
Letters of Request Lean Six Sigma Project Completes Control Tollgate

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Letters of Request (LORs), are an essential step in the process of foreign military sales (FMS). A major project has been underway since last summer to apply the principles of Lean Six Sigma (LSS) to examine two key aspects of LORs. First, what does it take for an LOR to be “actionable”; and second, how do we ensure that LORs, especially for more complex cases, get processed in a timely fashion?

This LSS team started with the second question. Their charter stated the problem clearly:

Failure to process LORs in a timely manner and a lack of useful information (as to what the country really needs) result in serious delays and a loss of confidence in the FMS system.

With that in mind, Keith Rowe, Deputy Director for Europe and Africa in the Operations Directorate, sponsored a team from DSCA Headquarters to examine data drawn from over 3,500 Letters of Offer and Acceptance (LOAs) and Amendments. They also gathered inputs from nearly 100 FMS practitioners using a detailed survey. From that data, the team recommended setting new standards of timeliness to receipt for the LOR and then [having] it tasked out for writing the LOA. They expect that, by setting standards and encouraging the use of collaborative tools by DSCA and the Implementing Agencies, we will get a quicker and clearer picture of those items that support both the international customer’s needs and U.S. Government policy.

The team consisted of Eric Ferguson, Black Belt; Tom Keithly, project Green Belt; and DSCA employees Jim McFadden, Mark Rumohr, Terry Ormsby, Joe Cumiskey, Debra Longmire, Kidd Manville, and Charley Tichenor. They were supported by subject matter experts from the military departments and by Frank Campanell of DISAM. The Control Tollgate marks the completion of the final of five LSS stages.

In late March [2009], Keithly briefed the implementing agencies and members of the Foreign Procurement Group, who liked what they saw, on the recommended improvements.

These steps are only the first phase of LOR improvements. A second phase will examine how better training and LOR templates could help the international customer draft a more actionable LOR.

This is no small matter, said Rowe. We have the potential here of shortening turnaround times dramatically, while getting a much better description of what our allies need to do the job.