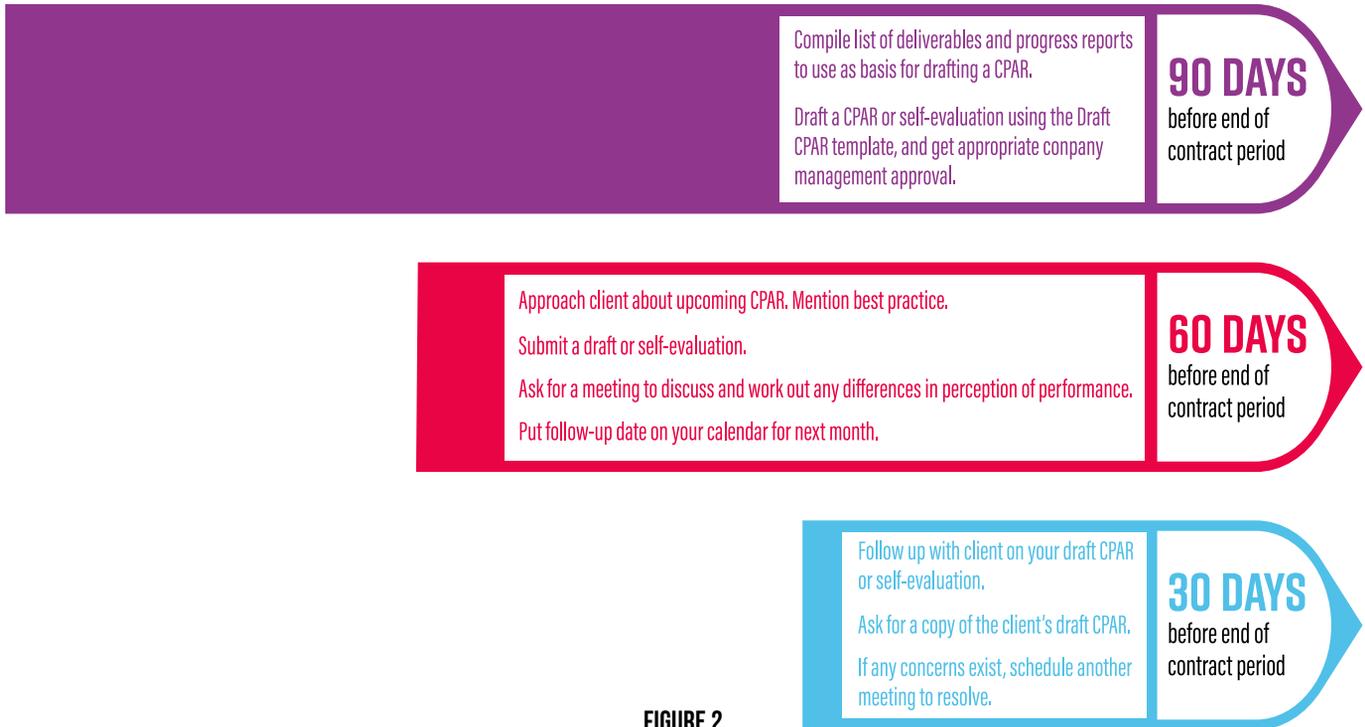


FIGURE 2.

RATING	CONTRACT REQUIREMENTS	PROBLEMS	CORRECTIVE ACTIONS
EXCEPTIONAL	Exceeds Many—Government Benefit	Few Minor	Highly Effective
VERY GOOD	Exceeds Some—Government Benefit	Some Minor	Effective
SATISFACTORY	Meets All	Some Minor	Satisfactory
MARGINAL	Does Not Meet Some—Government Impact	Serious: Recovery Still Possible	Marginally Effective: Not Fully Implemented
UNSATISFACTORY	Does Not Meet Most—Government Impact	Serious: Recovery Not Likely	Ineffective

FIGURE 3. CPARS.GOV RATING AND NARRATIVES (FAR 42.1503, TABLE 42-1)

ARTICLE CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

DRAFT Contractor Performance Evaluation
Contract Number: _____
Evaluation Period: _____

1. Company Name and Address:		
2. Contractor Representative Email Address:		CPARS USER ID:
2. Contracting Officer Representative:		
3. Brief Description of Requirement:		
4. Contracting Officer Representative Evaluation (Blocks 4a through 4h, as appropriate)		
4a. Technical Performance (Quality of Product/ Service)	Comments:	5 - Exceptional 4 - Very Good 3 - Satisfactory 2 - Marginal 1 - Unsatisfactory
4b. Schedule/ Timeliness	Comments:	5 - Exceptional 4 - Very Good 3 - Satisfactory 2 - Marginal 1 - Unsatisfactory
4c. Cost Control	Comments:	5 - Exceptional 4 - Very Good 3 - Satisfactory 2 - Marginal 1 - Unsatisfactory
4d. Business Relations/ Customer Satisfaction	Comments:	5 - Exceptional 4 - Very Good 3 - Satisfactory 2 - Marginal 1 - Unsatisfactory
4e. Management of Key Personnel	Comments:	5 - Exceptional 4 - Very Good 3 - Satisfactory 2 - Marginal 1 - Unsatisfactory
4f. Utilization of Small Business (complete only if the contract contains a subcontracting plan)	Comments	5 - Exceptional 4 - Very Good 3 - Satisfactory 2 - Marginal 1 - Unsatisfactory
4g. Total Score (Sum of Scores from each area): _____ Mean Score (Add the ratings above and divide by the number of areas rated): _____		
4h. Would you select this firm again? Given what I know today about the contractor's ability to perform what they promised in the contract, I (select one of the phrases below) award to them today given that I had a choice. a. Definitely would b. Probably would c. Might or might not d. Probably would not e. Definitely would not		

GUIDANCE

To justify a **(5 - Exceptional)** rating, identify multiple significant events and state how they were of benefit to the Government. A singular benefit, however, could be of such magnitude that it alone constitutes an Exceptional rating. Also, there should have been NO significant weaknesses identified.

To justify a **(4 - Very Good)** rating, identify a significant event and state how it was a benefit to the Government. There should have been no significant weaknesses identified.

To justify a **(3 - Satisfactory)** rating, there should have been only minor problems, or major problems the contractor recovered from without impact to the contract. There should have been NO significant weaknesses identified. Per DOD policy, a fundamental principle of assigning ratings is that contractors will not be assessed a rating lower than Satisfactory solely for not performing beyond the requirements of the contract.

To justify a **(2 - Marginal)** rating, identify a significant event in each category that the contractor had trouble overcoming and state how it impacted the Government. A Marginal rating should be supported by referencing the management tool that notified the contractor of the contractual deficiency (e.g., management, quality, safety, or environmental deficiency report or letter).

To justify a **(1 - Unsatisfactory)** rating, identify multiple significant events in each category that the contractor had trouble overcoming and state how it impacted the Government. A singular problem, however, could be of such serious magnitude that it alone constitutes an unsatisfactory rating. An Unsatisfactory rating should be supported by referencing the management tools used to notify the contractor of the contractual deficiencies (e.g., management, quality, safety, or environmental deficiency reports, or letters).

NOTE 1: Plus or minus signs may be used to indicate an improving (+) or worsening (-) trend insufficient to change the assessment status.

NOTE 2: N/A (not applicable) should be used if the ratings are not going to be applied to a particular area for evaluation.

Technical Performance (Quality)	Cost Control	Schedule/Timeliness	Business Relations
1. Unsatisfactory: Most performance requirements are not met; recovery not likely.	1. Unsatisfactory: Significant cost overruns; not likely to recover cost control.	1. Unsatisfactory: Many late deliveries or reports; negative cost impact; loss of capability for the Government; ineffective corrective actions; not likely to recover.	1. Unsatisfactory: Delinquent responses, lack of cooperative spirit, unsatisfied user/customer, unable to improve relations; significantly under subcontractor goals; excessive unnecessary, change proposals to correct poor management; significantly untimely definitization of change proposals.
3. Satisfactory: Met all performance requirements; some minor problems, satisfactory corrective actions.	3. Satisfactory: Met overall cost/price estimates while meeting all contract requirements.	3. Satisfactory: On-time deliveries or report submittal; minor problems, did not affect contract schedule.	3. Satisfactory: Professional, reasonably responsive; met expectations; adequate user/customer satisfaction. Met subcontractor goals; reasonable change proposals, reasonable definitization cycle
5. Exceptional: Met all performance requirements; minor problems, highly effective corrective actions; improved performance quality and results.	5. Exceptional: Significant reductions while meeting all contract requirements; use of value engineering or other innovative management techniques; quickly resolved cost issues, effective corrective actions facilitated cost reductions.	5. Exceptional: Significantly exceeded delivery or reporting requirements (e.g., all on-time with many early deliveries or reports to the Government's benefit); quickly resolved delivery or reporting issues; highly effective corrective actions.	5. Exceptional: Highly professional, responsible, proactive; significantly exceeded expectations; high user/customer satisfaction; significantly exceeded SB/SDB subcontractor goals; minor changes implemented without cost impact; limited change proposals; timely definitization of change proposals.