



Business book review: 'Collaboration Nation'

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Collaboration Nation

Mary Scott Nabers (Platform Press, \$19.95)

This book helps businesses navigate public-private partnerships, including outsourcing, privatizing and cooperative procurement programs.

For companies interested in doing business with public entities, Mary Scott Nabers identifies several challenges: "Public officials are risk-averse decision-makers who look for experience, references, credibility and solutions that appear safe."

Safe takes politics into account. You're not only dealing with the administrators; most public institutions have unionized staff whose input into decision-making shouldn't be underestimated, especially when it involves privatizing services. Contract approval also requires navigating through various departmental approval levels.

The source of public funds comes into play, too. When funding ties to state or federal sources, the contract structure requires the awardee to comply with administration and compliance reporting requirements that can increase the cost. The source of funds can also affect timeliness of payments because invoices may require layers of approval.

When it comes to negotiating terms, public officials have little latitude. The liquidated damages clause in most public contracts keeps corporate risk managers up at night. Failure to comply or perform on time and within budget can trigger it.

Do your homework before you respond to a bid request. The more information you have about the award and administration processes and how to deal with the stakeholders, the better the odds of a contract award.

When you get to the Round 2 interview stage, Nabers offers this advice: Heed the time allotted for the meeting and allow time for questions. Use handouts (not PowerPoint slides) about cost estimates, cost controls, outcomes and why your solution works. Ask about the next steps in the process.