How to book individual training with the NCI Academy

NCI AGENCY | NATO Communications and Information Academy

Meeting the global challenge

As the world around us continues to evolve, we strive to stay abreast of developing security challenges, to stay ahead of the game. Training and education is critical for the Alliance to keep pace with global challenges. The NCI Agency is committed to "Smart Training", which requires a new approach, an evolution from the static hands-on, classroom-based training environment, to one that is more flexible, agile and adaptive.

What the NCI Academy has to offer

The NCI Agency's Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) and Cyber Training Catalogue for 2021 contains more than 200 course offerings. It covers the entire spectrum of NATO-specific C4ISR and cyber security training, including user, administrator and technical training, as well as managerially-focused courses for military and civilian staff working in more general Communications and Information Systems (CIS) posts. The catalogue explains the procedure for seat allocation, the pricing policy and course prices. It includes, for the first time, course relationship diagrams that explain the various paths towards certain qualifications and competence levels.

As you might expect from an agile and responsive organization, the catalogue is a living document. It will be adjusted as the Agency accommodates courses for new systems or new system versions, discontinues courses for systems being phased out, or as changing customer requirements evolve.

Doing business with the NCI Academy

Following direction by the Nations, the NCI Academy must be fully customer-funded. Consequently, from 2021 onwards, a formal agreement with the NCI Agency is required for the delivery of all training provided by the NCI Academy.

While requirements planning remains the crucial factor for future education and individual training funding and delivery, the process needs to be supported by a flexible and responsive agreement in the delivery phase to adjust to customer priorities that may change in the course of the year.

To this end, the NCI Academy has developed the Service Support Training (SST) package. The aim of the SST is to provide required funding and delivery flexibility for both the customer and the provider. It also streamlines the delivery management between the customer and the provider at the lowest eligible decision-making level, which is usually the level of the national or organizational Training Coordinator.

The SST package is cost reimbursable, so the customer pays only for the training that is actually provided. It is compliant with the regular Customer Request Form (CRF) and Price Proposal process used by the NCI Agency and initiated by a regular CRF.The SST covers the yearly training requirements as envisioned when requested, but, importantly, it allows for in-year changes by mutual agreement in type and quantity of courses, provided the customer remains within the overall financial scope of the SST package. Customers are invoiced quarterly for actual training usage, based on standard catalogue course prices.

Each SST package stipulates the requirement for the customer to provide a single Training Coordinator with authority to commit students to training and act as the general focal point for that customer. Once an SST package has been signed, further coordination of training requests and communication on NCI Agency courses takes place directly with the Training Coordinators.

The NCI Academy follows an annual cycle, starting in the first quarter of the year prior to the year of training delivery, where a letter will be sent along with a preliminary pricing sheet, inviting customers to develop their training requirements for the following year. This is known as the 'bidding letter' and this early engagement allows customers to make their budget submissions with reasonably accurate pricing information. In the following months, the customers refine their requirements, while the NCI Academy refines its course offering and prices for the following year, culminating the formalization of the process through the submission of a CRF and the subsequent development of the SST package. It is expected that all SST packages will be signed in the fourth quarter, ready for training to start in January of the following year. Further details on the Annual Training Request Process can be found later in the leaflet.

Clarification of SST management costs

Throughout the transition process, the NCI Academy has received requests for clarification on the management cost, which is included with each SST.

The agreement management cost is charged annually as part of each SST to cover support costs associated with:

• The collection and management of training requests;
• The development and staffing of SST packages;
• Reporting and invoicing.

These costs are similar to those included in every NCI Agency Service Level Agreement (SLA), Service Support Package or Price Proposal, although the nomenclature may vary depending on the type of agreement.

Following analysis of level of effort and resources required for the SST Package management process, the Academy applies 5,000 EUR for the SST management cost. All CRFs go through the same staffing process, no matter the value (a CRF with a value of 10,000 EUR is staffed in the same way as a CRF with a value of 100,000 EUR), so a standard cost was established.

In addition to the staffing and management of the annual agreement, there is additional effort associated with any in-year financial scope increase. This effort is slightly less than for the annual package so the Academy applies a 3,000 EUR amendment cost for each financial scope increase.
It should be noted that as long as the overall financial scope of the SST does not increase, then no amendment cost will be incurred. The NCI Agency therefore strongly encourages customers to coordinate and request a single SST package each year to reduce the risk of incurring amendment costs.

List of changes between SST and the past system

What changes:

• Terminology – an SST package is triggered by a CRF;

• Relationship – an SST package creates a direct bridge between the customers' Training Coordinators and the NCI Academy, based on the NCI Academy's terms and conditions, where in the past, customers had to go through SLA Managers to enact changes.

• Flexibility:

  • While our customers are still required to validate the initial requirements and budget, the courses listed in the SST package can be changed in-year by mutual consent, and the overall cost of the SST package can be increased or decreased as per the customer's request. This not only enables customers to change the training courses and number of attendees, but also to more easily shift from commercial to NCI Agency-provided training, and vice versa;
  • SSTs are also cost-reimbursable as opposed to firm fixed price, which is used in many other agreements.

• Change process – for any in-year increase to the overall cost of the SST package, an amendment of the CRF is required, a revised package will be agreed and an additional 3,000 EUR of agreement amendment cost will be charged.
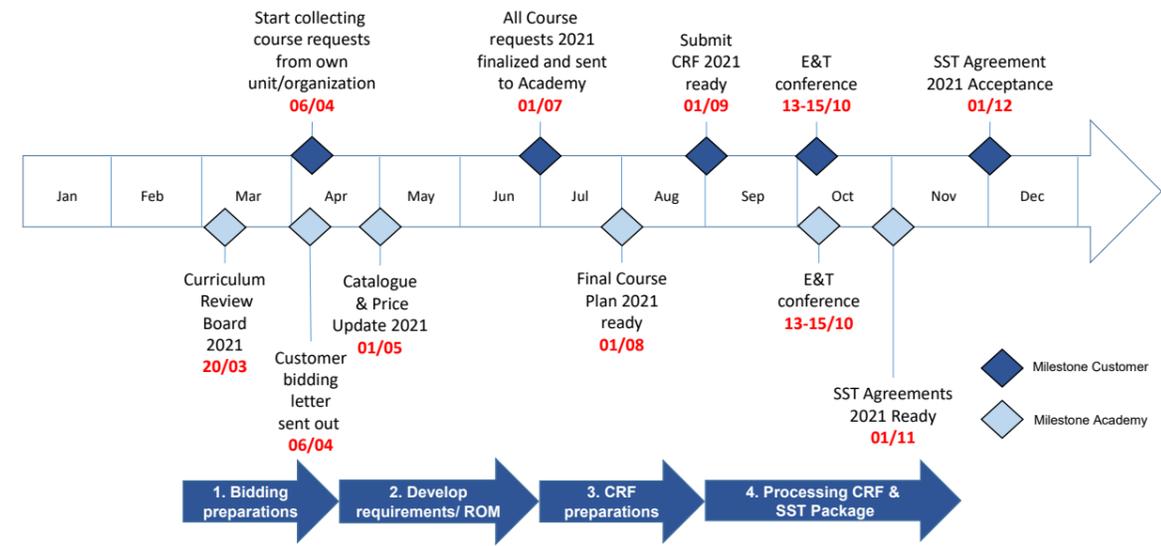
What stays the same:
• Agreements on an annual basis – SSTs will be annual agreements signed by both parties.

• Training costs:

  • Non-CSLA (Centralized Service Level Agreement) courses will continue to have a standardized cost associated with them, as mentioned in the NCI Agency C4ISR and Cyber Training Catalogue;
  • Prices are usually available per seat in courses organized at an NCI Agency site (Oeiras, Mons or The Hague);
  • Location of the courses are specified in NCI Agency C4ISR and Cyber Training Catalogue and may be subject to changes by the NCI Agency;

  • Course prices include time for preparation and delivery of the course by the instructor and, if applicable, technical support staff;
  • For local course iterations at a customer site (also known as Mobile Training Teams (MTT)), different prices are available for sites in Europe and sites outside Europe (covering different levels of travel expenses).

• CRFs – customers will continue to submit CRFs to formally request user training services, and to request in-year increases to scope of SSTs.

• Training points of contact – customers are required to provide a single Training Coordinator who has the mandate to commit seats and local course iterations (MTTs) within the financial scope of the agreement on behalf of the organization;

• Usage of a Learning Management System – customers will still use a LMS (when available), to document and request courses for planning purposes;

• Prerequisites – Students are expected to meet the prerequisites for the courses attended as specified in the NCI Agency C4ISR and Cyber Training Catalogue, including security clearance and language proficiency. The NCI Agency can request proof of meeting the prerequisites. In case the prerequisites are not met, the NCI Agency has the right to deny or discontinue the provision of the course without reimbursement.

• Course commitments and cancellations – the customer can cancel students' participation on the LMS before the course 'turn back date' without being charged. Unless specified otherwise, the 'turn back date' is six weeks prior to the start of the course. After the 'turn back date', the customer will be allowed to transfer the seat to another student within its organization, provided the new student also meets the prerequisites for the course. In the event that the seat cannot be transferred, full course participation will still be charged to the customer.

• Reporting – the NCI Academy will provide a report on training delivered with metrics, along with the invoice.

The Annual Training Request Cycle

Annual Cycle Starts in the Year Prior to Training Delivery (Y-1)
2020 Cycle – planning for 2021

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

Milestones (above line):
- Start collecting course requests from own unit/organization **06/04**
- All Course requests 2021 finalized and sent to Academy **01/07**
- Submit CRF 2021 ready **01/09**
- E&T conference **13-15/10**
- SST Agreement 2021 Acceptance **01/12**

Milestones (below line):
- Curriculum Review Board 2021 **20/03**
- Customer bidding letter sent out **06/04**
- Catalogue & Price Update 2021 **01/05**
- Final Course Plan 2021 ready **01/08**
- E&T conference **13-15/10**
- SST Agreements 2021 Ready **01/11**

◆ Milestone Customer
◇ Milestone Academy

1. Bidding preparations → 2. Develop requirements/ ROM → 3. CRF preparations → 4. Processing CRF & SST Package

1. Bidding preparations
During this period, preliminary course prices will be determined and the catalogue will be reviewed. This period ends when the bidding letter. has been sent.

2. Develop requirements
The bidding letter invites customers to develop their training requirements for the following year, indicating which and how many courses the customer wants to follow and in which quarter.

3. Customer Request Form (CRF) / course plan preparation
During this period, the NCI Academy will prepare a final course plan based on customer training requirements, while customers start submitting their Customer Request Forms (CRFs).
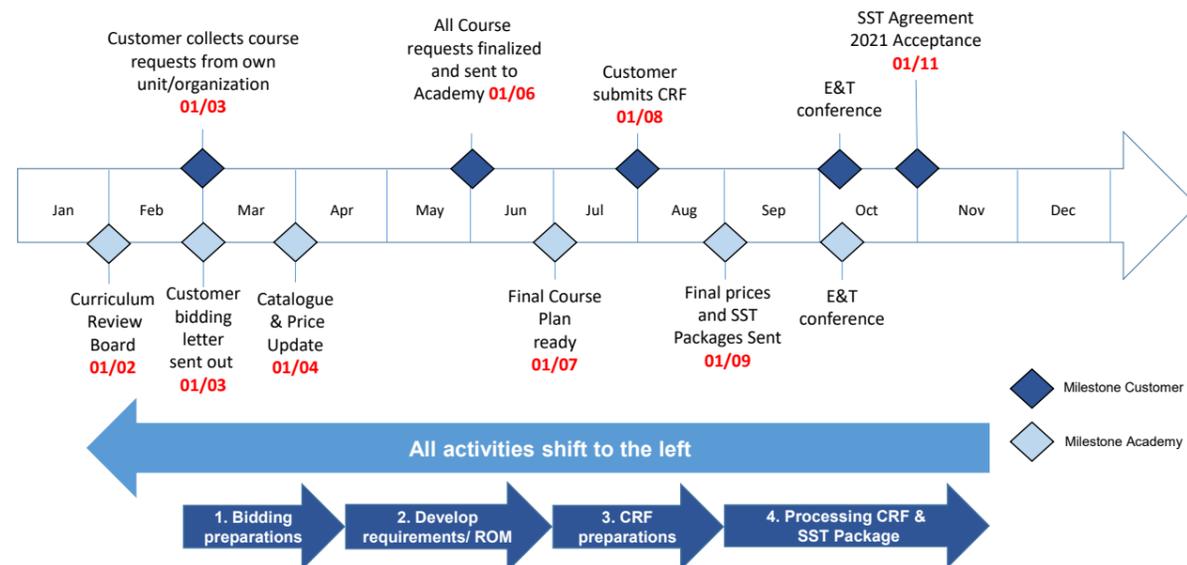
4. Processing CRF / Service Support Training (SST)
In the final period before training starts, the CRFs and the Service Support Training (SST) packages are processed. The annual E&T conference also takes place at that time, offering customers a chance to clarify any final points in the SSTs.

In 2021, it is anticipated that the planning cycle will start earlier in the year to give more time for customers to staff their budgets and also for the Academy to process CRFs/SSTs.

Annual Cycle Starts in the Year Prior to Training Delivery (Y-1)
2021 Cycle (draft) – Planning for 2022

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

Milestones (above line):
- Customer collects course requests from own unit/organization **01/03**
- All Course requests finalized and sent to Academy **01/06**
- Customer submits CRF **01/08**
- SST Agreement 2021 Acceptance **01/11**
- E&T conference

Milestones (below line):
- Curriculum Review Board **01/02**
- Customer bidding letter sent out **01/03**
- Catalogue & Price Update **01/04**
- Final Course Plan ready **01/07**
- Final prices and SST Packages Sent **01/09**
- E&T conference

◆ Milestone Customer
◇ Milestone Academy

All activities shift to the left

1. Bidding preparations → 2. Develop requirements/ ROM → 3. CRF preparations → 4. Processing CRF & SST Package

Education and Training Conference

The NCI Academy holds an annual Education and Training (E&T) conference, which is an important part of the planning cycle. The conference is a forum that brings together the training community in NATO, the Nations and the NATO Force Structure with NCI Agency training providers in the areas of CIS, C4ISR and cyber security. The conference will address individual training evolution and trends, policy and guidance updates, as well as collective training support tools. It will also act as a networking event between Training Coordinators and the NCI Academy.