



SARA

Case Study Outline:

Interviewed Shari Dougherty, Contracts Manager and Matt Lindsey, Contractors Administrator.

Scientific Applications & Research Associates (SARA), Inc., was formed in 1989 to provide engineers and scientists an agile and flexible work environment to help create specialized technologies and innovations. SARA prides itself on being able to perform state-of-the art technology at small business rates. Their novel and cost-effective technologies and solutions have helped customers around the globe address real world problems. To continue to keep rates low and efficiency high, the company has streamlined and simplified their proposal estimating and submission processes.



A Better Solution

SARA has managed their pricing process with the ProPricer system since 2018. However, one of SARA's Contracts Managers, Shari Dougherty, was familiar with ProPricer long before that. Working with ProPricer at her former job with another defense contractor, Shari knew the kind of reports and capabilities ProPricer could bring to the table.

"I would find myself spending immense amounts of time making sure the data we gave our prime and the data we gave to the government matched, when I knew in ProPricer the same thing could be done in minutes," said Shari.

In addition to the inefficiency of using spreadsheets, SARA's Contracts team was constantly having to check the integrity of their data. Since there was no standardized estimating and pricing tool in place, SARA lacked control of data rights and the formulas that underpinned

critical calculations. Essentially, estimators could inadvertently overwrite hard-coded formulas, unique labor estimates and rates, and associated indirect costs without realizing the impact it had on the proposal estimating and submission processes.

"When estimators would go through and provide their inputs, some of them would inadvertently make changes that resulted in formula errors which would completely change the entire price. Or they would use an old version and we'd have to go back and put new rates in and validate and update other data. That created a lot of challenges, just having a very vulnerable open-sourced program that anyone could touch, mess with, and override," said Matt Lindsey, Contractors Administrator

After realizing the potential for errors and the time involved in reviewing and

updating proposals to ensure accuracy, Shari realized that a solution had to be brought to her corporate office. At first, the thought of replacing SARA's current long-standing process of using Excel for proposal development was a tough sell due to the expense of procuring a new pricing solution software; however, once the team saw the many benefits ProPricer offered, SARA recognized the efficiency they could bring to their processes. "We started out with an evaluation and began working in the ProPricer environment," said Shari. "Once everyone saw the accuracy, the ease in which we could change rates, perform what-if analysis, copy proposals, ensure accuracy and compliance, and it's extensive reporting capabilities - we were confident we'd get buy-in."

Standardizing the Process

“The ProPricer process enforcement ensures that our estimators are inputting data correctly without inadvertently making mistakes. It makes for a lot less double-checking, and creates fewer errors in the process”

After implementing ProPricer, SARA's Contracts team came to quickly appreciate the structure that ProPricer brought to their company. Standardizing and streamlining their processes meant estimators could no longer make changes that could compromise the accuracy and compliance of the data.

“The ProPricer process enforcement ensures that our estimators are inputting data correctly without inadvertently making mistakes. It makes for a lot less double-checking, and creates fewer errors in the process,” Matt said. Beyond providing data management capabilities, ProPricer has also accelerated the overall bid process. In their Excel model, the SARA team was constantly having to cut estimates from Excel and paste them into Word. They then would have to reformat those estimates to make certain all the data was presented properly. Eliminating the back and forth and reducing the reformatting time has brought significant time savings as well as reduced the risk of errors due to the manual process.

“The process itself took a ton of time. Then, if anything ever changed after you put all your data in, you basically had to start from scratch,” said Matt. SARA's customer satisfaction with SARA's proposals has increased now that they use a pricing system that provides consistently formatted displays and reports without any of the awkward formats and page breaks that plague spreadsheets and Word documents. SARA has received positive feedback from multiple customers who are used to the standard reports that can be generated in ProPricer as well as SARA's ability to provide rapid responses on RFPs.

The Capability to Handle Proposals of any Size

Being a small business, SARA has relied on the flexibility and scalability of ProPricer to quickly develop proposals and prove their accuracy in real time. In the past very minor changes to a proposal could result in hours, or even days, of additional work. Now their team can make updates with a couple clicks of a button.

“We have so many different contract types, customers, and requirements. ProPricer is a significant time-saver regardless of the proposal size or complexity. It saves more time on some proposals than on others; however, it's so useful we use it on all of our bids,” said Matt. Additionally, they have seen a vast improvement when they need to submit their fully-disclosed proposals to the government. “That was often a HUGE challenge in the past. We would frequently have to create everything they wanted from scratch in our own custom-made spreadsheet, which could take up to several days of solid work. And then we had to make sure it tied out to the other spreadsheets, which did not always reconcile right away so we would have to manually identify the discrepancies,” Matt noted. “Now we can say to the government ‘ok – you want all this information, let me just send you exactly what I sent them [the prime]. Here is all of the data, with every single breakdown of our Overhead, G&A, and Cost of Money’. It takes me two minutes to set that up.”



Flexible



Scalable



Fast



That all takes a tremendous amount of time, and I don't think we would have had the time to actually get to all of those proposals with the deadlines our customers had unless we had ProPricer."

The Future with ProPricer

With the ease of entering new proposal templates, updating rates, updating travel per diems, having a variety of custom reports for specific customers, etc., SARA has already begun to see results in the first year of utilizing ProPricer.

The team now can open the database, pick a reusable proposal template with their entire library of cost data already populated, and be off and running in no time. This dramatically reduced the potential for errors by ensuring proper rates, burdens, and travel per diems are being utilized, which in turn has also sped up the bid cycle time.

"The amount of proposals we've been able to get out in a timely manner has definitely gone up. We had 128 proposals in 2018, and we are already at 150 in 2019 and the year is not over," said Matt. "And that number doesn't include all the proposal revisions, ROMs, and "what-ifs" customers have asked us for. That all takes a tremendous amount of time, and I don't think we would have had the time to actually get to all of those proposals with the deadlines our customers had unless we had ProPricer."

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