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THE TROUBLE WITH EMAIL

Can agencies get records management right?

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Trending

Rep. Ted Lieu talks cybersecurity

Rep. Ted Lieu (D-Calif.) is a rara avis on Capitol Hill — a member of Congress who knows what he's talking about when it comes to technology. Lieu has a degree in computer science from Stanford University. He's also a lawyer, an Air Force veteran and a member of the Air Force Reserve, and a firebrand when it comes to privacy rights.

He's making a mark as president of the 2014 class of House Democrats and as a vocal member of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee's IT Subcommittee. This is an excerpt of Lieu's recent interview with FCW's Adam Mazmanian; for the full Q&A, go to FCW.com.

You've been outspoken in your opposition to efforts by law enforcement to obtain access to encrypted communications. Do you think the people advocating for more law enforcement access understand those objections?

I respect law enforcement, but their mission is to catch bad guys and prevent bad things from happening. Their mission is not to really think about privacy or think about what could happen if you put in an encryption key. It is clear it will help them catch bad guys. But there's a whole series of other consequences, such as you're weakening encryption systems. And this key is really neutral — it's just a series of ones and zeros. The computer can't tell if it's the FBI director entering this key or the leader of Hamas or a criminal.

What are your impressions of the government's cybersecurity posture and overall approach to IT, especially in light of the breaches at the Office of Personnel Management?

Both the private sector and the public sector have problems with cybersecurity. You've seen it at OPM, but you've seen it at Anthem, Target, Home Depot, and on and on.

Within government, I think it does vary by agency and department. The Department of Defense figured out very quickly that we are in a cyber war, and every day hackers are trying to get our sensitive data. That's why they stood up U.S. Cyber Command. That's why they put in two-factor authentication.

Many of the civilian agencies, if you read the [inspector general] reports, just don't have that. In the case of OPM, for years they ignored IG report after IG report that said you need to do two-factor authentication. The last IG report, in 2014, said that OPM was in violation of the administration's own guidance.

To me, there is no reason why OPM should be protecting the database of security clearance data. Security clearances are a national security function. It is not a personnel function primarily.

That's why [Oklahoma Republican Rep.] Steve Russell and I are working on legislation to move that responsibility out of OPM and into a department that has as its mission fundamentally either national security or intelligence or homeland security. ■

FCW CALENDAR

8/19 CDM
The Department of Homeland Security's Jim Quinn and the General Services Administration's Chris Hamm are among the speakers at this FCW event on the next steps toward improving agencies' security posture. Washington, D.C.
fcw.com/cdm

9/2 Acquisition
Washington Technology's Department of Health and Human Services IT Day will dig into specific fiscal 2016 acquisitions at the Food and Drug Administration, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and other HHS components. Falls Church, Va. is.gd/WT_HHS_IT

9/2 Defense
Brig. Gen. Mark Weatherington, the Joint Staff's deputy director for C4/cyber, and Veterans Affairs Undersecretary for Benefits Allison Hickey are among the speakers at AFCEA NOVA's Joint Warfighter IT Day. Vienna, Va. is.gd/AFCEA_defense

Contents

The Federal IT
Acquisition Summit

Exploring Strategies, Options & Innovations

October 20, 2015

Washington Hilton, Washington, DC

EDUCATION & TRAINING FOR KEY CONTRACT VEHICLES

This second event in the Federal IT Acquisition Summit series provides government IT decision makers with contract-specific training opportunities as well as insights on key issues that are reshaping the federal acquisition environment. Featured vehicles include GSA Alliant (including an Alliant 2 update), NASA SEWP V, and NIH CIO-CS.

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Have we reached breach fatigue?

The Census Bureau was hacked. Does anyone care?

Activist group Anonymous took credit for the breach in a July 22 tweet that included links to a data trove that appears to contain federal employees' names, email addresses, phone numbers, password hashes and answers to security questions.

The International Business Times reported on the breach on July 23, and a handful of other news sites have done the same.

The Census Bureau acknowledged unauthorized access to its systems, but told the International Business Times that the data was not confidential and came from "an external system that is not part of the Census Bureau internal network."

The bureau released a statement saying access to that external system has been restricted while the incident is being investigated, adding that "security and data stewardship are integral to the Census Bureau mission. We will remain vigilant in continuing to take every necessary precaution to protect all information."

The Census Bureau did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Monzy Merza, chief security evangelist at operational intelligence software firm Splunk, said the situation demonstrates a worrisome trend: In the wake of the massive Office of Personnel Management breaches that exposed the sensitive personal information of more than 22 million federal employees and contractors, people are not taking much notice of smaller hacks.

"My real concern is that [the OPM breaches] desensitized the public and government officials to smaller but still damaging breaches like the attack on the Census Bureau," Merza said.

That needs to change, he added. "The lesson from the breaches at the Census Bureau and OPM is the same: Organizations need to understand who is accessing their networks, from where and for how long," he said. "We do not know all the details of the Census Bureau attack or what the ultimate goal of the breach was, but it is clear that we must ensure that our government has the right budget, tools and personnel to continuously defend our networks from all adversaries."

— *Zach Noble*

EDITOR'S NOTE

The industry side of federal IT

More than 80 percent of FCW's readers are federal employees, so it's not surprising that so much of our coverage spotlights the agency side of federal IT. And much of this issue — from the records management feature and Kathy Conrad's exit interview to the final-page shout-outs for Albuquerque, N.M., and Eagan, Minn. — sticks to that model.

When it comes to technology, however, government and industry are intertwined to the point of being inseparable. Contractors and career feds often sit literally side by side. The Obama administration is actively recruiting from the private sector for both ideas and talent, and issues ranging from health IT to spectrum to sharing information require more collaboration than ever. It's no coincidence that so many of the community's strongest leaders have held both industry and agency roles.

Given all that, focusing too tightly on just the government half would be a distortion and a disservice. That's why this issue also includes Washington Technology's Fast 50 — small businesses that are growing at a blistering clip and already shaping the future of key technologies in government.

It's also why we devoted so many pages to a NetCents-2 contract guide. The major acquisition vehicles, after all, are catalysts for an amazing amount of government/contractor collaboration.

And it's why, if you now go to FCW.com, you'll find so much coverage of the Defense Department's July 29 award of the Defense Healthcare Management Systems Modernization. That electronic health records effort will have implications far beyond the Pentagon. And the $11 billion contract could send ripples through the contractor community that rival those from Lockheed Martin's decision to largely exit federal IT.

FCW's industry coverage, after all, is about much more than who's making money or who just landed a plum private-sector job. It's about tracking the individuals and institutions that are integral to making government work better and providing a more complete portrait of federal IT.

— *Troy K. Schneider*
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$6 billion is the ceiling for the Defense Intelligence Agency's new Enhanced Solutions for the IT Enterprise contract

WHAT: "Securing Electronic Health Records on Mobile Devices," the first document in a new series from the National Institute of Standards and Technology's National Cybersecurity Center of Excellence.

WHY: The growing use of mobile devices to store, access and transmit electronic health information is outpacing privacy and security protections for those devices, which puts medical information at risk for theft, according to NIST.

The document is a step-by-step guide to help health care providers make mobile devices more secure and better able to protect patient information without interfering with advances in communications technology.

It includes a detailed security architecture that can be copied or re-created. The guide adheres to the security rules in the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act and incorporates standards and best practices from NIST and others. It also accounts for implementation under different circumstances, including in-house versus outsourced cybersecurity activities.

Comments on the draft publication should be sent to HIT_NCCoE@nist.gov by Sept. 25.

VERBATIM: "All health care organizations need to fully understand their potential cybersecurity vulnerabilities, the bottom-line implications of those vulnerabilities and the lengths attackers will go to exploit them."

FULL REPORT:
is.gd/FCW_SecureEHR

ICE unveils expanded cyber forensics lab

A federal group responsible for tracking transnational cyber criminals who traffic in stolen information, credit cards, child pornography, fake documents and drugs just got a technology upgrade.

In July, Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) unit unveiled a 5,000-square-foot forensic laboratory that has substantially more space for conducting cyber operations, including closer analysis of criminal hard drives and video and audio forensic capabilities that rival anything seen on "CSI."

The Cyber Crimes Center (C3) in Fairfax, Va., provides computer and cyber-based technical services that support domestic and international investigations into cross-border crimes.

Eric Feldman, HSI's unit chief for cyber crimes investigations, told FCW that the new lab is five times the size of C3's previous facility. The Customs Service, which was absorbed into U.S. Customs and Border Protection, established the lab in 1997, and the facility had not had a significant technical overhaul for quite some time, according to DHS officials.

HSI's hundreds of field offices in the U.S. and overseas — as well as state, local and international law enforcement agencies — have been deluging C3's 278 computer forensics agents and analysts with petabytes of data from electronic files and hard drives that must be analyzed as part of criminal investigations. Those entities also come to C3 for help in tracking down criminals online.

According to DHS, HSI processed 5.2 petabytes of data in fiscal 2014 — the equivalent of 83 billion pages of images or 95 billion PowerPoint files. Furthermore, the volume of data presented by field agents increased 4,000 percent from 2004 to 2012.

The new facility includes expanded space for the computer forensics, cybercrimes and child exploitation units. Each has substantially upgraded software, digital analysis and other advanced and sometimes customized forensics IT, according to DHS.

Jim Cole, national program manager for victim identification in the Child Exploitation Investigations Unit, said he has unique video and audio analysis technologies and capabilities that allow him to examine digital photos and extract details that can break child exploitation cases.

— *Mark Rockwell*

Anthony K. Robbins
@AKRobbins2010

Rep. @GerryConnolly on the future of #FITARA & his plans to watch over the act via @FCWnow http://ow.ly/PF5Mn

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KRIS VAN RIPER is the government practice leader and **SCOTT SHERMAN** is a senior executive adviser at CEB.

Maximizing the effectiveness of customer service

To satisfy citizens' digital demands, agencies should shift their focus from exceeding expectations to improving the customer service experience

Improving digital services has been made a priority in President Barack Obama's management agenda, highlighted in the Digital Services Playbook and cited in several cross-agency priority goals. At issue is how agencies can maximize their efficiency to provide the highest-quality citizen experiences in the most cost-effective manner.

Conventional wisdom suggests that organizations satisfy their customers when they far exceed expectations. Fueled by media coverage of companies such as Zappos and JetBlue, 89 percent of organizations surveyed by CEB believe that "delighting" customers will increase loyalty. That perception assumes a direct correlation between extreme customer service delivery and customer satisfaction.

Our research, however, has found that premium customer service programs are not likely to produce that outcome. In fact, it shows that customers whose expectations were exceeded were no more loyal to the organization than those whose expectations were simply met. If the return on investment for exceeding service expectations is negligible — or even draining — for the organization, then adopting that type of strategy could prove debilitating to an already cash-strapped agency.

Nevertheless, failing to meet customer expectations can have crippling effects on loyalty. A customer is 400 percent more likely to be disloyal after a subpar service experience. That statistic has dramatic implications for agencies because it demonstrates how a failure to meet customer expectations could profoundly undermine the agency's support of the federal mission.

A key driver of customer satisfaction is the level of effort the customer must exert during a transaction. CEB research indicates that 96 percent of customers who put "high effort" into service interactions are disloyal, compared to a 9 percent disloyalty rate among those with "low-effort" interactions. Drivers of

> ## A key driver of customer satisfaction is the level of effort the customer must exert during a transaction.

effort include repeat interactions, generic service, redundant information, transfers and the customer's perception of how difficult it was to arrive at a solution.

For federal agencies, creating a low-effort experience can go beyond increasing customer loyalty to generate operational cost savings by reducing customer escalations and unnecessary callbacks.

Here are five key ways to deliver a low-effort experience:

• **Track customer effort, not satisfaction.** Agencies should identify and prioritize improvements that result in the largest loyalty wins. Some organizations have adopted a "customer effort score" as a key performance indicator.

• **Engineer experiences to reduce customers' perceived effort.** Agencies can make complex interactions feel easier, in part by using activities designed around the principles of behavioral economics.

• **Solve the customer's next problem, not just his or her current issue.** To avoid repeat contacts that frustrate customers and increase costs, agencies must capture latent issues through questions designed to identify the root cause of potential future service interactions.

• **Provide a guided resolution experience.** Customers should be steered toward the lowest-effort service channel. For example, rather than transmit confidential information via an online chat, the organization should direct the customer to a service channel that is better equipped to handle such communications.

• **Create a climate that enables and empowers staff.** Frontline employees must exercise the judgment necessary to deliver tailored, low-effort service interactions with customers. Therefore, organizations must thoughtfully select job candidates, focus on frontline supervisors' coaching abilities and build a performance management process that rewards the use of good judgment. ■

DAVID WENNERGREN is senior vice president of technology at the Professional Services Council.

Moving from oversight to outcomes with FITARA

The law's success hinges on a culture change from blame-setting to measuring progress toward desired goals

The Office of Management and Budget issued its implementation guidance for the Federal IT Acquisition Reform Act in June. Almost 20 years after the enactment of the Clinger-Cohen Act, it's encouraging to see Congress taking action on IT reform.

There are a number of provisions in FITARA that could have a positive impact because the law emphasizes the importance of CIOs having access to and influence over the three key levers of power in government: budgeting, contracting and human resources.

The focus on portfolio management is crucial. Across government the majority of IT dollars — as much as 75 percent to 80 percent — go toward sustaining legacy systems. A focused effort on rationalizing and retiring those systems would help reduce costs, improve security and allow access to new technologies and approaches. FITARA empowers CIOs to take such actions.

Additionally, the law emphasizes the need to adopt industry best practices, and it pushes for greater adoption of cloud computing, enterprise services, shared services and enterprise licensing agreements.

Of course, the Clinger-Cohen Act also had a number of important provisions, but, as Alan Balutis noted in FCW last year, implementation of its key provisions was still a work in progress almost two decades later.

Just as it was for Clinger-Cohen so, too, will FITARA's success depend on effective implementation. Enacting a law is not enough to change behavior. In reality, it takes a concerted effort by agency leaders to ensure the cultural change necessary to move from organizational resistance to acceptance of the new order.

> ## Today, more than ever, federal CIOs must be given the opportunity to step up and lead.

As agencies implement FITARA, it will be important to keep a few things in mind. First, although FITARA helps with the age-old issue of CIOs having a seat at the executive table, we should not lose sight of the fact that there is a big difference between having a seat and having a voice. There must be a recognition that the CIO's responsibilities span the domains of chief financial officers, chief acquisition officers and chief human capital officers, and that successful IT acquisition and management require all those organizations to be united in both word and deed.

Even more important is the recognition that FITARA's success requires a change in mindset from oversight to outcomes. In today's world of heated rhetoric and blame-setting, we spend far too much time fighting about who and what went wrong. Yet successful change management hinges on senior leaders establishing an outcome to be achieved and then following up to ensure progress has been made.

Although it might momentarily feel good to assess who's to blame for the latest data breach or failed program, the greater good is achieved when agency leaders and their CIOs publicly commit to specific outcomes and when oversight focuses on assessing progress toward those goals.

We're four years past the administration's announcement of a "cloud first" policy, and more than a decade since Homeland Security Presidential Directive 12 required the use of smart cards for cryptographic logon, digital signatures and technology-enabled physical access.

Much has changed since Clinger-Cohen, and buying and managing IT are radically different in this millennium. We must collectively ensure that federal technology efforts support and encourage the rapid insertion of new technologies, innovative solutions and commercial best practices. Today, more than ever, federal CIOs must be given the opportunity to step up and lead. Then one day we can look back and say we dialed down the rhetoric and dialed up the results. ■

3 keys to building a federal DevOps culture

Government lags behind the private sector in breaking down the wall between the development and operations teams. Here's how agencies can close the gap.

DevOps is certainly not new, but it is becoming more important every day. This is especially true in federal IT. The private sector has embraced DevOps, and it has changed the way businesses operate.

It's been six years since the first DevOps Day in Europe, and its influence has spread around the world. In that time, the end of isolation between development and operations teams has paved the way for commercial organizations to turn out better software more quickly and to achieve new levels of quality and efficiency.

Unfortunately, those successes have not translated to federal agencies. The 18F program, with its support of agile software delivery, is an enormous step in the right direction, but there are still critical barriers to overcome if agencies are going to adopt true DevOps cultures.

Here are three keys to making that vision a reality:

1. Change the culture of fear. As with the cloud, the biggest federal barrier to DevOps is the fear of change. It isn't unique to the government, but it's amplified in this market because the stakes are so high. When you're responsible for protecting national security or public health, trying something new can be daunting. That type of change comes only with buy-in from leaders at the highest levels, so how do you get them on board?

The best way is to start small.

Move forward with a low-risk pilot program. Get the developers and operations teams in the same room working toward a common goal, and track the benefits. When agency leaders see the reduced turnaround time, efficiency gains and cost savings, they'll be ready to build an agencywide DevOps culture.

> With DevOps, software builds will be three to four times quicker, and deployment will be eight to 10 times faster.

2. Find and build talent. DevOps is a culture shift that requires talented people with unique skills and experience. However, the "right" people are scarce and in high demand. To overcome the talent gap, agencies must implement a two-pronged strategy that incorporates recruiting and training.

The private sector has a role to play in providing educational support programs to agencies with the goal of building the next generation of federal DevOps leaders. In parallel, agencies must get more aggressive about recruiting top tech talent from our universities. A commitment to implementing emerging IT strategies that include DevOps, agile software development and cloud computing will make federal IT a more attractive place for our most talented graduates to find employment.

3. Measure, measure, measure. One of the best aspects of DevOps is its ability to deliver return-on-investment metrics. You never have to guess whether or not it's making an impact.

The first step is to record the baseline metrics. Agencies must know how efficient — or inefficient — their existing software development processes are at the outset. Then it's time to start tracking the improvement.

Based on our experience, software builds will be three to four times quicker, and deployment will be eight to 10 times faster, with a 50 percent uplift in quality (measured by a reduction of incidents and incident duration). We've seen enterprises institute a DevOps structure and reduce release windows from 2 days to 2 hours, just through repeatability and scalability.

There is a saying I hear repeated often: "To err is human. To err on 10,000 servers in 10 minutes is DevOps." It's good for a laugh but, at its core, DevOps is the realization of a more productive, efficient organizational model. It's time for the government to break down the barriers, build a modern IT culture and deliver better software in shorter cycles. ∎

MAKING THE MOST OF AGENCY EMAIL SCANDALS

Chief Records Officer Paul Wester would prefer that records management was done right, of course, but the political kerfuffles do offer a teachable moment

BY ADAM MAZMANIAN

Even by the admission of the nation's top federal records officer, many of the issues related to government records management are mundane.

"It's like the lights," said Paul Wester, a longtime senior executive at the National Archives and Records Administration who has served as the nation's first chief records officer since 2011. "They come on, they go off. You press the button, it all works. People expect records to be like that."

When they're not like that — when, say, a high-profile former secretary of State is revealed to have conducted the entirety of her official email correspondence via a private system or when the IRS can't locate the email archive of an official in hot water with congressional Republicans over a political scandal — it's Wester who gets irate calls from Capitol Hill.

In the summer of 2014, when the IRS email story was at a fever pitch, Wester told a gathering of government records officers, "If you don't want to have to stand before Congressman Issa with your hand raised, touching the chin of God, get your email under control."

Now, Wester is getting ready to make his annual speech to agency records officers at the Digital Government Institute's Records Management Conference on Aug. 26. Although the irascible Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) is no longer chairman and chief antagonist on the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, government's electronic recordkeeping remains very much in the news, thanks to the Hillary Clinton email story.

For Wester, these situations provide more than just a chance to journey to Capitol Hill and sit in the hot seat for a few hours. He's on the front lines of a governmentwide effort to corral electronic records — first email and then any electronically produced material — into more manageable and enduring shape.

Although Wester said he doesn't concern himself with the political overtones of the records stories, he does find that when email is in the news, it can be something of a teachable moment.

"It's giving records officers and senior agency officials the opportunity to have conversations with people they were never having conversations about regarding these issues," Wester told FCW in an interview at NARA's Washington, D.C., headquarters.

"IT'S LIKE THE LIGHTS.

THEY COME ON, THEY GO OFF. YOU PRESS THE BUTTON, IT ALL WORKS.

PEOPLE EXPECT RECORDS TO BE LIKE THAT."

Records Management

Not an enforcement agency

One of the big misconceptions about government records management is that there is a central authority with the ability to sanction individuals or departments that are not living up to their charge as custodians of government information.

"There's a lot of expectation that we are an enforcement agency when we really aren't," Wester said. "Our focus is really on how can we help agencies manage their records the best that they can so that they can meet their business needs, protect their rights and interests [of] the government and the citizens, and get to the national archives their permanently valuable records at some point in the future so that we can make them available [for] a future generation."

When records have been destroyed or removed, NARA can refer individual cases to the Justice Department, but in general, it doesn't have much leverage over particular agency programs. The results of its annual Records Management Self-Assessment give oversight bodies and lawmakers a look at how agencies are doing, and NARA also conducts inspections by going into agencies and examining how their records management programs work.

And increasingly, Wester is trying to bring agency inspectors general into the records conversation.

"I think the IG community is interested in thinking about how important records are, particularly for the audit kinds of functions, and what's the nexus between our responsibilities and what they're trying to do in the IG community," Wester said. He wants federal employees to know that records management "is an area where you can go to your IG and ask questions and have them look into things."

New law, new penalties

Wester is also involved in the implementation of updates to the Federal Records Act. One key provision requires feds who use personal email for government business to move those messages into an official account within 20 days or face consequences, except in exceptional circumstances.

"That's a fundamentally different issue with penalties and things that had not been in place before," Wester said, adding that the specificity of the new law will encourage conversations between records officers and senior officials

"WE'VE TAKEN A POLICY APPROACH THAT WE THINK MATCHES UP WELL WITH HOW TECHNOLOGY HAS EVOLVED."

that might not have happened otherwise.

"Now that there are penalties for a particular piece of your not managing your records effectively, there's a better way to have that conversation now," Wester said. "'If you do not do this, this is what could happen to you.' That makes it much more concrete than it may have been in the past."

Right now, Wester said, he plans to leave it to each agency to define the exceptions to the 20-day rule.

A looming deadline

Under a presidential directive, agencies must manage all their email records in electronic format by the end of 2016. That means no more printing messages and filing them. NARA is starting to have conversations with designated senior agency officials — executives with enough clout to take records issues into the C-suite — about how well they're doing to meet the 2016 deadline.

"It would be surprising to me if every single person met the deadline and every single agency met the deadline by 2016," Wester said. "What I can say is that all of the agencies are making progress toward meeting it."

NARA has recommended that agencies adopt a policy dubbed Capstone that involves designating certain agency email accounts, whether by virtue of rank or function, as likely to generate permanent records and then setting those accounts for automatic archiving.

"We've taken a policy approach that we think matches up well with how technology has evolved and allows agencies more flexibility and greater ability to be able to capture that permanently valuable email, segregate it [and] get it to the archives when it needs to be gotten to us for permanent preservation," Wester said.

NARA is also preparing for the impending change in administration. Wester said officials are getting ready to "dust off plans" for what agencies need to do as the Obama administration winds down. He has worked at NARA since 1990 and has been through a few presidential transitions.

"They're mundane if they all work right," Wester said, adding that the goal is "having the conversations early, getting our literature out and guidance products out early so that agencies understand what their obligations are with those kinds of folks. Making sure things move effectively and easily is something we're interested in doing better." ■

Filling the data gap

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is looking for ways to balance its international treaty obligations to provide weather data freely against the innovation that the private sector could unleash

BY ZACH NOBLE

Money makes the world go round, while weather forecasts help keep the world safe.

So should weather data be the property of those who collect it, thereby incentivizing industry to collect more and better data in innovative ways? Or is it a public good, collected and distributed freely by governments?

At a July 14 hearing of the House Science, Space and Technology Committee's Environment Subcommittee, Manson Brown, deputy administrator at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, discussed the promise of private-sector involvement and the treaty obligations that hold weather data to be a public good, distributed free of charge.

NOAA is far from self-sufficient when it comes to the data streams that make weather forecasts possible. The agency could face a gap in satellite data coverage from October 2016 through September 2017 — a gap that Congress hopes the private sector can help fill.

Big Data

Standards coming

Brown said NOAA plans to issue a commercial satellite data policy and standards later this year, though he could not specify when.

"I am driving toward this year, very aggressively," Brown said of the forthcoming policy, which "will really signal to the industry [NOAA's] interest" in harnessing private-sector satellite capabilities for data collection.

He also promised that the "living" policy would be amended based on industry feedback.

Brown pointed to the 2015 NOAA Satellite Conference, at which hundreds of private-sector leaders engaged with NOAA on data standards, as hard evidence of the agency's interest in commercial data. He also embraced the Weather Research and Forecasting Innovation Act of 2015, which passed the House in May and would require NOAA to implement a data collection pilot program with a private-sector partner by October 2016.

But he did not have a firm answer on the profitability of such a venture.

Who gets paid what?

Brown used the phrase "learn forward" several times to describe the process of working out public/private weather data-collection partnerships.

"Let's see if we can get the technology and the feeds and the architecture right" first, he said, adding that the business arrangements would be a separate discussion.

Environment Subcommittee Chairman Jim Bridenstine (R-Okla.) lamented the fragile state of America's satellite infrastructure and touted the benefits of private-sector involvement. "This data policy is critically important for creating the markets that actually drive innovation," he said.

He made the comparison to his late-night cravings for cheeseburgers, which the private sector satisfies.

"If food was to be declared a global, public good and therefore necessary to be given away for free, that cheeseburger would not have been available to me," Bridenstine said. "That cheeseburger was available because…the shareholders of [McDonald's] were interested in making a profit."

The analogy addressed the central question in Brown's testimony: "What is environmental data? Is it intellectual property, or is it a public good?"

"We think it's a public good," Brown said, though he added that there could be a hybrid model in which data is treated as a public good while companies preserve some property rights.

Could NOAA buy private-sector data and then distribute it freely?

"For every byte we put in, we get three bytes back."

Manson Brown, NOAA
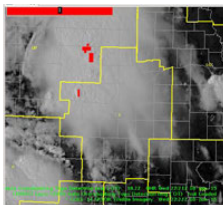
"The problem with that, as I understand on the industry side, [is] there's no business model that supports that," Brown said. "That's sort of where we get stuck."

Worldwide sharing benefits NOAA

NOAA does not share its weather data with other nations solely for altruistic reasons. "For every byte we put in, we get three bytes back," Brown said.

Under the World Meteorological Organization's Resolution 40, the U.S is obligated to freely share "essential" weather data with the rest of the organization. The other 184 WMO countries also share their data, netting the U.S. that three-to-one return.

"We share United States data freely and openly so that we can receive data freely and openly from our international partners," Brown said, noting that NOAA provides only three of the eight primary global forecasting satellites.

Such unrestricted data access is "the foundation of the current billion-dollar weather industry," said Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D-Ore.). "The current government-owned, commercially operated structure has served us well."

And yet NOAA still spends some $20 million annually to buy weather data that falls outside WMO's "essential" classification, Brown said.

Lightning data, which helps scientists learn more about severe weather events, and ocean color data, which helps with the tracking of algal blooms, are two types of valuable but arguably non-essential data that NOAA buys, and it does so on a proprietary basis, Brown said.

NOAA can dodge WMO sharing requirements because the data informs local and regional, not global, forecasting, he added.

Bridenstine voiced concerns about the first Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite R-Series, which might be delayed from its planned March 2016 launch date. In addition, the Joint Polar Satellite System-1 is slated for a March 2017 launch but has been plagued by delays and cost overruns.

Decrying the unprecedented weather data gap those delays could produce, Bridenstine once again championed the role of industry.

"NOAA does in fact already purchase weather data from commercial entities. Why not space-based weather data as well?" he asked.

He added that "a competitive, commercial market for weather data could drive innovation, reduce costs and increase the quantity and quality of data." ■

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CONTRACT GUIDE

NETCENTS-2:
JETTING
TOWARD HIGHER
POTENTIAL

INSIDE

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NETCENTS-2 IS KEY TO AIR FORCE'S IT MISSION

THE AIR FORCE'S Network Centric Solutions-2 (NETCENTS-2) is a follow to the successful NETCENTS-1, on which ordering stopped at the end of fiscal 2013. But that description does it little justice. With a total contract ceiling of more than $24 billion, the seven-year contract is more than twice the size of its older sibling, and carries more than 12 times the number of vendors.

It's key to the success of the Air Force's IT mission, said program manager Robert Smothers, and has been built specifically to provide IT services and products that meet Air Force requirements and technical standards. Other government contracts are not tailored to Air Force mission needs, he said, and do not require products to be compliant with Air Force standards.

Additionally, no fee is charged for use of the contract.

"Economically, the Air Force benefits by avoiding the cost spent on fees," Smothers said.

All other government-wide acquisition contracts (GWACs), such as NASA's Solutions for Enterprise-Wide Procurement (SEWP) and the GSA's Alliant, do charge a fee. As Air Force IT users could theoretically go to these other GWACs for their needs, the Air Force's no-fee approach for NETCENTS-2 could also provide a competitive edge for the program.

NETCENTS-2 benefits from lessons learned with the earlier contract. NETCENTS-1 had a complicated relationship between the contract's primes and their subcontractors, according to market researcher Deltek, and NETCENTS-2 enables a more direct working relationship for the Air Force with its vendors and providers.

It now separates products from services and applications from infrastructure through various requirement-specific contract vehicles, Deltek said, which creates a bidders' pool of specialized services versus product providers. That arrangement should also help to reduce overhead costs.

NETCENTS-2 also reworks the opportunities for small businesses to get Air Force work. NETCENTS-1 had what was considered then to be an aggressive strategy of providing a minimum of 20 percent of the contract dollars to small businesses, with another 20 percent of the money going to large contracts targeted for small-business subcontractors.

But most of the small business potential on NETCENTS-1 was as subcontractors, which was seen as a real impediment to actually getting business. NETCENTS-2, by contrast, has separate vehicles just for small businesses, which should create far more opportunities.

Boosting small business acquisition that way is "directly in line with the Air Force's strategic initiative of supporting small business goals," Deltek analysts said.

Deltek gives four key reason why NETCENTS-2 now plays such a central role in the Air Force's strategic plans:
- Standardization of products and services across the agency
- Simplified, standardized and expedited acquisition process
- Control the costs through leveraging Air Force's extensive buying power
- Visibility of acquisition data, in order to identify trends, cost variances and compliance through use of the AFWay procurement portal

AFWay was launched in 2002 as an automated Web-based tool for acquiring commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) products in order to provide an easier way for users to manage their IT spend. It's since become a focus for the Air Force's desire to get a better handle on such things as small business sales, and how to make better strategic IT procurements.

The evolution of the NETCENTS program since the days of the Unified Local Area Networking (ULANA II) contract, which ended in February 2003, mirrors the development of the Defense Department's overall focus on "net centric" warfighting, in which the harmonization of agency networks and data takes precedent.

It also supports the long-term Air Force objective to cut

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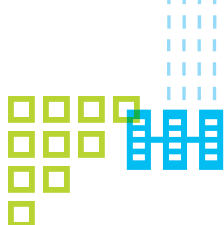
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- 25 SSL VPN users
- 10 security zones
- 250 max. number of policies

¹All performance and capacities are measured under ideal testing conditions using PAN–OS 6.0
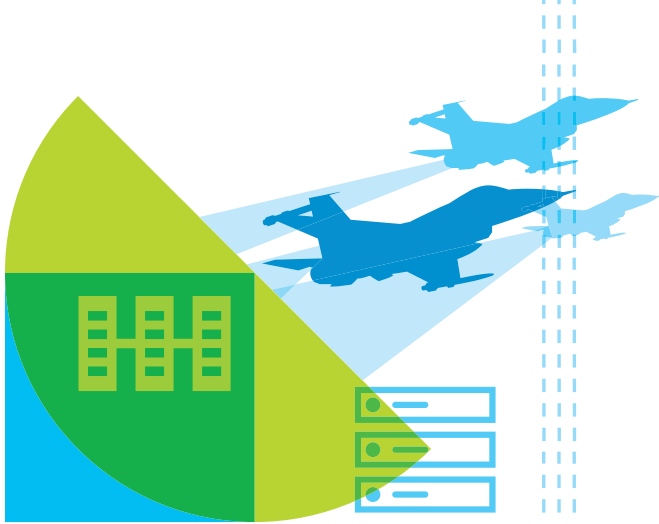
NETCENTS–2 and CDW·G

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About NETCENTS–2 Products and CDW·G

CDW·G was awarded the NETCENTS–2 Products Contract to support the Air Force with a primary source of network–centric IT and IT products, services and solutions.

NETCENTS –2 PRODUCTS

Category 1   Networking Equipment

Category 2   Servers/Storage

Category 3   Peripherals

Category 4   Multimedia

Category 5   Software

Category 6   Identity Management/Biometric Hardware and Software

Contract Information

Issuing Agency:

Department of the Air Force
490 East Moore Drive, Suite 270
MAFB – Gunter Annex, AL 36114–3000

Contracting Officer:
Janice Woodson
DSN 596.6116
Commercial: 334.416.6116
janice.woodson@us.af.mil

AFWAY:
afway.af.mil
334.416.5771
team5@gunter.af.mil

Contract Duration:
- Contract Award Date: April 19, 2013
- Period of Performance: November 5, 2013 through November 4, 2019, three–year base with three one–year options

Authorized Users:
- Air Force
- DoD and Other Federal Agencies

  1) Related to requirement for interoperability with the Air Force capabilities.
  2) Supports Air Force IT infrastructure, applications or operations.
  3) Supports host tenant arrangements involving Air Force Units.
  4) Support of joint operations or solutions, CONUS and OCONUS

CDW·G NETCENTS Sales Team:

CDWG.com/netcents2
Contact your dedicated CDW·G account manager:
866.371.2362
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Website: CDWG.com/netcents2
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Warranty/Tech Support: 877.394.2397

CDW·G NETCENTS Program Management Office:

Kathy Gaston,
Program Manager
703.621.8222
kgaston@cdwg.com

Karen Forrest,
Deputy Program Manager
703.621.8218
karefor@cdwg.com

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IT costs by using commodity hardware and software to assemble a common network of servers, data centers and online applications to replace the highly silod and unique networking infrastructures that have traditionally driven Air Force operations.

Net centric warfare requires that all elements of the service be able to seamlessly communicate and share data with each other, which requires each them use the same applications and protocols, and run across that single, common network.

As well as benefiting from not having costs spent associated with charging fees, NETCENTS-2 managers expect that the management of its own contract and the mandatory use policy will give the Air Force a much better insight into how it spends on IT, and will provide the data needed to develop strategic acquisition polices to better manage that IT spend, such as the "Bending the Cost Curve" initiative.

Deborah Lee, secretary of the Air Force, announced that initiative in January 2015 as a way to help the Air Force partner more closely with industry, encourage innovation, and drive down the overall cost of systems. Better dialog with industry is needed, she said, "so we can better understand how the processes, procedures, and some of the choices we make can inadvertently contribute to rising costs, the stifling of innovation and slow processes."

Bending the Cost Curve will require that the Air Force be "strategically agile," she said.

NETCENTS-1, the successor to ULANA II, was expanded from its initial design as a straight replacement for the LAN contract to become more of an enterprise-wide solutions contract aimed at standardization and interoperability of Air Force networks. NETCENTS-2 carries that forward even further by incorporating the lessons learned on cost reductions and more efficient acquisitions.

"Early on (in NETCENTS-2) the acquisitions strategy better targeted and segmented the customer base for ease of use, speed and leveraging buying power," Smothers said. "The rich history of NETCENTS-1 and market information guided the acquisitions strategy every step of the way."

As technology in the broader world improved and expanded, so did those advances feed into the added requirements for NETCENTS-2, such as:

NETCENTS-2 (INCORPORATES) THE LESSONS LEARNED ON COST REDUCTIONS AND MORE EFFICIENT ACQUISITIONS.

- Biometrics/Identity Management—products and services to support the creation and implementation of a standard identity management solution for the Air Force
- Service Oriented Architecture (SOA) based requirements—SOA based products, services, and solutions for the infrastructure and application areas
- Enterprise Integration and Service Management (EISM)—enterprise level advisory services for creating and implementing services and service management across the AF
- Migration to Everything over IP (EoIP)—Products and services for Voice over IP (VoIP) as well as video and signal data over IP
- Migration to enterprise solutionsEnterprise Service Units, Enterprise Service Desk, Enterprise Level Security, USAF IT-Lifecycle Centers
- Deployable IP networks

One thing NETCENTS-2 will no longer do is provide engineering services to go with the products and other solutions and services it offers. That was the original plan, but the Air Force now plans to acquire these services through the Professional Acquisition Support Services II (PASS II) and Engineering and Technology Acquisition Support Services II (ETASS II) vehicles, as well as GSA's One Acquisition Solution for Integrated Services (OASIS).

"The IT Professional Support and Engineering contract was not awarded because market research shows that the Air Force requirements for tactical level advisory and assistance services can be met by (these) other contracts that are already in place and doing the job today," Smothers said.

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NETCENTS-2 MANDATORY USE AIMS AT COSTS, TECHNICAL COMPETENCE

WHILE NETCENTS-2 is considered a key element in the Air Force's net-centric, warfighting future, service chiefs have cemented that position into formal policy by making the contract mandatory for use by all Air Force units looking to buy IT products and solutions that meet the net-centric requirement.

The May 2011 memo from the Air Force secretary's office that first stipulated this was reinforced by another in September 2014 that reiterated the mandatory-use policy, linking the use of NETCENTS-2 to the push by the Air Force to standardize its current networks, and to make sure all future developments use the same standards and can seamlessly interoperate with each other.

"NETCENTS-2 supports the IT lifecycle to include legacy operational and sustainment activities, re-engineering of legacy capabilities into target architectures and environments, and future service-oriented capabilities," the memo said.

> ## "POTENTIAL USERS SEEM QUITE HAPPY TO HAVE A CHOICE OF 100 VENDORS." —*Robert Smothers, NETCENTS-2 program manager*

"Furthermore, NETCENTS-2 facilitates competition by enabling different solution providers to participate over the course of the program lifecycle."

As well as ensuring that eventual network standardization through the Air Force, mandatory use is also seen as providing stability for vendors who have been awarded contracts in NETCENTS-2. In other contracts you might compete and come out on top, but that still doesn't guarantee a sale if users can still go to other sources outside of the contract if they feel they can get a better deal there.

Also, said Robert Smothers, NETCENTS-2 program manager, Air Force management of its own contract and the

mandatory use policy "provides better insight into Air Force spend patterns, and provides the data needed to develop strategic acquisition policies to manage that spend."

It also reduces procurement overhead and delivery times since NETCENTS-2 users can simply issue task orders to the pre-qualified vendors, instead of having to go through the laborious process of writing individual contracts for products and services.

Although it's not a stated goal, NETCENTS-2 is also expected to significantly cut the Air Force's overall IT costs through time saved by this faster and more streamlined procurement process, through less support needed to maintain fewer configurations of IT systems, and through the sheer increase in competition for orders.

"Potential users seem quite happy to have a choice of 100 vendors," Smothers said. "You may recall that the NETCENTS-1 contract had only 8 vendors."

The use of lowest price, technically acceptable (LPTA) criteria for selecting awards may also be used to drive down costs, but it's drawn flak from some vendors and users, who worry that the quality of some products offered may suffer in the quest for lowest price.

But NETCENTS-2 task orders do not require the use of LPTA, according to Smothers. Many different types of task orders are available for use, from firm fixed price to those based on labor hours. Each task order on NETCENTS-2 is competed among those vendors in the available pool, e.g. each of the 25 Products vendors competes in that area of the contract.

"Generally speaking," he said, "if the requirements are well-defined and other factors such as innovation are not as important, the government can achieve cost savings (through LPTA). But the NETCENTS-2 acquisition strategy used by each acquirer determines whether or not to use LPTA."

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NETCENTS-2 IS A POTENTIAL BONANZA FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

SMALL BUSINESSES HAVE much more invested in NETCENTS-2 than previously, and stand to make much more from the contract than they could through set-asides and subcontracting. If all the goals are met, they could walk away with just under half of the $24.2 billion contract ceiling.

They can now compete directly for business throughout many of the contract categories, and also benefit from mandates steering business directly to them. In the NETCENTS-2 Products category, for example, 23 percent of the total obligated dollars are reserved to small business subcontractors.

The Application Services and Network/Operations Infrastructure Solutions categories have separate small business companion IDIQ contracts, where any requirement between $3,000 and $150,000 has to be competed only among a small business pool of companies.

The reaction so far has been favorable, Robert Smothers, NETCENTS-2 program manager, feels. "The NETOPS contract is too new to have compiled statistics," he said. "However, the Application Services contract has exceeded all expectations, with $550 million of the $960 million ceiling awarded since 2012."

As with other of the military services and government agencies, small business have typically had a hard time in securing government businesses. In many cases they were just not seen as capable as the bigger integrators, lacking the expertise and infrastructure to meet the requirements of complex IT programs, and until recently small business participation in Air Force procurement had been on a steady slide.

That attitude has been slowly changing, under pressure from Congress and the White House. In February 2012, for example, the Air Force published its Small Business Improvement Plan and in January 2015 the Air Force announced it had met its small business goals, the first time that had happened since nearly a decade earlier.

Various factors are driving that. While demands on the military ratchet ever higher, sequestration and other cost-cutting measures are constantly squeezing budgets. In the procurement world, that translates into a push for more and more competition to lower prices while still retaining the quality of products and services.

That, theoretically, gives small businesses an advantage. They don't have the overhead of the larger companies and therefore have more room to compete on price. They are also more agile than the larger companies and can react faster to provide the right mix of expertise and experience needed for military programs, which are themselves looking to be more nimble in providing more innovative solutions for their warfighters.

Congress is also putting more pressure on government overall, and the military in particular, to increase its levels of procurement from small businesses. In the annual National Defense Authorization Act it passed in late 2014, it included several provisions aimed at just that, to make sure that the goal of committing 23 percent of overall federal contracting to small business becomes a regular feature, and not the occasional triumph.

For one, Congress included language specifically discouraging the kind of bundling of multiple contracts that had given large contractors an advantage in winning business. Another now makes agency leaders directly accountable for meeting their organization's small business contracting goals.

That adds yet another incentive to increasing small business purchases in the military. Senior executive service members who head up acquisition programs have for several years already been evaluated each year on the way they drive small business goals.

The Air Force's long-term strategy calls for "strategic agility" in all of its acquisition activities, and the Air Force Acquisition Enterprise directive calls for its procurement force to become the most agile and effective in the entire government.

While NETCENTS-1 had both large and small

business contract holders much of the small business opportunities were at the subcontracting level, admitted market researcher Deltek, which has closely followed the evolution of NETCENTS.

But "NETCENTS-2 created significant opportunities for small businesses by creating separate vehicles similar to (the GSA's) Alliant unrestricted and small business contracts," analysts there said in emailed comments. "This was directly in line with the Air Force's strategic initiative supporting small business goals."

All the small business only contracts have the same scope and coverage as those competed as full and open, with small business specialists in the NETCENTS-2 program office reviewing all acquisitions over $10,000 at the task order level.

When it first published the Small Business Improvement Plan (SBIP), the Air Force didn't shrink from how poorly it had done in previous years, even while legal mandates were in place to boost small business opportunities.

Although small businesses continue to "serve superbly," the Air Force said, the service's small business prime contract award rate had declined sharply prior to the launch of the SBIP. Given declining budgets, it said it needed to re-examine the way it does business in order to increase small business prime and subcontracting opportunities.

In NETCENTS-2, that has led to some specific pro-small business activities that can be leveraged. For the Products non-set aside category, for example, decentralized contracting officer outside of the main NETCENTS program office can, at their discretion, invoke a fair opportunity exception and set aside order to small business vendors as long as they meet FAR Part 19 eligibility requirements.

In the Application Services and NetOps categories, for anything over the small business only ceiling of $150,000 the ordering office conducts market research to see whether or not there is a reasonable expectation of receiving offers from at least two small business

companion contracts. If that's indicated, then the task order is to be competed in the Small Business Companion contract pool of vendors.

Also, all of the vendors on NETCENTS-2, outside of the small businesses themselves, had to include a small business subcontracting plan as one of the requirements for them to be get a NETCENTS-2 award. A formal record of all the reviews of acquisitions over $10,000 has to be included with each task order contract.

The Air Force Small Business Office is making a concerted effort to reach out to all of the services' acquisition force to emphasize this push to include more small business participation.

In a May 2015 visit to Hanscom AFB, for example, Mark Teskey, the Air Force's Small Business director, told program managers, engineers and contracting

FOR THE AIR FORCE, PROMOTING SMALL BUSINESS DOESN'T NECESSARILY STOP AT THE BORDERS OF ITS OWN PROGRAMS SUCH AS NETCENTS-2.

airmen that boosting small business use is "all about developing our industrial base and creating competition. Simply put, small businesses are key to driving (that) competition."

Not all programs are suited for small businesses, he said, but where agility and innovation and both required, small businesses are generally nimbler than big companies and can react faster when changes are needed.

For the Air Force, promoting small business doesn't necessarily stop at the borders of its own programs such as NETCENTS-2. Though that contract will no longer provide engineering services to go with the products and solutions it does offer, it is passing that off to other government contracts that do emphasize small business use.

In December 2013, for example, the Air Force signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the GSA to use its OASIS Small Business contract to procure complex professional services.

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Federal Government Wide Acquisition Contracts

- GSA Contract: GSA-35F-5946H
- NASA SEWP V Contracts: NNG15SC18B and NNG15SC44B
- Netcents-2: FA8732-14-D-0006

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NETCENTS-2 BOOSTS STAFF, REACHES OUT TO VENDORS AND USERS

THE NETCENTS-2 PROGRAM is significantly bigger, with many more moving parts than NETCENTS-1 and the program has reacted by boosting the size of its central office, by using extensive outreach to communicate better with both vendors and users, and through improved Web-based services.

The most obvious difference in the contracts is the number of vendors that will be competing for business, with 100 spread among the six contract categories on NETCENTS-2 compared to just eight for the whole of NETCENTS-1.

That, in itself isn't unusual, according to market researcher Deltek. With the increase in the number of contract compared to those on NETCENTS-1, the NETCENTS-2 program fully intended to expand its bidders' pool, Deltek analysts said.

This is also a more common phenomenon among most IDIQs and Governmentwide Acquisition Contracts (GWACs) in today's acquisition environment, they said. The Air Force needs to maintain a certain level of competition in order to capitalize on the cost savings associated with that.

However, they said, this increase in contractor numbers is often seen as a reaction to protests lodged by companies who lost out on contracts the first time around, and both agencies and contractors lose money when the acquisition period is prolonged due to protests. For NETCENTS-2, therefore, competition will truly begin at the task order level.

In fact, that's where much of the dirty work on NETCENTS-2 will happen. Though the NETCENTS program office is staffing up to handle the increase in oversight and program execution at the centralized level, said Robert Smothers, the NETCENTS-2 program manager, task order execution is decentralized and handled at the tactical, base level by individual contracting officers.

Much of the manpower intensive processes will therefore be addressed by the ordering organization, he said. That should be to his advantage since, while he said the program office is continuing to seek additional manner authorizations, overall Air Force IT acquisition requirements "have been limited by current budgetary limitations."

Meanwhile, the program office is "well underway" with an effective communications campaign to educate both agencies and vendors in how to use NETCENTS-2.

"We use all forms of electronic media, including a rapid response team for inquiries," Smothers said. "Video teleconferences are used as much as possible to save funds, and our NETCENTS website is full of information."

The response to the program office's RSS feed has been particularly strong, he said. The office has also established an "express lane" for contracting officers that will be open in the final quarter of the year, and he expects that also to be a big hit with field customers.

Finally, he said the program office is continuing to automate the IT purchasing portal, called AFWAY, with new releases, business-to-business transfers, and management dashboards for contractor performance and customer responses that Smothers said will ensure the NETCENTS program office keeps pace with the expected volume of business.

So far, much of the industry's response has been favorable. Jaime Albizures, senior director of federal sales for NETCENTS-2 vendor PCMG, thinks the Air Force is doing "an outstanding job."

"(Our customer) response has also been outstanding," he said. "We see nothing but positive growth, and are looking forward to servicing more commands."

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PROTESTS AND LATE START MUDDY NETCENTS-2 FUTURE

NETCENTS-2 IS NOT a monolithic contract, but comprises different IDIQ vehicles that all have their own contract ceilings and vendor awards. As of mid-May this year, after years of turmoil and protests, all of them had been awarded and were open for business, each with different teams of contracting officials, engineers and subject matter experts providing users help with acquisitions.

The early awards, in order, are:

- Enterprise Integration and Service Management: Fully awarded by November 30, 2010, and worth a total of $460 million over eight years, though with a five-year order period that ends after 2015.
- Application Services (Small Business): Awarded June 21, 2012, with a ceiling of $960 million over 10 years.
- NetCentric Products: Awarded November 6, 2010, and worth $9.6 billion over six years.
- The other categories, after delays to settle numerous protests and challenges, were made in March and April 2015:
- Application Services (Full & Open): Awarded March 31, and worth $960 million over 10 years.
- Network Operations & Infrastructure Solutions (Small Business): Awarded April 2, with a ceiling of $5.79 billion over 10 years.
- Network Operations & Infrastructure Solutions (Full & Open): Awarded May 15, and worth 7.91 billion over 10 years.
- The smaller contracts that were awarded early have already seen significant business. EISM, for example, has a five year ordering period running to June 21, 2017 and has a quarter of its ceiling accounted for. The small business Application Services contract ordering runs seven years through June 21, 2019 and half of its total has so far been booked.

The delays in awarding the various contracts means there is some confusion about where the orders stand and what damage may have been caused to the long-term performance of NETCENTS-2. But there's no longer any leeway to wonder, since the last day for performance or delivery of NETCENTS-1 orders is September 9, 2015.

The many delays could have an impact on the potential value of NETCENTS-2, according to market researcher Deltek, eroding some of the boost that mandatory use and the overall scope of the program provided.

"Specifically, due to the delays, much of the work intended for NETCENTS-2 was instead procured through alternate means," Deltek analysts said. "Alliant was a primary recipient of Air Force contracting dollars, as well as NASA SEWP, Army ITES and GSA Schedules. This fostered the slow start for the different NETCENTS-2 contracts, as the redirected tasks will be slow to move back to the NETCENTS-2 program."

Additionally, they said, restrictions on usage by other agencies will limit acquisitions by non-Air-Force entities, as will the fact that other agencies have now also established their own program to provide products and services. The Army bought some $776 million under NETCENTS-1, they said, but, as of June 2015, had obligated less than $500,000 under NETCENTS-2 and is unlikely to do the kind business it did on the previous contract when it has too many other options.

But other services and Defense Department agencies have typically been a small part of the the NETCENTS customer base, according to Robert Smothers, the NETCENTS program manager.

"Our expectation is that will continue," he said. "We will assess the market at the end of next year, which will be the second year of operations of NetOps and Infrastructure Solutions. There has been interest expressed (in that) by other agencies but, since the contract was awarded so late in the fiscal year, no task orders have been awarded yet."

All of the contracts are open to users outside of the Air Force except for the EISM contract. That's specifically

an advisory and assistance type of contract designed for large scale Air Force personnel needs, Smothers said. As such, it's not available for other services.

With all of the contracts now awarded and open for orders, the full list of NETCENTS-2 vendors for each contract is as follows:

ENTERPRISE INTEGRATION & SERVICE MANAGEMENT (EISM)

Provides strategic level consulting to various parts of the Air Force to help them manages and plan for IT and net centric changes within their domains. This includes enterprise level integration and service management support for both infrastructure and mission capabilities.

- Booz Allen Hamilton Inc.
- Science Applications International Corporation
- Dynamics Research Corporation
- CACI Enterprise Solutions, Inc
- Jacobs Engineering Group, Inc.
- Deloitte Consulting LLP

NETCENTS-2 PRODUCTS

Provides products and associated support worldwide for networking equipment, server/storage/peripherals/multimedia, software, identity management/biometric hardware and software, and desktop COTS software not included in other enterprise licenses.

- FedStore Corporation
- Intelligent Decisions, Inc.
- World Wide Technology, Inc.
- CDW-G
- Ace Technology Partners, LLC
- Counter Trade Products, Inc.
- General Dynamics IT
- Iron Bow Technologies, LLC
- Immix Technology, Inc.
- M2 Technology, Inc.
- Blue Tech, Inc.
- Unicom Government, Inc. (Formerly GTSI Corp.)
- Global Technology Resources, Inc.

- Micro Tech
- Red River Computer Company
- Integration Technologies Group
- Federal Network Systems LLC
- Dell Federal Systems L.P.
- Harris IT Services
- Sterling Computers
- Force 3, Inc.
- PCMG
- Insight Public Sector, Inc.
- Presidio Networked Solutions
- FCN Inc.

APPLICATIONS SERVICES SOLUTIONS (SMALL BUSINESS)

Provides application services such as sustainment, migration, integration, training, help desk support, testing and operational support. It includes support to mission areas overseen by portfolio managers. communities of interest, and project and program offices.

- ActioNet, Inc.
- Array Information Technology, Inc.
- Datum Software Inc.
- Digital Management, Inc.
- Diligent Consulting Inc.
- Diversified Technical Services, Inc.
- DSD Laboratories Inc.
- Excellus Solutions, LLC
- Exeter Government Services, LLC.
- IndraSoft
- Segue Technologies
- SI Systems Technologies

APPLICATIONS SERVICES SOLUTIONS (FULL & OPEN)

Provides application services such as sustainment, migration, integration, training, help desk support, testing and operational support. It includes support to mission areas overseen by portfolio managers. communities of interest, and project and program offices.

FCW

- Lockheed Martin Corporation
- Jacobs Technology
- SRA International
- L-3 National Security Solutions
- Harris IT Services
- Raytheon
- InfoReliance Corporation
- CACI-ISS, Inc.
- Northrop Grumman Systems Corporation
- General Dynamics Information Technology
- International Business Machines Corporation
- Accenture Federal Services LLC
- BAE Systems Information Solutions
- Booz Allen Hamilton
- Computer Sciences Corporation
- Dynamics Research Corporation
- HP Enterprise Services, LLC
- ManTech Systems
- Vencore Services and Solutions, Inc.
- Leidos, Inc.

NETOPS AND INFRASTRUCTURE (SMALL BUSINESS)

Provides services and solutions for network operations, production, R&D, and C4ISR mission capabilities, and includes development, acquisition, integration, test, deployment and sustainment of Air Force infrastructure.

- Abacus Technology Corporation
- American Systems Corporation
- Atlantic CommTech Corporation
- BTAS, Inc.
- CDO Technologies, Inc.
- The Centech Group, Inc.
- EPS Corporation
- Epsilon Systems Solutions, Inc.
- Indus Corporation
- Intelligent Decisions, Inc.
- Micro Technologies, LLC
- Smartronix, Inc.
- SMS Data Products Group, Inc.
- STG, Inc.
- Sumaria Systems, Inc.

- Technica Corporation
- Telos Corporation

NETOPS AND INFRASTRUCTURE (FULL & OPEN)

Provides services and solutions for network operations, production, R&D, and C4ISR mission capabilities, and includes development, acquisition, integration, test, deployment and sustainment of Air Force infrastructure.

- URS Federal Services, Inc..
- AT&T Government Solutions, Inc.
- BAE Systems Information Solutions, Inc.
- Booz Allen Hamilton Inc.
- Nextiraone Federal, LLC
- Computer Sciences Corporation
- Federal Network Systems LLCPROTE
- General Dynamics Information Technology, Inc.
- Harris IT Services Corporation
- HP Enterprise Services, LLC
- International Business Machines Corporation
- LGS Innovations LLC
- Lockheed Martin Corporation
- L-3 National Security Solutions, Inc.
- NCI Information Systems, Inc.
- Northrop Grumman Systems Corporation
- Raytheon Company
- Science Applications International Corporation
- SRA International, Inc.
- Telos Corporation

Kathy Conrad:
The exit interview

The outgoing GSA executive talks about the impact of shared services and open data — and the need to recognize and nurture talent

For the past four years, seemingly every governmentwide IT initiative has in some way involved Kathy Conrad, principal deputy associate administrator of the General Services Administration's Office of Citizen Services and Innovative Technologies. The three-time Federal 100 winner's last day in government was July 24; she sat down with FCW Editor-in-Chief Troy K. Schneider on July 21 to discuss the lessons she had learned.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Before we get to your departure, let's talk about your arrival. Why did you join GSA in 2011?

The mission and the scale of government are unparalleled. Having worked with and around government for my whole career, I had always wanted the opportunity to serve when the time was right — and when, at least in my mind, the administration was leading initiatives that I felt would leave a lasting positive impact.

Having that more direct impact on improving how technology and digital services can enable more effective government and improve the lives of the people we serve, that's a rare opportunity. It's really the most rewarding work I've ever done.

You've certainly worked on a wide range of projects in your four years. Are there any that stand out as your favorites or that you think are going to have the greatest impact?

We've developed a remarkable portfolio of shared services and solutions that are enabling agencies to deliver on the Obama administration's commitment to open, citizen-centered digital government. We've done Data.gov, the Digital Analytics

Program, Challenge.gov, DigitalGov.gov, Connect.gov and launched the Presidential Innovation Fellows program and 18F.

It was very clear when I got here in 2011 that there was tremendous untapped potential in open govern-

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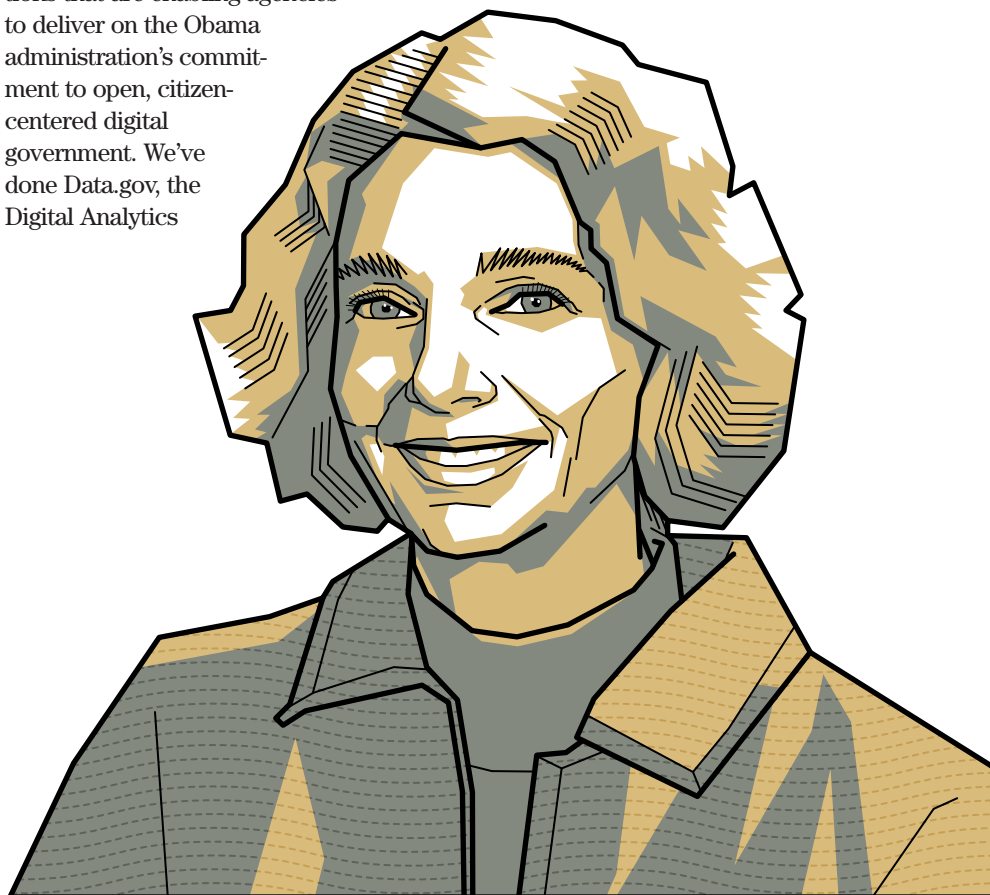
ment and in open data. Since then, open data has really become one of the key principles of government and is now being adopted all around the world. Data.gov now hosts 130,000 datasets from 80 different agencies along with the states, counties and some cities.

We're unleashing the power of open data to drive economic growth and improvement in society in key areas like health care, transportation, the environment, disaster recovery. Broader than that, we're developing software in the open. We are ensuring reuse and building a stronger community of developers and designers as a result of that open-source community.

That shift to meet the changing expectations of citizens for transparency, accountability and engagement is now operationalized in a whole fleet of shared services and solutions, and they're based in policy.

A couple of the other things that I think are making a real difference: FedRAMP is really changing the landscape. Agencies are able to move to the cloud with a consistent, rigorous, reusable security authorization and assessment framework, which is now fully operational, and it's really demonstrating the benefits of a governmentwide approach to cloud security.

I know people continue to believe that the FedRAMP process should be shorter and quicker. And it should be more efficient, and it will be more efficient. But we will never trade speed for rigor. The heart of FedRAMP is trust, and trust is based on the rigor and consistency of the process.

I'm also excited to see what happens with Connect.gov, which is

> ## It's not enough to just bring in smart, talented people. They need to work hand-in-hand with the many innovators and career leaders in government, and then to show incremental results and quick wins.

ready for takeoff as our newest high-impact shared service.

Are there other projects like Challenge.gov that haven't quite hit escape velocity yet that you hope or expect to get more traction in the next year?
I think one thing that will be really interesting is to pay attention to what's happening with USA.gov and its transformation to a content management and digital service platform.

Just last month we launched a very robust content-management platform on USA.gov, and I don't mean just the website USA.gov. It's the whole family: the contact center, GobiernoUSA.gov and Kids.gov. It is enabling USA.gov to evolve from what's really been a self-contained portal to a powerful, bilingual publishing platform for government agencies.

It will fulfill its promise as the front door of government and be able to consume content directly from agencies and then dynamically publish it on the USA.gov domain. It's very, very effective as a platform to amplify content from around the government.

Another one to keep an eye on is our Digital Analytics Program, which will soon be adding customer satisfaction data to give us an even more complete view of the use and performance of federal websites.

That's quite a list. How much of your work is focused on new systems and actual technologies and how much of it is about changing the culture and mindset in government?
Much of what I've done is to be a champion for change. I spent a lot of my time building awareness, interest and support for new ways of developing and delivering government services.

It's really important not just to offer new technologies but to build receptivity and appreciation for how they can help government better meet the needs of its customers. Part of that is baking in an understanding of what does that really mean?

I think government can sometimes be so steeped in process that it's easy to lose sight of what we're trying to accomplish.

So much of what your office does relies on persuading, not compelling. Are there things you've learned in the past four years about how to convince people to change when you don't have command authority?
I've felt like it's always better to offer carrots rather than sticks when you can and frankly to listen, not to lecture. Having a collaborative, down-to-earth approach that's focused around delivering results works best.

Most people in government are here because they passionately believe in what they're doing. If you can, [it's best to] tap into that mission focus and have people engaged in not only understanding what we're offering or what the new way of doing things might be but how it will help them be more successful.

That has been reflected in a lot of the staffing that has been done. You've been recruiting change agents, but how do you make sure the changes outlast their champions? A lot of the most effective leaders are not planning to settle into government for the next 15 years.

We've found that the impact, the scale and the mission of government are not only a powerful recruiting tool. Once here, there are plenty of talented people who are choosing to stay. Look at Ryan Panchadsaram, who's now deputy CTO, and Marina Martin, who's now the CTO at VA. They both started out as Presidential Innovation Fellows. And they're not alone.

But again, I think the real staying power depends on collaboration.

It's not enough to just bring in smart, talented people. They need to work hand-in-hand with the many innovators and career leaders in government, and then to show incremental results and quick wins.

As these new leaders come in, is there advice that you'd give them — things you wish you had known before you showed up at GSA?

I think I actually did this, but the most important thing is to really spend a lot of time listening and learning at the start — to recognize the talents that already exist and learn from those people. I benefited tremendously from doing that.

I think one of the hardest things is to learn how to find that talent. Early participation in as many governmentwide or agency-specific, not really just meetings, but groups that can help provide visibility and insight on the things that are already working. You need to learn how to tap into and leverage those rather than starting from scratch.

You've said you're going to take a break before jumping into whatever's next. Are you doing anything fun this summer?

I am! My husband and I are riding our bikes from Jasper to Banff and Lake Louise, through the Canadian Rockies along the Icefields Parkway, which is supposed to be one of the 50 most spectacular bike rides anywhere.

Was this the last government job for you? Or might you cycle back into the public sector at some point?

I could certainly be lured back in the future. As I said, this has been inspiring and rewarding, and depending on the next administration...that's hard to predict, but I wouldn't rule it out. ■

The up-and-comers of federal IT

THIS YEAR'S RANKINGS SHOWCASE
THE RICH DIVERSITY OF
THE SMALL-BUSINESS
COMMUNITY

BY NICK WAKEMAN

The success story of No. 1 Fast 50 company n2grate might seem to be an outlier. It's a five-year-old company that has grown at a 292.57 percent compound annual growth rate since 2010.

The stat is impressive, but the company's story is not significantly different in many ways from the other 49 companies on the Fast 50 list.

All are small businesses, and nearly all are led by entrepreneur founders who discovered a particular need in the market.

At n2grate, founders Steve Halligan and Jack Farley used their sales experience and accompanying knowledge of customer

securigence

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needs to start a company focused on helping federal agencies with IT infrastructure solutions, data center services and cloud integration.

Halligan got his start at Andersen Consulting (now Accenture). "I had the opportunity to really see some of the complexities and mystery around customers transitioning to the cloud," he said.

2015 is the first year that n2grate qualified for consideration for the Fast 50. Companies must submit five years of revenue data, and they must be small businesses to qualify. They are then ranked according to their compound annual growth rate.

This year's rankings showcase the rich diversity of the small-business community. Several kinds of small businesses made the list, including 8(a), woman-owned, service-disabled veteran-owned and Historically Underutilized Business Zone companies. Several hold multiple designations.

The companies also offer a diverse set of capabilities. There are a handful of consulting companies, such as n2grate, but there is also strong representation by firms that provide IT and professional services.

In addition, the rankings highlight the staying power of many of the companies on the list. Four of the top 10 were also ranked in the top 10 last year. Overall, 21 companies are making a repeat appearance on the list.

And while many Fast 50 companies are led by their founders, one is led by its savior.

Patriot Group International (No. 3) had success early on but failed to adapt as the market changed. Enter Greg Craddock, a veteran of the Army's 3rd Ranger Battalion. He and a group of investors acquired the company in 2009.

By then, PGI had no contracts and no revenue, but it still had a good reputation. "Some of the relationships they started in 2004 helped us get our foot in the door and get in front of the customer," Craddock said.

> ## "We want people to be all they can be because if not, what's the point of waking up? We hold the bar pretty high."
>
> — BOB LOHFELD, CEO OF SEV1TECH

The company's growth skyrocketed from there, hitting 160.99 percent over five years. The growth is a culmination of a "lot of hard work and a little bit of luck," he said. The company provides counterintelligence and security support as well as training in intelligence analysis.

After such an explosive period of growth, the company's leaders are now focused on managed growth. "The emphasis should be on smart growth in the areas we perform well in," he said.

Bob Lohfeld, CEO of Sev1Tech (No. 12), understands that philosophy. When he and five of his best friends, including his wife, founded the company, they focused on what he calls the principle of OCP — only competent people.

"Let's build a really good small business so that when it crosses the $35 million threshold, we're going to survive and go to $200 million," he said.

So far, so good. The company is on the cusp of $20 million and has a compound annual growth rate of 113.55 percent over the past five years.

Lohfeld credits the focus on employees as a key to the company's success. "We want people to be all they can be because if not, what's the point of waking up?" he said. "We hold the bar pretty high."

As a result, Sev1Tech has grown well beyond its data center roots. Lohfeld said he challenges employees to come to him with ideas.

"I've put the challenge out to everyone in the company and said, 'If you want to lead, lead,'" he explained. "'Come to me with a plan, I'll fund it, and let's go build business in something you're interested in because, quite frankly, some of the stuff that you guys are doing I'm never going to do. I'm a hardcore IT guy.'"

With the growth rates that the Fast 50 have sustained over the years, hardcore might be the one common thread for all 50 firms. ■

Mark Hoover and Matthew Weigelt contributed to this report.

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Rank	Company	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	CAGR*
1	n2grate	$120,000	$800,000	$1,200,000	$3,600,000	$28,500,000	292.57%
2	HighPoint Global	$1,238,098	$1,651,121	$1,160,968	$96,352,732	$95,709,774	196.52%
3	Patriot Group International Inc.	$625,000	$1,000,000	$11,000,000	$24,000,000	$29,000,000	160.99%
4	DigitalSpec LLC	$70,000	$750,000	$1,130,237	$1,733,576	$3,118,182	158.35%
5	Marathon TS	$261,582	$1,736,193	$3,583,133	$6,821,409	$10,184,921	149.80%
6	Infojini Inc.	$200,000	$2,400,000	$4,400,000	$6,900,000	$7,400,000	146.63%
7	LinTech Global Inc.	$259,185	$1,522,498	$2,002,068	$5,535,306	$9,015,889	142.86%
8	Adams Communication & Engineering Technology	$7,110,422	$15,615,889	$54,097,379	$165,196,298	$225,293,433	137.25%
9	SecuriGence LLC	$140,702	$301,889	$741,362	$1,626,631	$3,794,822	127.89%
10	Strategy and Management Services Inc.	$553,902	$1,522,840	$5,424,039	$10,616,950	$13,525,009	122.29%
11	Favor TechConsulting LLC	$517,287	$822,610	$1,834,779	$3,693,318	$11,820,771	118.64%
12	Sev1Tech	$925,000	$3,032,000	$12,180,000	$13,974,000	$19,238,000	113.55%
13	Allegheny Science & Technology Inc.	$385,203	$2,650,996	$6,209,788	$7,023,359	$7,929,340	113.00%
14	OBXtek Inc.	$3,252,939	$6,323,520	$29,616,593	$37,899,110	$65,438,106	111.78%
15	Axiologic Solutions LLC	$176,717	$720,385	$2,007,653	$3,781,166	$3,516,609	111.21%
16	AASKI Technology Inc.	$12,000,000	$17,000,000	$29,000,000	$51,000,000	$203,000,000	102.81%
17	ITility LLC	$1,400,000	$1,600,000	$3,500,000	$15,100,000	$22,500,000	100.22%
18	Synaptek Corp.	$1,021,679	$1,330,794	$3,943,507	$8,362,069	$15,706,135	98.01%
19	Pivotal Point LLC	$178,127	$178,285	$557,013	$1,817,465	$2,475,523	93.08%
20	PotomacWave Consulting	$2,360,135	$2,649,842	$7,184,681	$23,522,829	$29,162,643	87.49%
21	CNI Technical Services LLC	$1,931,454	$3,107,955	$11,685,690	$16,914,875	$23,625,911	87.01%
22	iWorks Corp.	$1,267,864	$1,731,930	$4,086,675	$10,728,246	$15,438,352	86.80%
23	Eagle Ray Inc.	$4,300,000	$8,900,000	$25,200,000	$30,300,000	$44,500,000	79.36%
24	Strongbridge Corp.	$1,417,579	$3,025,331	$10,129,681	$13,175,301	$14,529,836	78.93%
25	Knowledge Systems LLC	$671,459	$3,039,000	$3,234,000	$4,738,000	$6,788,000	78.31%
26	G2SF Inc.	$1,430,427	$2,075,208	$7,159,955	$12,906,842	$14,070,721	77.10%
27	Zantech IT Services Inc.	$4,590,138	$17,834,495	$22,366,748	$23,307,299	$42,155,625	74.08%
28	E3 Federal Solutions LLC	$3,879,019	$4,849,338	$7,082,151	$18,469,769	$35,297,969	73.68%
29	IT Partners	$358,008	$395,818	$1,261,202	$2,001,732	$3,227,363	73.28%
30	Strategic Operational Solutions Inc.	$3,460,249	$7,218,837	$8,521,833	$15,562,474	$29,889,537	71.44%
31	Red Rock Government Services	$637,084	$1,664,983	$3,966,162	$4,797,100	$5,359,129	70.30%
32	VariQ Corp.	$3,200,000	$4,600,000	$8,200,000	$18,700,000	$26,600,000	69.80%
33	Paragon Micro Inc.	$2,863,113	$7,483,488	$5,625,690	$14,880,892	$21,496,056	65.53%
34	ApplyLogic Consulting Group LLC	$756,789	$624,491	$2,272,936	$3,749,411	$5,503,778	64.22%
35	Credence Management Solutions LLC	$2,832,530	$5,953,207	$15,698,818	$21,283,345	$20,541,276	64.10%
36	One Federal Solution	$974,265	$1,671,012	$2,286,402	$5,139,624	$7,011,013	63.79%
37	Sabre88 LLC	$354,032	$328,898	$811,110	$1,562,516	$2,537,928	63.63%
38	R3 Strategic Support Group	$1,803,138	$2,852,974	$4,291,202	$7,247,459	$12,755,454	63.09%
39	Summit2Sea Consulting	$800,000	$1,500,000	$3,400,000	$4,300,000	$5,600,000	62.66%
40	Business Information Technology Solutions Inc.	$2,900,000	$4,300,000	$5,100,000	$11,400,000	$20,060,000	62.17%
41	Pro-Sphere Tek Inc.	$3,212,167	$1,901,301	$3,040,569	$5,988,895	$21,912,952	61.61%
42	Dependable Global Solutions Inc.	$2,090,207	$4,851,262	$9,750,078	$12,517,423	$14,012,810	60.91%
43	Information Systems & Networks Corp.	$2,083,925	$5,991,155	$7,574,696	$13,034,639	$13,850,359	60.56%
44	Zapata Technology Inc.	$596,901	$722,290	$2,191,478	$3,056,154	$3,943,977	60.33%
45	Chartis Consulting Corp.	$1,265,503	$1,814,260	$2,117,922	$4,948,535	$8,009,149	58.61%
46	Cypher Analytics	$1,180,000	$2,126,000	$1,807,000	$4,072,000	$7,305,000	57.74%
47	RightDirection Technology Solutions LLC	$356,000	$3,069,331	$2,382,177	$285,535	$2,202,902	57.72%
48	Fusion PPT	$641,555	$1,500,098	$3,028,151	$3,412,310	$3,890,172	56.92%
49	Astor & Sanders Corp.	$2,133,980	$7,836,130	$10,874,359	$10,376,960	$12,885,360	56.76%
50	Ishpi Information Technologies Inc. (dba ISHPI)	$6,145,879	$7,268,598	$17,196,313	$22,810,723	$37,068,935	56.71%

*CAGR: Compound annual growth rate

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