HOW TO EVALUATE SUPPLIERS FOR DEFENSE PROGRAMS: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Use these questions to help you identify suppliers who can do more than meet technical specifications — partners who will support your program through every phase of development and integration to ensure mission readiness.

DEFENSE EXPERIENCE & PEDIGREE

- [ ] Describe your company's experience in the defense industry.
- [ ] Have you supported similar defense applications with flight-proven components?

ENGINEERING SUPPORT & CUSTOMIZATION

- [ ] Do you offer support from early design stages through to final integration and testing?
- [ ] Can you modify standard components to fit application-specific requirements?
- [ ] Are you able to provide rapid prototyping and iterative design support as application requirements change?
- [ ] How do you handle Defense Priorities and Allocations Systems (DPAS) orders?
  DPAS is a U.S. program that provides priority ratings for national defense contracts and orders. Equivalent terms or processes may differ outside the United States.
- [ ] Are you Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement (DFARS) compliant?
  DFARS refers to regulations that supplement the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) and establish defense-specific requirements for contractors doing business with the U.S. government. Equivalent terms or requirements may differ outside the United States.
- [ ] How accessible are your sales and engineering support teams? Do you offer local resources or a dedicated point of contact?

MATERIALS & COMPATIBILITY

- [ ] What specialized materials can be incorporated into your component designs?
- [ ] How do you verify that components will remain reliable under prolonged exposure to extreme or combat conditions?
- [ ] Are your components compatible with defense-grade fluids and materials?
- [ ] Can you demonstrate expertise in fluid-material interactions?
- [ ] If needed, are you capable of working with exotic or non-standard materials?

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QUALIFICATION & TESTING

☐ What types of environmental and functional testing do you perform? Examples may include:
- **Proof / Burst Tests**: These tests evaluate a component's ability to withstand the maximum operational pressure they will face. Proof tests apply pressure above normal operating levels to verify that the component does not leak or deform, while burst tests increase internal pressure until the component fails, establishing its maximum pressure capacity.
- **Endurance Tests**: Endurance tests simulate long-term use by repeatedly operating the component under normal or extreme conditions. This type of test helps assess wear, fatigue, and overall durability over the product's expected lifespan.
- **Acceptance Tests:** Performed on production units before delivery, acceptance tests confirm that each component meets design and quality standards.

☐ Do you provide vacuum, thermal cycle, shock, or vibration testing data?

☐ How do you perform or arrange leakage testing?
- Read more about best practices for selecting a leak testing method.

☐ Do you perform testing in-house or via a third party?

☐ Are your components 100% flow tested?

☐ Do you provide detailed information on your component qualification procedures, including test results, data analysis, or other relevant documentation?

☐ What types of fluids do you test on (e.g., hydraulic fluids, jet fuel equivalents, lubrication fluids, etc.)?

☐ Can you provide Mean Time Between Failures (MTBF) data or other performance and reliability metrics?

PRODUCTION & SCALABILITY

☐ How do you scale production without compromising quality or creating bottlenecks?

☐ Do you have experience in high volume production?

☐ What measures do you take to ensure supply chain resilience — from supplier qualification and monitoring to contingency planning for disruptions?

☐ How do you adapt to changes in production volume or timelines? What strategies do you use to manage inventory and minimize lead times for critical components?

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QUALITY ASSURANCE & COMPLIANCE

☐ Are you certified to AS9100, ISO 9001, or other defense-related procurement standards?

☐ Are you registered with the System for Award Management (SAM.gov)? Please provide your Unique Entity ID.

☐ How do you support customer audits or compliance reviews?

☐ Do you provide full traceability and documented quality assurance policies with your parts?

☐ What is your process for product revalidation and lifecycle management?

☐ What cybersecurity certifications do you maintain to protect sensitive defense data and comply with industry regulations such as NIST 800-171 and CMMC?

EXPORT & GLOBAL READINESS
If your company is located outside of the U.S., use these questions when vetting U.S. suppliers

☐ Are your components compliant with international environmental regulations such as REACH and RoHS?

☐ What is the export classification of your products? Are you ITAR/EAR compliant?

☐ Can you confirm if your products are ITAR-free? Can you provide alternatives for ITAR-controlled parts?

☐ How do you make sure we have the right documentation for country of origin and customs compliance requirements?

☐ Do you have international offices or distribution capabilities to support global customers?

☐ What are the common challenges international defense customers face when sourcing components from the U.S.? How does your company help them navigate these hurdles?

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