

Methodology for gathering data on CPRA contracts

CPRA Contracts

Gathering data on CPRA contracts entailed hours of work, manually transcribing specific data points from hardcopy CPRA proposals. This data gathering process was distinct from other Data Center analysis activities which typically entail downloading readily available data from federal web sites. For example, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers contracts data is readily available and downloadable from USASPENDING.gov by mandate of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006. In contrast, CPRA contracts and proposals are primarily available only as hard copies that cannot be removed from government premises. Thus in order to collect the data, we traveled to Baton Rouge eight times to look at physical copies of and gather data from proposals and contracts. Below we describe in detail the actions taken to obtain CPRA regular services contract data and CPRA construction contract data.

Regular Services Contracts

The first task was determining the scope of the data to collect. To guide this decision, there was no master list of contracts. Services contracts are contracted through the CPRA, but are listed by RFP/RSIQ on a Department of Natural Resources (DNR) web site that includes both CPRA and DNR contracts, without a flag distinguishing the two. The state of Louisiana does maintain a database of contracts called LaTrac, but this database contains little metadata on contracts other than the name of successful proposers and amounts. CPRA personnel explained that it would be exceedingly difficult to get contracts prior to 2010, because they were housed in a completely different location than CPRA or DNR. Relying on the advice of CPRA personnel, the scope of our data collection was narrowed to 2010 onward. CPRA personnel explained that five categories of contracts – labeled “regular services” contracts by The Data Center – are representative of CPRA Coastal Program recurring services, and that other services contracts were for administrative services or associated with a single disaster. Thus, data collection on services contracts was narrowed to just “regular services.” All CPRA regular services data were collected from successful proposals that were won between 2010 and 2014.

Regular services contracts fell into five main categories: engineering, environmental science consulting, geotechnical, professional land, and surveying. Each type of service had different formatting for proposals and within a service, every proposal was put together differently by the company. There were some data inconsistencies, but data as simple as the location of the company, for example, was often located in different places on each proposal. Finally, the requirements of Requests for Proposals (RFPs) changed in the period between 2010 and 2014, thus items were labeled and organized differently in a 2010 contract than in a 2012 contract. The Data Center had to reconcile changing labels and collect data accordingly. On average these proposals had 5 to 10 different sections and were around 3 inches thick. Because of how large the proposals were, it took nearly an hour to go through each to gather the 10 needed data points.

In initial phases of data collection, we looked at 2014 proposals that were housed in CPRA. The rest of the regular services proposals were housed at the DNR headquarters in Baton Rouge. CPRA has some of these contracts in digital format which they offered to let us view on their computers, but this method was less than ideal, in part because it was unclear whether all relevant contracts were available in digital format on CPRA computers. We explored collecting the data at DNR headquarters instead. DNR typically

has a rule limiting the amount of time that one can look at their archives to only two hours at a time. After some time, we were able to work with CPRA and DNR to make an exception so we could look at their archives for full work day stretches of time. However, DNR archives could only be accessed when a room was available for use, and a CPRA chaperone was required at all times. DNR does not allow contracts to be taken out of the archives or pages to be scanned. The process of pulling data from 84 contracts necessitated four days of data entry at the DNR archives in Baton Rouge with a chaperone.

Finally, we began to match our contract data to contract dollar amounts in LaTrac. That proved to be difficult, as names entered into LaTrac did not match names on proposals and dates were often inconsistent. Nevertheless, with the assistance of CPRA personnel we were able to put a contract amount on each successful proposal.

Construction Contracts

All CPRA construction data were collected based on the CPRA Historic Hotlist—a spreadsheet containing some information on all CPRA and partner-led projects completed between 2007 and 2013. This spreadsheet contained the funding source and project year, but did not supply final cost, and did not contain a flag indicating whether projects were CPRA- or partner-led. To rectify this, we used cash transfer data compiled by GNO Inc. In addition, CPRA personnel advised us that if the most money was paid out to a company, the project was CPRA led, if not, it was partner led. In this way, the final costs of all construction projects was determined, and CPRA-led contracts were separated from partner-led contracts.

All underlying data gathered via these procedures was confirmed by CPRA personnel. The Data Center wishes to thank Jenny Kurz, Jackie Johnson, and Natalie Snider at CPRA for many hours spent finding documents, working through databases, and clarifying complicated Louisiana procurement systems. The coastal program is intricate, integrated, and interwoven, and CPRA personnel were immensely patient as we strove to understand the program and helpful as we started to pull the data.