

Implementation of the Continuous Learning Policy for the USEPA Acquisition Workforce Members

APPLICABILITY: The policy applies to all personnel, designated by the Agency's Senior Procurement Executive (SPE) as members of the acquisition workforce pursuant to OFPP Policy Letter 05-01. This policy will be incorporated into the Contract Management Manual during the next revision.

RESPONSIBILITIES:

Acquisition Career Manager (ACM): The Senior Procurement Executive will appoint the ACM and will ensure that implementation of this policy for Agency acquisition workforce members is in accordance with continuing education standards established by the Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP), and is consistent with existing procedures and practices for meeting the current standards of the Agency.

Supervisors: Supervisors play a key role in continuous learning. They will ensure, within organizational workload and funding constraints, that individuals are provided duty time for planned continuous learning activities. They will allow telework for continuous learning web based training, as appropriate. They must also ensure that the annual Individual Development Plans or comparable documents prepared for their personnel include opportunities for participating in continuous learning activities, and then document workforce members' records for completion of continuous learning requirements. The Continuous Learning Guide assists supervisors and members in helping determine the points to be credited for continuous learning activities.

Agency Acquisition Workforce Members: It is each workforce member's responsibility to meet the mandatory requirement of obtaining the number Continuous Learning Points (CLP) required for their position within each two year cycle. Each person will identify and discuss with his or her supervisor during an annual review the types of continuous learning activities to pursue. Individuals should also verify records to ensure that accomplishment of continuous learning requirements have been recorded.

DEFINITIONS:

• ***Acquisition Workforce Member: Contract Specialist.*** All positions in the general contracting schedule series; GS-1102, GS-1105, and GS-1106. They are required to earn 80 CLPs every two years.

• ***Acquisition Workforce Member: Contracting Officer's Representative (COR).*** All employees who are appointed by Contracting Officers for the purpose of performing particular contract administration functions. Also known at the Agency by the following titles: Project Officer, Work Assignment Manager, Delivery Order Project Officer, Task Order Project Officer, or Task Monitor. Note that this policy does not impact anyone

who is *solely* a Project Officer of Assistance Agreements (grants, cooperative agreements, or interagency agreements). They are required to earn 40 CLPs every two years.

- ***Acquisition Workforce Member: Contract Finance and Property Support Personnel.*** Positions in the Office of Acquisition Management (OAM) which are in the general accounting, auditing, and property management schedule series; GS-0510, GS-0511, and GS-1103. They are required to earn 80 CLPs every two years.

- ***Certification Training:*** Training required for certification in accordance with OFPP Policy Letter 05-01. Certification training may be counted toward the accumulation of Continuous Learning Points.

- ***Continuous Learning Activities:*** Personal and professional growth accomplishments by acquisition workforce members resulting in improved professionalism and better contributions to the Agency mission. Any course or activity with a clear purpose and objective which will maintain, improve, or expand skills and knowledge relevant to the work overseen by the acquisition workforce member may be considered acceptable.

- ***Continuous Learning Points (CLPs):*** Points awarded for successful completion of Continuous Learning Activities.

- ***Two Year Cycle:*** October 1, 2005 through September 30, 2007 is the first training cycle under this policy. Following cycles will follow the same pattern; 10/01/07-09/30/09, 10/01/09-09/30/11, and so forth.

SPECIFIC GUIDELINES: Professional improvement is a continuing cycle. It includes certification training and the full range of continuous learning activities. The following sections describe the guidelines for determining CLPs. These are only guidelines and supervisors have flexibility in assigning points. The supervisor, in conjunction with the acquisition workforce member, should use these guidelines to determine points credited for any given training or developmental activity.

CORs and Contract Specialists are encouraged to select meaningful courses/activities which will aid them in overseeing their contracts. OAM is providing autonomy to the CORs and their management to obtain the CLPs using this guidance document. Managers and acquisition workforce members must use the flexibility judiciously because there are some pitfalls associated with this latitude.

All CLPs earned must show a demonstrated link to the acquisition workforce member's current role as a COR, a Contract Specialist, or a Finance and Property Support Personnel. It is not necessary to earn all CLPs through activities that have an obvious link to acquisition (i.e., "acquisition" in the title of the activity.)

For example, a COR who is a biologist managing a work assignment would like to attend a seminar on the use of a specific piece of equipment or scientific concept to gain a more thorough understanding of the work plan or approach of the contractor they monitor. This is acceptable.

Another example, a COR who is an engineer possesses a Professional Engineer's License that requires continuous learning to remain valid. The COR currently manages a contract for meeting support that has nothing to do with engineering. Acquisition CLPs will not be granted for those engineering activities because they are not related to the work the COR is performing related to acquisition.

1. Staying current in functional areas; acquisition, technology, scientific, and business initiatives; and, leadership and management. The majority of the workforce will participate in continuous learning activities in these functional areas. Obtaining CLPs through activities related to functional areas ("cross training" or activities that may not obviously related to acquisition) will require more judgment from the supervisors and workforce members. **All CLPs earned must be show a demonstrated link to the acquisition workforce member's current role as a COR, Contract Specialist, or Finance and Property Support Personnel.** Supervisors may require that the employee provide a brief narrative to document the nexus between the activity and their current role as an acquisition workforce member.

A number of activities can be used to stay current in functional areas. Examples include, but are not limited to:

A. Training Activities

- 1) *Completing awareness training.* Examples include, OAM briefing sessions to acquaint the workforce with new or changed policy or Agency training related to ethical behavior and security awareness. There is generally no testing/assessment of knowledge gained.
- 2) *Completing learning modules and training courses.* These may be formal or informal offerings from a recognized training organization, including in-house training course/sessions, which include some form of testing/assessment for knowledge gained.
- 3) *Performing Self-Directed Study.* An individual can keep current or enhance his or her capabilities through a self-directed study program agreed to by the supervisor.
- 4) *Teaching.* Agency acquisition workforce members are encouraged to share their knowledge and insights with others through teaching of courses or learning modules. Teaching is also a part of the Professional Activities category.

5) *Mentoring*. Helping others to learn and become more productive workers or managers benefits the Agency and the individuals involved. Mentoring is also a part of the Experience category in the following section.

B. Professional Activities

1) *Participating in Organizational Management*. Membership alone in a professional organization will not be considered as fulfilling continuous learning requirements, but participation in the organization leadership will. This includes elected/appointed positions, committee leadership roles, or running an activity for the organization.

2) *Attending/Speaking/Presenting at Professional Seminars/ Symposia/ Conferences*. An acquisition workforce member can receive points for attending professional seminars or conferences. However, the supervisor should consider devising a method to determine that the individual learned something meaningful from the experience. Due to the additional effort involved in preparation and delivery, making presentations should get full credit for each hour involved in preparation and presentation. However, care should be taken to avoid awarding CLPs for presentations that do not advance the employee's knowledge, but that are considered work product.

3) *Publishing*. Articles for publication normally will meet the criteria for continuous learning. However, care should be taken to avoid awarding CLPs for publications that do not advance the employee's knowledge, but that are considered work product. Points will be awarded only in the year published. Compliance with any Agency publication policy is required.

4) *Participating in Workshops*. Points should be awarded for workshops with planned learning outcomes.

5) *Professional Examination, License, or Certificate*. This includes such activities as passing the CPA exam, licensing as a Professional Engineer, or Project Manager Certification from the Project Management Institute. CLPs will be credited only in the year awarded.

C. Educational Activities

1) *Formal training*. Supervisor should use Continuing Education Units (CEUs) as a guide for assigning points for formal training programs that award CEUs. The CEUs can be converted to CLPs at 10 points per CEU.

2) *Formal academic programs*. For formal academic programs offered by educational institutions, each semester hour is equal to one CEU. A three-hour credit course would be worth three CEUs and 30 CLPs.

The following is a summary chart of recommended CLPs:

CREDITABLE ACTIVITIES	POINT CREDIT (see note)
<i>Academic Courses :</i>	
Quarter Hour	10 per Quarter Hour
Semester Hour	10 per Semester Hour
Continuing Education Unit (CEU)	10 per CEU
Equivalency Exams	Same points as awarded for the course
<i>Training Courses/Modules :</i>	
DAU Courses/Modules	10 per CEU (see DAU catalog)
Other Functional Training	1 point per hour of instruction
Leadership or Other Training	1 point per hour of instruction
Equivalency Exams	Same points as awarded for the course
<i>Professional Activities :</i>	
Professional Exam/License/Certificate	10-30 points
Teaching/Lecturing	2 points per hour; maximum of 20 (1102) or 10 (COR) points per year
Symposia/Conference Presentations	2 points per hour; maximum of 20 (1102) or 10 (COR) points per year
Workshop Participation	1 point per hour; maximum of 8 points per day and 20 (1102) or 10 (COR) points per year
Symposia/Conference Attendance	.5 point per hour; maximum of 4 points per day and 20 (1102) or 10 (COR) points per year
Publications	10 to 40 points

Note - All activities may earn points only in the year accomplished, awarded, or published. Points may not be carried over into a new two-year period (banking).

2. Certification training. Certification training for Contract Specialists and CORs is required by OFPP and is a very important, if not the most important, facet of professional training for the acquisition workforce member. Obtaining all core acquisition training should be the first priority for workforce members. However, there are times, such as waiting for a class to become available when other non-core continuous learning activities are appropriate. Certification training will count for continuous learning points.

A. For Contract Specialists, the core acquisition training follows the Defense Acquisition University curriculum which can be viewed at www.dau.mil.
NOTE: Contract Specialists considered members of the legacy workforce do not have to retake courses simply because the curriculum has changed.

B. For Agency CORs, the core acquisition training is begins with either the OAM provided 3-day COR training course OR the Federal Acquisition Institute's online course, "COR Mentor Program". Every three years, CORs are required to take the OAM provided COR Recertification course.

3. Experience. The Experience category includes on-the-job experiential assignments, and intra/inter-organizational rotational career broadening and developmental experiences. While supervisors and employees must use discretion in arriving at a reasonable point value to be awarded for rotational and developmental assignments, a sliding scale is recommended. Suggested points for such assignments are in the following table.

The assumption is that longer assignments are more beneficial than shorter assignments. The supervisor may feel that an individual may deserve more or less than the values shown. In determining the points for a rotational or developmental assignment, the supervisor should consider both the long-term benefit to the Agency, and the immediate benefit to the supervisor’s organization and the workforce member. For example, a second rotational assignment of the same sort would be less valuable than a different type of rotational assignment.

When experience or other non-assessed activities are to be used to earn CLPs, certain principles should be followed. Supervisors and employees should pre-define, as closely as possible, the tasks to be accomplished, expected outcomes, and the learning opportunities. If it is an assignment, the individual should have a mentor during the assignment. Accomplishment of a product, such as a briefing, a project design, a report, or other work product that shows the learning attained, is desirable. Sharing the knowledge and experience gained and the product with others in the organization should be highly encouraged.

The following is a summary chart of recommended CLPs:

CREDITABLE ACTIVITIES	POINT CREDIT (see note)
<i>Experience</i>	
On-the-Job Experiential Assignments	Maximum of 20 (1102) and 10 (COR) points per year
Rotational Assignments	Maximum of 40 (1102) and 20 (COR) points per year
Training With Industry	Maximum of 40 (1102) and 20 (COR) points per year
IPT/Special Project Leader	Maximum of 15 points per year
IPT/Special Project Member	Maximum of 10 points per years
Mentor	Maximum of 5 points per year
Assignment Length (Rotational Assignments or Training with Industry)	Recommended Points
12 Months	80
9 Months	60
6 Months	40
3 Months	15
2 Months	10
1 Month	5

APPLICATION OF GUIDELINES: It is expected that supervisors will use the Guidelines and their own professional judgment in arriving at points to be awarded for any activity undertaken to meet the standards. While supervisors have the authority to establish points for activities, any concerns of employees or disputes may be addressed through the Agency ACM.

OFPP mandates that agencies collect, maintain, and utilize the continuous learning information to ensure effective management of the acquisition workforce. FAI maintains an acquisition career management information system (ACMIS found at www.acmis.gov) that is required to have complete and current information on each workforce member.

OAM is currently establishing an implementation plan to bring the Agency acquisition workforce on-line with the ACMIS system. The current OFPP deadlines for compliance are, Contract Specialists and any other warranted individuals 10/01/06, and all others 04/01/07.

The agency has several “home grown” tracking systems in place. These may be used in the interim. At a minimum, supervisors must ensure that all workforce members keep a record of their CLPs for audit purposes.