

Every Marine an Acquisition Marine

Three things every Marine and Sailor can do to improve the Marine Corps' acquisition process

by LtCol Shawn Miller

The Marine Corps and other DOD acquisition processes have a reputation for being slow, bureaucratic, and out of touch with warfighter needs. At times, this perception might be well-deserved; however, the Nation's ability to deter and win wars will cease to exist without the current acquisition process.

Today's defense acquisition process, though imperfect, influences every aspect of the Corps, and every Marine and Sailor is a stakeholder in that process. Consequently, each person has a role to play in the continuous improvement of the process. Not everyone needs to be an expert in the process to help make improvements, and there are relatively simple things every Marine or Sailor can

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do to improve the acquisitions process and enhance the quality of warfighting systems fielded through it.

Provide Feedback

Understanding the warfighter's needs is essential to the acquisition process, and there are many ways for a Marine or Sailor to provide valuable warfighter feedback to the acquisition community. Participating in an online or in-person product survey is a valuable way to com-

municate warfighter needs directly to acquisition decision makers, materiel developers, and systems integrators.

For example, online Marine Corps Uniform Board surveys are often conducted and periodically published. There are also surveys given to Marines and Sailors who test new equipment or improve existing equipment. Marines and Sailors should give honest and constructive feedback in these surveys.

Submitting timely and detailed Product Quality Deficiency Reports (PQDR) is another valuable way for warfighters to provide feedback. These reports are typically generated and submitted by the maintenance community, but any Marine or Sailor can initiate a PQDR by contacting their G-4, S-4, or maintenance management section.

Like surveys, candid and constructive feedback in a PQDR is crucial. The comments and recommendations Marines and Sailors provide in a PQDR are taken seriously by receiving organizations such as Marine Corps Logistics Command and the program offices at Marine Corps Systems Command. In many cases, these organizations directly leverage these recommendations to improve a product.

Providing well-articulated and timely after-action reports can also help improve the acquisition process. If an exercise, an operation, or a training event is involved, documenting an issue with a piece of gear should be part of the formal unit's after-action report. These reports should not just focus on equipment functionality but also cover issues with the techniques, tactics, and



Notice something wrong? Marines and Sailors can submit a PQDR and let MCLOG and MCSC know about the issue. (Photo by LCpl Elizabeth Gerber)

procedures associated with the training or use of a piece of equipment.

To enhance the acquisition process, as well as inform policy-generating organizations across the Corps, after-action reports should also include innovative suggestions to improve or replace a product to make it more operationally relevant.

Finally, participating in innovation challenges sponsored by DOD organizations gives Marines and Sailors the opportunity to directly help develop a prototype device or system that could eventually end up in the hands of the warfighter.

Without timely and well-articulated feedback from the warfighter, the acquisition community will not fully understand warfighter requirements. When requirements are not fully understood, products may fail to meet warfighter needs. Ensuring requirements are fully understood is a two-way responsibility

between the warfighter and the acquisition professional, and quality feedback between the two parties is vital.

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of support messages that ask for a unit or individual Marines and Sailors to participate in user evaluations, product development workshops, technology experiments, and developmental or operational tests.

Many Marines and Sailors believe that supporting these events will distract them from valuable unit training time or add more work to their plates. However, with the right coordination and an open mind, participating in these types of events can be a win-win for all involved. Supporting these types of events provides the acquisition community with invaluable feedback and data that can provide a better product to the warfighter.

Another way Marines and Sailors can support the acquisition process is through participation in myriad policy and equipment-related conferences held across the Corps. Conferences such as those held by operational advisory

Take Opportunities to Support

Marines and Sailors should show a willingness to support events associated with the acquisition process. In many instances, these events are not advertised as acquisition-process events. They might take the form of feasibility



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(U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Justin Boling)
"The appearance of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visual information does not imply or constitute DoD endorsement."



There are efforts seeking solutions to extend the life of some equipment. (Photo by Ashley Calingo.)

groups, budget planning and reviews, and force structure reviews provide invaluable input to the processes.

At these conferences, there are many important recommendations and decisions that influence the cost, schedule, and performance aspects of the acquisition process. Conference participants

tunities for more in-depth participation in the process.

Participation is an important way to transfer operational experience into and improve the process. Unfortunately, nobody remains in the Operating Forces indefinitely. At some point, people who remain in the Corps will need to com-

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can engage in conversations that spur ideas for new products, improve existing products, and provide ideas for how policy changes could increase the effectiveness and efficiency of new or existing products.

Seek and Take Opportunities to Participate

It is important to provide feedback to and support the acquisition process. Every Marine and Sailor should participate in these proceedings. However, some should seek and take the oppor-

tunities at least one tour in the Supporting Establishment. Officers, SNCOs, and NCOs should seriously consider an acquisition-related billet at some point in their career.

The opportunity to serve in an acquisition-related billet goes well beyond a tour at Marine Corps Systems Command or Program Executive Officer Ground Systems. Billets within Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Programs and Resources, Marine Corps Operational Test and Evaluation Activity, or other HQMC

departments, such as Plans, Policies, and Operations and Installations and Logistics, all support the Corps' acquisition processes.

There are also many opportunities to serve in similar billets at the joint level. An argument can be made that the continuous expansion of a Marine's or Sailor's knowledge about the policies and procedures associated with the acquisition process help to make more effective leaders above the platoon level.

While a tour with one of these units might not make someone an acquisition expert, it allows for individuals to leverage their operational experiences to inform the process and gain a valuable working knowledge of the DOD's and Corps' acquisitions process. These operational experiences can help in fielding and sustaining equipment that is operationally relevant. It can also help individuals to become better commanders, staff officers, first sergeants, sergeants major, and senior enlisted leaders through their ability to better navigate the acquisition system.

To achieve success, the DOD acquisition process must field and sustain equipment that supports warfighter requirements in a timeframe that is operationally relevant and within an ever-changing and finite budget.

The current defense acquisition system is far from perfect. However, perfection will never be achieved because of the ever-evolving character of war, ever-changing political environments, and ever-fluctuating budgets. There will always be opportunities for improvement.

Not every Marine or Sailor needs to become a full-time acquisition professional to help improve the defense acquisition process. However, by providing feedback to, supporting, and directly participating in the Corps' acquisition process for a time, Marines and Sailors across the Corps can help improve it and the warfighting systems produced through it, ultimately helping to accomplish the Corps' missions across the globe.