Army Contracting Command
Virtual Contracting Enterprise – Reverse Auction (VCE-RA)
Bidder’s (Industry) User Guide

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Purpose

The purpose this VCE-RA Bidder’s User Guide is to provide the basic technical steps required to
participate in a VCE-RA Reverse Auction Event, from initial registration to the actual process of submitting
bids.

For additional information, please contact the specific contracting officer or the VCE-RA Administrator at
(609)-562-7031.
VCE-RA User Registration

Individual POCs intending to participate in a Reverse Auction using VCE-RA are required to have an existing VCE-RA account or register for a new VCE-RA account. Having/Registering an account with VCE-RA, however, does not provide access or an invitation to any specific Reverse Auction Event. Refer to the specific synopsis and/or solicitation or contact the contracting officer for additional instructions regarding being invited to participate in a specific event.

Additional Information:
- Accounts can be registered at any time, regardless of current intent (or lack thereof) to request an invitation to a reverse auction event.
- Companies can register more than one individual, but only one POC from that company can/will be added to participate in a specific event.
- **An individual only needs to register for one VCE-RA account** (i.e., you do not need to register a new VCE-RA account for each auction).

To Register a New VCE-RA User Account:
2. Click LOGIN TO VCE-RA on the left hand side.
3. Click REGISTER in the top left corner.
4. Specify your language and country of origin and click NEXT.
5. Fill out all Required Fields (see Fig. 1).

**NOTE:** Your USERNAME and PASSWORD are both case sensitive. Your username will be an e-mail address. You will need to provide your VCE-RA username to the contracting officer to request an invitation to the reverse auction event.
6. It’s recommended that you select the appropriate Time Zone, so the correct time is displayed when logged in.

7. Note the Email Notifications section (see Fig. 2). By default, all applicable situations are set to trigger a notification. Consider these specific situations and uncheck the box(es) as needed to avoid a potential influx of unnecessary e-mail notifications.

![Email Notifications](image)

**E-mail Notification Situations and Descriptions:**

A. “An Event completes and my Response is accepted.” – When the auction ends, send an e-mail to me if I am the “winning” bidder.

B. “An Event completes and my Response is not accepted.” – When the auction ends, send an e-mail to me if I am not the “winning” bidder.

C. “An Event completes and my Response is not accepted due to a reserve price.” – Not applicable for VCE-RA auction events (i.e., a reserve price will never be established).

D. “An Event is still accepting Responses but I get outbid or the Response gets resurrected.” – I was “winning” the auction, but have since been outbid by another participant.

E. “An Event begins accepting Responses.” – Sends an e-mail at the “start” of the auction, when the event switches from the Response Preparation phase to the Response Acceptance phase.

For all intensive purposes, “e.” is the only type of notification that most users should want or need. Because VCE-RA auction events are typically completed within a matter of hours as opposed to days or weeks, the other notification types are not as impactful.

8. Click NEXT or FINISHED.
9. Click CLOSE.
10. An e-mail will be sent to your e-mail address (see Fig. 3). You must click the link contained in the e-mail, and then enter the validation code in order to complete your registration.

![Validation code](image)

If you do not receive the validation code via e-mail within 2 business hours of submitting your registration, please contact the VCE-RA helpdesk at (609)-562-7031.
Participating in a Reverse Auction Event

You must express interest with the specific Contracting Officer in order to be invited to participate in the specific Reverse Auction Event. Refer to the solicitation and/or contact the Contracting Officer for additional information.

NOTE: In this guide, “response” is synonymous with “bid”.

VCE-RA Homepage (My Activities page)

After logging into VCE-RA, you will be taken to the My Activities page. The page is broken up into 5 tabs (Fig. 4).

- **Message Center**: Displays inbound messages from all in-progress Reverse Auction Events. See [Viewing Messages from the Message Center tab (VCE-RA Homepage)](#) for more information.
- **Invitations**: Displays a list of all upcoming or in progress Reverse Auction Events that the user has been invited to. See [Accessing the Reverse Auction Event Page](#) for more information.
- **Single-Section Response Activity**: Displays a list of all upcoming, in progress, and completed single-section events that you have participated in. A Single-Section Event is an auction where only a single/total price is submitted.
- **Multi-Section Response Activity**: Displays a list of all upcoming, in progress, and completed multi-section events that you have participated in (at the current time of this publication (July 2012), VCE-RA will not be conducting any multi-section events). A Multi-Section Event is an auction where multiple items/line items are involved and prices are submitted separately for each item.
- **Profile**: Access your VCE-RA account (e.g., to update any information completed during the VCE-RA registration process, change your password, etc.).

NOTE: Each tab contains a Question Mark icon (in the Tab Header) that can be clicked to open additional information/description about what information/functionality is provided in that tab.

NOTE: A My Activities link is listed in the upper left hand corner on all VCE-RA pages and will always take you back to the VCE-RA Homepage.
Accessing the Reverse Auction Event Page

2. Click LOGIN TO VCE-RA on the left hand side.
3. Sign in with your VCE-RA Username and Password.
4. Click the INVITATIONS tab (see Fig. 5). A list of upcoming or open auctions for which you have been invited will appear.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message Center</th>
<th>Invitations</th>
<th>Single-Section Response Activity</th>
<th>Multi-Section Response Activity</th>
<th>Profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name A: W1SP7T-12-8-0021</td>
<td>Type: Reverse</td>
<td>Phase: Response Preparation</td>
<td>Response Deadline: 3/26/12 10:30 PM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W2:00T7-12-8-0054</td>
<td>Type: Reverse</td>
<td>Phase: Response Acceptance</td>
<td>Response Deadline: 3/23/12 4:30 PM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events 1-2 (2 total)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 5

If the Event is not listed in your Invitations tab, please contact the specific Contracting Officer or the VCE-RA helpdesk at (609)-562-7031 immediately.

Individual Reverse Auction Events shall be listed for invited participants no sooner than 7 days and no later than 60 minutes before the established Response Acceptance Start Time (i.e., the Event start time).

5. Click the event name/solicitation number to open the Reverse Auction Event Page.

The Reverse Auction Event Page is broken up into 3 sections:

- **Event Details Section** (Fig. 6) – contains basic information about the current status of the auction event.
- **Message Section** (Fig. 7 and 8) – place to submit/receive messages related to the event (to only be used while the event is in progress).
- **Response Section** (Fig. 9 and 10) – place to submit/view responses.

See subsequent pages for details on each section.
### The Reverse Auction Event Page; Event Details Section

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>A. Time Remaining:</strong></th>
<th>Current time until the Response Deadline (end of the Reverse Auction Event). This time can change as the auction occurs (see <a href="#">Response Deadline Extension Process</a>). When there is less than 24 hours, the display will switch to an HH:MM:SS format.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Phase:</strong></td>
<td>The Current phase of the Event. If the Phase is RESPONSE PREPARATION, the event has not started and responses will NOT be accepted. If the Phase is RESPONSE ACCEPTANCE, the event is in progress and responses will be accepted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C. Response Acceptance Start Time:</strong></td>
<td>Event start time. When the auction will begin accepting responses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D. Response Deadline:</strong></td>
<td>Scheduled Event end time. When the auction will stop accepting responses. This time can change as the auction occurs (see <a href="#">Response Deadline Extension Process</a>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E. Type:</strong></td>
<td>The type of event; will always be “Reverse”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>F. Poster:</strong></td>
<td>The owner of this auction event. Will typically be the contracting officer or specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G. Message Manager:</strong></td>
<td>The person responsible for addressing any Auction Messages that are sent; it will typically be the contracting officer, specialist, or a VCE-RA administrator. See <a href="#">Submitting/Viewing VCE-RA Messages</a> for more information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H. Related Documents:</strong></td>
<td>Associated files are sometimes listed/accessible here for your reference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I. Current Best Price:</strong></td>
<td>Current lowest response. N/A if no response has been submitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>J. Next Available Price:</strong></td>
<td>Next lowest price that can be submitted as a response. At the beginning of the auction event, this price will be the Starting Price.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>K. Minimum Decrement:</strong></td>
<td>Minimum amount that a response needs to be lowered from the Current Best Price in order to be accepted. Responses can be lowered in any multiple of the Minimum Decrement (i.e., if the Current Best Price is $1,000, and the Minimum Decrement is $100, a response of $900 or $800 would be acceptable, but $850 would not).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>L. Price Multiple:</strong></td>
<td>Not applicable for VCE-RA auctions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>M. Description:</strong></td>
<td>Optional custom text sometimes entered by the Poster to describe the solicitation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Fig. 6**

Mock Auction. For additional questions, please contact the VCE-RA Support Desk at 609-562-7031.
The Reverse Auction Event Page; Message Section

The Message Section in VCE-RA allows users to submit online messages to and receive messages/replies from the Message Manager. At first, the only item listed in the Message Section will be a link to send a new message (Fig. 7). The Message Section will display recent incoming messages if/when the page is refreshed (Fig. 8).

NOTE: Messages submitted by Auction Participants are private and only visible to the Message Manager. When the Message Manager responds to incoming messages, he/she will have to choice to respond to sender only or to all participants, depending on the nature of the original question and the appropriateness to provide an answer/response to all participants.

It’s highly recommended that Reverse Auction Participants submit any/all questions well in advance of the Response Acceptance Start Time (using other means outside of the VCE-RA tool; e.g., phone call or e-mail). The real time auction process does not always provide a suitable atmosphere to facilitate back and forth questions and answers. Remember, once an auction begins, the clock is always ticking!

The Message Section will display up to five (5) of the most recent incoming messages.

See Submitting/Viewing VCE-RA Messages for additional information.
The Reverse Auction Event Page; Response Section

The Response Section is where responses (bids) can be submitted and current responses by all responders can be viewed (participants whom have not submitted a response will not be represented in the list). The section displays one of two distinct views: the RESPONSE FORM view and the RESPONSE SUMMARY view.

Response Form View

*Used to submit a response (i.e., a new or lower bid)*

If the user has not submitted a response to the auction yet, the Response Status will be N/A and the price field will be null. If the user has submitted a response to the auction already, the Response Status will be listed as “Winning” or “Losing” and the price field will contain the user’s latest accepted response.

NOTE: the terms “winning” and “losing” in VCE-RA are relative to the price submittal of the current auction only. The subsequent Contract Award is based on the solicitation’s Basis of Award.

If you do not see the BEGIN RESPONSE SUBMISSION button, the Reverse Auction is not currently accepting responses (Phase is not RESPONSE ACCEPTANCE).

The RESPONSE FORM VIEW will NOT automatically refresh. As new responses are submitted by other participants, this view will not auto-refresh to account for new responses. Refresh the page manually (F5 will refresh the page in most browsers), or switch to the RESPONSE SUMMARY VIEW to check for updates if/when needed.

See [Submitting a Response](#) for additional information.
The Reverse Auction Event Page; Response Section (CONTINUED)

Response Summary View
Used to view current responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supplier</th>
<th>Response Time</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Submit Price</th>
<th>Assigned Price</th>
<th>Requested Quantity</th>
<th>Assigned Quantity</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Attachments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>trekseller</td>
<td>3/26/12 12:28:26 PM</td>
<td>Losing</td>
<td>$999,000.00</td>
<td>$999,000.00</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response #2181</td>
<td>3/26/12 1:08:01 PM</td>
<td>Winning</td>
<td>$995,000.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response #2182</td>
<td>3/26/12 1:21:38 PM</td>
<td>Losing</td>
<td>$997,000.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses 1-2 (3 total)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 10

This view will show you your current response (your VCE-RA username will appear under SUPPLIER) and the current responses of other participants in the Reverse Auction Event.

NOTE: Other participants, referred to as suppliers, will be listed anonymously during the Auction (as you will be to other participants). Suppliers will only appear in the RESPONSE SUMMARY VIEW (with an anonymous RESPONSE #) if they have submitted at least one response (i.e., Participants who do not submit a response will not be listed).

If any supplier updates their response (i.e., lowers their bid), you will see that change in the ASSIGNED PRICE column (i.e., a new row will NOT be created for each individual response, just for each individual participant that submits a response – if that response changes during the auction, the ASSIGNED PRICE in the row will update to reflect the new response).

NOTE: The terms “winning” and “losing” in VCE-RA are relative to the price submittal of the current auction only. The subsequent Contract Award is based on the solicitation’s basis of award.

Requested Quantity and Assigned Quantity will usually be one (1), referring to the one solicitation/Request for Bids. Responses, unless otherwise specifically noted in the solicitation, should by a total price for the total action, not a single unit price.

While on the RESPONSE SUMMARY VIEW, the table will automatically refresh every 20 seconds, updating the table with new information if/when available.

See Monitoring an Auction for additional information.
Submitting a Response

1. Click into the Reverse Auction Event Page (see Accessing the Reverse Auction Event Page for more information).

2. The Response Section must be displaying the RESPONSE FORM in order to submit a bid. Click VIEW RESPONSE FORM if you do not see a text field to enter your price.

3. Enter/lower your response (i.e. bid) into the PRICE field.

4. (Optional) Enter any comments as needed. NOTE: Comments are only visible to the Government and you.

5. (Optional) Click ADD/REMOVE ATTACHMENTS to attach any files related to your response. NOTE: Attached files are only visible to the Government and you.
   a. A new window will open. Click BROWSE.
   b. Find the file you wish to attach. Select it and click OPEN.
   c. (Optional) Change the filename if desired.
   d. Click ATTACH FILE.
   e. (Optional) click DELETE to remove files that have been attached already.
   f. Click CLOSE.

6. Click BEGIN RESPONSE SUBMISSION. A confirmation window will appear (Fig. 11).

   **Fig. 11**

7. Verify that your PRICE is formed correctly (e.g., not missing a digit, decimal in the right place). If it is not correct, click NO and repeat steps 2-6; if it is correct, click YES. Clicking YES here will submit a binding response/bid at the listed Price.

8. If your response is valid and accepted, the page will refresh and the RESPONSE SUMMARY VIEW will display, identifying your bid as the current “winning” bid. See Potential Errors During Response Submittal if error messages are displayed for additional information.

9. Monitor the auction as it occurs and repeat steps 1-8 when needed (i.e., to submit a lower bid after your current response is outbid). See Monitoring an Auction for more information.
Potential Errors During Response Submittal

As you are in the process of entering your response (somewhere between steps 2 and 8), it is possible for another Participant to submit the same or lower response before your response is processed (step 8). This will result in an error in accepting your bid, since it is no longer valid as the next available price when step 8 occurs.

If you get either of the following errors, check the NEXT AVAILABLE PRICE field and lower your response as needed/if desired.

The more participants in a Reverse Auction Event, the greater potential there is for bids to overlap and this issue may occur a few times during the event, especially when response activity is high.

Response Submittal Error Example #1 (Fig. 12)
A lower bid was submitted by a different participant and processed before clicking BEGIN RESPONSE SUBMISSION (step 6).

Response Submittal Error Example #2 (Fig. 13)
A lower bid was submitted by a different participant and processed after clicking BEGIN RESPONSE SUBMISSION (step 6) but before clicking YES to the response confirmation (step 7).
Monitoring an Auction

- Participants are advised to monitor the auction from the beginning (Response Acceptance Start Time) till the end (Response Deadline).
- Keep in mind the Auction End Time (Response Deadline) can be extended based on a defined extension process. See Response Deadline Extension Process for more information.
- If you have questions or issues during the Reverse Auction event, contact the contracting officer. **After the event begins, only the contracting officer can authorize pausing/stopping the event.**
- Monitoring an Auction is done by paying close attention to the following information:
  - TIME REMAINING will increase in real time (auto-refresh) if the auction is extended.
  - RESPONSE DEADLINE will increase if the auction is extended (page MUST be refreshed).
  - RESPONSE STATUS (on the RESPONSE FORM VIEW) will change from “winning” to “losing” if your current response was the lowest bid but is now “beaten” (page MUST be refreshed).
  - STATUS and SUBMIT PRICE (on the RESPONSE SUMMARY VIEW) will change in real time (auto-refresh) as new responses/bids are submitted.
- Ways to refresh the Reverse Auction Event Page:
  - Refresh the page using the browser’s native refresh (F5 in most browsers).
  - Switch between the RESPONSE FORM and the RESPONSE SUMMARY.
  - STATUS and SUBMIT PRICE fields will auto-refresh/update on the RESPONSE SUMMARY view.
  - Click MY ACTIVITIES and then reopen the auction.
- **When the time runs out, a prompt will advise you to refresh the page. Refresh the page and make sure TIME REMAINING = 00:00:00 (HH:MM:SS). In some cases, it is possible that the event is still on-going due to a last second extension.**

Response Deadline Extension Process

- If any bid is submitted/accepted within four (4) minutes or less of the current Response Deadline, then the Response Deadline (end time) is increased by five (5) minutes.
- An auction can be extended an unlimited amount of times (in 5 minute increments based on the above rule).
- A Reverse Auction Event ends only when there is no longer any bidding activity/NO responses have been submitted for the final full 4 minutes.

Example: There are 3 minutes remaining in an event when a new or updated response is submitted. This causes an extension to kick in and the time remaining changes from 3 minutes to 8 minutes.

Based on the above process, **there is absolutely no need to wait until the last second to submit a bid in effort to win the auction at the last moment.** At best, you will only be extending the auction by another 5 minutes, and at worse, your bid will not be received in time. Participants found attempting to exploit last second bids will be reported to the contracting officer.
Submitting/Viewing VCE-RA Messages

The Message Section on the Reverse Auction Event Page provides an area to submit and receive messages during an Auction. **Any message sent by an auction participant (a “supplier”) will be private** – other participants (suppliers) will not have access to the message.

When the Message Manager responds, he/she will have the choice to make the response private (visible to just the original message submitter) or public (visible to all participants).

It’s highly recommended that Reverse Auction Participants submit any/all questions well in advance of the Response Acceptance Start Time (using other means outside of the VCE-RA tool; e.g., phone call or e-mail). The real time auction process does not always provide a suitable atmosphere to facilitate back and forth questions and answers. Remember, once an auction begins, the clock is always ticking! That being said, the Message Section can be utilized as needed during an auction.

Sending a Message
1. Click SEND A MESSAGE in the Message Section (or click VIEW/RESPOND TO ALL MESSAGES… if you have already sent one or more messages).
2. Click into the SUBJECT field and enter a subject your message.
3. Click into the BODY field and enter your message.
4. Click SUBMIT to send your message.

Viewing Messages

There are a few different ways to view messages. Utilize the following three (3) methods as needed. You cannot reply directly to messages; you can only send new messages (new messages can be in response to an incoming message) (see Sending a Message).

Viewing Messages from the Message Section
To view recent incoming messages of a specific event.

1. The Message Section will display up to five (5) of your most recent incoming messages. Click the subject to open the message.

   **NOTE:** The Message Section/Reverse Auction Event page will not auto-refresh when new messages are received. The page needs to be refreshed in order to see new messages (e.g., manual refresh (F5) or switching between RESPONSE FORM VIEW and RESPONSE SUMMARAY VIEW.)

2. Click CLOSE to close the message.
**Viewing Messages from the View Messages window**

*To view all incoming and outgoing messages of a specific event.*

1. Click VIEW/RESPOND TO ALL MESSAGES FOR THIS EVENT to open the View Messages window. This link will also display how many total incoming messages have been received and how many outgoing messages have been sent.

   NOTE: If you choose to leave this View Messages window open during the auction (it opens as a separate window), you will need to click the REFRESH button in order to refresh the window and see any new updates. The View Messages window does not auto-refresh.

2. A list of incoming and outgoing messages will be displayed. Click the subject to open the message.
3. Click CLOSE to close the message.

**Viewing Messages from the Message Center tab (VCE-RA Homepage)**

*To view all incoming messages for all in-progress events.*

After logging in, the VCE-RA Homepage (My Activities page) defaults to displaying the Message Center tab. The Message Center displays all incoming messages of an in-progress event.

When an event ends, any messages involved in the event will be removed from the Message Center (but still available via the Reverse Auction Event Page).

1. Click the subject to open the message.
2. Click CLOSE to close the message.

**Other Message Center functionality:**

- Click the EVENT to open the Reverse Auction Event Page
- Click the MESSAGES button to open the View Messages window (access to all incoming and outgoing messages). Once you open the View Messages window, you can read and/or respond to the message.

**End of an Auction**

- When no responses have been submitted in the final 4 minutes, the auction will end.
- Having the “Winning” response at the end of the auction does not mean a contract has been awarded to that participant. This simply indicates that the “winning” response is the apparent lowest bid. Contract Award is based on the solicitation’s Basis of Award.
- You may be advised to submit additional information (e.g., Technical Proposal/Information, Price breakdown) – refer to the specific solicitation for additional information.
- Contact the specific Contracting Officers if you have any additional questions regarding the solicitation and/or contract award.