Factors to consider for a successful EIS contract transition

Federal IT leaders are grappling with how to leverage a huge government contract to transform their IT infrastructures. The Enterprise Infrastructure Solutions (EIS) contract is poised to replace existing contract vehicles, such as Networx and Washington Interagency Telecommunications System (WITS) 3 by 2023, and there is a lot of work to do prior to that date. The $50 billion contract has been designed by the Government Services Administration (GSA) to migrate and transform federal agency IT networks, giving them the performance capabilities and efficiencies of the latest private-sector IT networks.

The deadline for transition was originally 2020. In December 2019, the GSA announced that it intends to extend legacy contracts like Networx and WITS 3 for another base year, with two additional one-year options. The GSA has stated that agencies now have until September 30, 2022, to move 100% of their telecom inventory off current contracts to other contracts like EIS. For a successful transition, agencies must include several migration concepts into their transition plans, including tapping cloud, moving to managed services and improving cybersecurity.

Despite the extension, agencies are under pressure to move forward. In comments made to Federal Computer Week, Bill Zielinski, Deputy Assistant Commissioner of the Office of Information Category in the GSA's Federal Acquisition Service, made it clear that agencies need to act now.

"I'd stress that this isn't simply moving the deadline to the right," Zielinski said. "This doesn't change the urgency on the front end."

"[The] GSA displayed a lot of forethought in how they handled the process that produced the EIS contract," said Nicole Goyette-Billingsley, Manager of Federal Strategy at Verizon. "They were early with the RFI, released a draft and also created a portal that allowed for a great deal of valuable dialogue between industry and government. They also worked with DoD and DHS to increase the minimum security standards of the contract, which will strengthen cybersecurity."

> **"I encourage agencies to view EIS in a holistic way, so that the tools can be integrated into a single IT outcome."**
> — Steve LeFrancois, Federal CTO at Verizon

While presenting enormous opportunity for agencies, the EIS contract also brings significant challenges. Larger agencies may have thousands of circuits and millions of numbers that need to be transitioned. Agencies the size of Fortune 50 companies should invest time and staff now to establish an IT baseline, so they can put a comprehensive migration plan in place. While many agencies may have already started the migration process or gone through a recent IT upgrade, the time investment for EIS can be a challenge on top of their daily workloads.

"Agencies are trying to balance the urgency of contract transition with the complexity of strategic modernization," said Tom Colatosti, Verizon Executive Director of Public Sector Programs. "It is increasingly challenging to allocate capital and resources across multiple priorities, including executing on the mission, transitioning to new contracts and modernizing infrastructure. Agencies need a strategic partner that can help them identify transformative solutions that maximize return on investment and minimize risk to the mission."

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The EIS transition process may present different challenges to smaller agencies that have fewer internal resources and may not have the billing personnel needed for EIS. This is because Networx allowed small agencies to delegate certain billing needs to the GSA, which will not be possible for EIS. Some agencies will be dealing directly with vendors for the first time, potentially stressing their internal staff and complicating their ability to take advantage of consumption-based pricing.

Most stakeholders agree that these challenges are heavily outweighed by the enormous benefits of IT migration offered via EIS. The EIS contract can be the vehicle for agencies to consolidate their infrastructures, streamline IT processes and make workforces more productive. Advanced Ethernet technology can deliver far more bandwidth than legacy technologies, as well as provide agencies the ability to scale bandwidth based on mission requirements. Software-defined networking (SDN) can virtualize government networks for far greater flexibility and performance, much like the cloud is changing computing and storage capabilities. These technologies also help improve cybersecurity by increasing network and application visibility, and making it easier to implement automated tools and continual assessments.

"Ten years ago, cloud computing was just starting to change infrastructure, bandwidth demands were much lower and there was no push for mobility," Goyette-Billingsley stated. "Today, [the] government simply cannot meet bandwidth demands using legacy [time-division multiplexing] TDM equipment. Aging technology is hamstringing IT enablement of the mission.

"We are committed to SDN because, as a wireless and wireline leader, that's where the market is heading," added Goyette-Billingsley. "Networking is core to our future, and it's critical to enabling a future modernized government."

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"SDN allows for so much more flexibility from a mission execution perspective," said Lefrancois. "In many of our cybersecurity initiatives, we find old policies and procedures that are five or 10 years old. More nimble and transparent networks are powering the industry move toward cyber-risk scoring, which many insurance companies now require when assessing rates. Modernization won't just save money, it will increase cybersecurity."

Too many agencies are locked into legacy IT infrastructure that does not easily support the mission. In recent years, private-sector IT has raced forward, dramatically increasing capacity and efficiencies with new virtualized technology. This IT transformation has unlocked gigantic value and productivity that consumers experience every day. The impact of new technologies in the private sector has dramatically raised citizen expectations of what IT can accomplish, and led directly to the new services available via the EIS contract.

Federal government leaders can follow the same roadmap by partnering with vendors who have built these networks for their private-sector customers. The EIS contract is a chance to focus more on IT outcomes, and it is less prescriptive and restrictive in language about how to get there. EIS lets vendors put in place the latest commercial IT innovations to support agency missions. An experienced vendor partner is critical, whether making the transformation leap immediately or after the initial contract transition.

Partner considerations

There are nine approved vendors for the EIS contract. When choosing which vendor to partner with for a successful transition, consider the following:

- **Past experience and performance.** Does the vendor have relevant experience performing transitions of this scope and magnitude? Understanding the need to transition quickly, can the vendor share a project plan that offers a strategy to mitigate risks and minimize downtime? Can it demonstrate success in transitioning agencies between complex contract vehicles? Is it able to tackle the contract transition and IT migration elements of EIS separately?

- **Understanding how the mission impacts the IT transition.** There will be times when a major technology transformation will be too disruptive for the agency mission. Does the vendor understand when and how often these high-risk periods are?

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- **Does the quote factor in all costs?** Vendors can make it difficult to compare apples to apples. Questions to ask when deciding on a vendor include whether a parallel network will be required, whether all expenses for new staff and equipment are included, and whether the project management office is included in the quote or will be invoiced later

- **Does the vendor offer a comprehensive suite of integrated solutions with nationwide availability?** Does the vendor possess proven expertise in areas like full life-cycle communications integration, mobility, secure collaboration and managed security services? Is it a one-stop shop with internal product development expertise? Is the vendor everywhere your network needs to be?

- **Is the vendor operating like a strategic partner working with you to transform your IT infrastructure?** EIS can be a transformational opportunity for the government, either during or after transition. With the right partner, going "like for like" initially should not preclude improving or expanding upon existing technologies

Conclusion

Properly managed, the right EIS partner can show you the way to improve agency performance, increase network flexibility, strengthen cybersecurity and lower costs. The opportunity for agencies is immense.

Learn more:

To learn more about how Verizon can help with your EIS transition, contact your Verizon Government Account Manager or visit enterprise.verizon.com/eis

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