Doctrine 10 — Post-Submission and Win

One durable concept: submission is a milestone, not the finish line — and the most valuable information you will ever get arrives after you press submit.

The pipeline (Doctrine 03) ends with *submit → deliver → learn*, but the newest pursuer's mental model stops at submit. This doctrine covers everything after: the corridor between submission and award, the oral presentation, the final proposal revision, negotiation, and — most important of all — the debrief and the retrospective that turn every outcome into the next pursuit's advantage.

Submission is a milestone, not the finish

The moment the proposal leaves your hands, the pursuit is still open. The agency is evaluating, but it is also still talking: amendments can arrive, questions can be consolidated into agency answers, and the contracting officer can send evaluation notices, clarification requests, or an invitation to discussions — each with a hard response window.

The discipline of the corridor is unglamorous: **watch the docket relentlessly.** Every communication is logged — what arrived, what it means for our submission, what we answered, and when. A pursuit that goes silent after submit can be lost in the corridor, even after a strong proposal.

Orals: the proposal, in person

Many competitions include an **oral presentation** as part of the evaluation. Orals are the highest-leverage event in the entire pursuit: a strong oral can move an evaluator from *acceptable* to *outstanding*, and a weak one can do the opposite. They are also the only point in the process where evaluators meet the actual people who will deliver the work.

The rules of orals are the rules of the proposal, applied to people:

- **The oral is the proposal in person.** Themes, discriminators, and pricing posture align exactly with what was submitted. No improvisation of strategy on stage.
- **Roles are pre-decided.** Who speaks, who answers, who observes is decided before the room.
- **Practice to a stopwatch.** Time limits are hard; rehearsals run with an external observer playing the hostile evaluator.
- **Anticipate every question.** A Q&A bank is built from the evaluation factors, the risk register, the price position, the past-performance citations, and the key personnel, with a primary and backup responder per question.
- **Bring the people you proposed.** Substituting key personnel at the oral is a credibility hit evaluators remember.

After the oral, everything is captured — every question, every commitment, every signal — and reconciled against the written proposal, because a commitment made in person that the proposal does not back is a hole in your own story.

Discussions and the final proposal revision

If you are in the competitive range, the agency may open **discussions** — a formal, usually written, exchange intended to let you improve your proposal — possibly closing with a request for a **final proposal revision (FPR)**.

The professional rule for the FPR is counterintuitive to the adrenaline of the moment: **treat it as a compressed proposal cycle, not a patch job.** The same compliance discipline, theme reinforcement, and review rigor apply, proportioned to the scope of the change but never relaxed because the timeline is short. FPRs are frequently the deciding submission. The team that slaps a few pages onto its old proposal while a competitor re-runs its full review discipline is the team that loses in the final round.

Negotiation posture

If you are awarded, the price and terms are **negotiated** — and negotiation is not the time to make up a position. It is the time to defend the position you prepared during capture, from three sources built before submission: the capture intelligence (what the customer values, what the competitive price band looks like), the cost buildup (what the work honestly costs, where the floor is), and the risk register (which terms are genuinely risky). Entering negotiation without that prepared position is how good work gets bargained down to unprofitable terms.

The debrief: the highest-information source in the pursuit

Here is the lesson that separates professionals from the rest: **after a loss, request a debrief — and treat it as the most valuable information the pursuit will ever produce.**

Under the standard federal acquisition rules, on a negotiated procurement you can request a debrief within days of the award notice. In it, the agency tells you how your proposal scored on each evaluation factor, what your strengths and weaknesses were, and how your price compared. This is the customer handing you competitive intelligence for free.

The discipline of the debrief:

- **Listen, do not argue or defend.** The agency is explaining the outcome, not negotiating it; arguing burns the relationship and loses the information.
- **Bring at least two note-takers.** Memory is not evidence.
- **Come with prepared questions.** Ask about each evaluation factor, your price outcome, and how your discriminators landed.
- **Say thank you.** The relationship outlives the pursuit — you may face these same evaluators on the next one.

Then reconcile the debrief against the win strategy and the compliance matrix: which themes landed, which discriminators were valued, which weaknesses map to which sections. That map is the raw material of the learning loop.

The retrospective and the learning loop

Whether you win or lose, the pursuit ends with a **retrospective** — a structured lessons-learned session, run within roughly 30 days while memory is fresh. It captures what to repeat and what to change, sorted by where the lessons came from: capture, strategy, production, the color reviews, pricing, submission, or post-submission.

The retrospective feeds three compounding assets:

1. **The past-performance record** — the outcome, win or lose, becomes evidence for the next pursuit's credibility.
2. **The probability model** — every outcome is compared against the pWin estimate made at the start; a pattern of over- or under-estimation is the most honest calibration data the organization has (Doctrine 05).
3. **The doctrine itself** — durable lessons get fed back into how the next pursuit runs. This is the same loop the wider ecosystem calls the cosmology loop (Doctrine 07): a won pursuit re-seeds the pipeline with capital and credibility; a lost one re-seeds it with information. Both are fuel.

This is what turns a pipeline into a compounding asset: **the outcome is never the end. It is input to the next cycle.**

What this means for your career

The people who treat submission as the finish line learn only from winning — and winning is too rare, and too late, to be a good teacher. The people who treat the corridor, the debrief, and the retrospective as part of the pipeline learn from everything. A firm that debriefs every loss and retrospects every pursuit will, over a few cycles, simply out-learn its competitors.

For the Strategic Initiative student, the post-submission phase is where the organization's learning system lives. For the MBA student, it is where the funnel closes and the flywheel turns. For the MPA student, it is the public side made visible: the debrief is the agency explaining, on the record, how it spent the public's money. All three meet at the same truth: **the pursuit that ends at submit is a lottery ticket; the pursuit that ends at the retrospective is an investment.**

Self-check

1. Why is submission a milestone and not the finish — and what is the discipline of the evaluation corridor?

2. Why is the debrief the highest-information source in the pursuit, and what are the rules for running one well?
3. What three compounding assets does the retrospective feed, and how does that turn a pipeline into a compounding asset?