Teresa Sorrenti and Earl Warrington say they are ready to start bringing systems into the Integrated Acquisition Environment

Quicksilver team puts pieces together

By Jason Miller
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In some ways, the job facing Teresa Sorrenti and Earl Warrington is like putting together a vast puzzle. The brain-teaser they are working on is the federal government's new procurement system.

As project managers for the General Services Administration's Integrated Acquisition Environment Quicksilver project, Sorrenti and Warrington have spent the last 15 months analyzing governmentwide needs and searching for systems that agencies use that could be expanded across government.

The goal is a system that—by October of next year—will let agencies access vendor data, place orders, review bills and make payments electronically.

"The challenge will be integrating all these systems into one," Sorrenti said. "Agencies will have to work these new systems into their existing systems."

As the e-government initiative heads into its second year, GSA's efforts have started to change the way the government buys more than $190 billion worth of products and services each year.

"We are at the point where we are ready to start integrating all the systems we have modified or developed over the last year," Sorrenti said. "We have tried to find the best that is out there and enhance it. If there was nothing that we could use, we would build a new one."

Over the past year, GSA's project team of 160 federal workers launched the Past Performance Information Retrieval System, the Business Partner Network and Federal Technical Data system. By October, the project team will expand or bring online four other systems, including the Interagency Contracts Directory, Intra-Governmental Transactions Exchange and Federal Procurement Data System Next Generation.

Warrington said the project team is analyzing how they will integrate agency systems with the new apps they've developed. He said in some cases Web services and Extensible Markup Language schemas will work. But other legacy systems, such as those that run Cobol or the IBM DB2 database system, cannot be connected through Web services, he said.

For the older systems, the team will have to find traditional middleware to push or pull data, Warrington said.

Over the next few months, the project team also will focus on how to integrate the Federal Technical Data Systems, known as FedTeds, with GSA's E-Authentication gateway, a governmentwide public-key infrastructure project, Sorrenti said.

FedTeds, which was launched in February, lets contracting officers put sensitive but unclassified drawings and plans on a secure Web site and link those plans to FedBizOpps.gov, a portal for agencies to post and vendors to find solicitations.

Controlled access

Sorrenti said FedTeds supplies a controlled environment to test how the gateway will work. To access the plans, vendors would verify their identity through a personal identification number and password or digital certificate.

Agencies send drawings and plans to FedTeds, which originally was an Air Force system, through File Transfer Protocol, and the system provides access to the documents to registered vendors.

Also by October, agencies will have to populate the Interagency Contracts Directory with information about all multiple-award contracts open for multiagency use. Sorrenti said it will be similar to the Yellow Pages, where contracting officers can search 20 elements to see which agency already set up a contract for the products or services they are looking to purchase.

"There are several different communities of interest in this whole piece," Warrington said. "Each one has its own challenges, and we are considering that as we move forward."

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