"GREENING"

A PROTEST RESPONSE:

TEAM COLLABORATION TOOLS ENCOURAGE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Use of collaborative tools can improve acquisitions and enhance project efficiency, effectiveness, and team cohesion, all while protecting the environment.

BY MARK TERZANO

THE DEFINITION OF SUSTAINABILITY IS THE "CAPACITY TO ENDURE." FOR HUMAN BEINGS, IT IS THE POTENTIAL FOR LONG-TERM MAINTENANCE OF WELLBEING, WHICH IN TURN DEPENDS ON THE WELLBEING OF THE NATURAL WORLD AND THE RESPONSIBLE USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES.

U.S. federal government contracts and project/program professionals are currently exploring innovative methods to "green" the government's acquisition processes. Government contracts and project management professionals at the federal agency where I am employed are encouraged to evaluate every process and procedure to determine how environmental sustainability might be enhanced while simultaneously ensuring that the result of the contractual activity remains responsible, accountable, transparent, and regulatory compliant. At my agency, we are ever increasingly challenged to "meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs."[1]

ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS PROTEST RESPONSE

One promising area for environmental sustainability gains we have been exploring is in the realm of "greening" an agency's response to a protest. The government often finds itself defending against every manner of bid protest. During the week that the first draft of this article was written, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) bid protest site displayed over ten new protests filed. Traditionally, when an agency receives a (pre or post) award protest, either filed with the agency or GAO, trucks would be dispatched in order to supply the paper required to prepare the hard copy documentation required by agency legal staff, GAO, the protestor's counsel, and other relevant stakeholders (e.g., the Small Business Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Labor, interveners, etc.). While the need to dispatch paper trucks for a single protest defense is on obvious exaggeration, when a new protest is filed, reams of paper are necessary for the hard copy conversion of the relevant documentation that the protest stakeholders require: the aggregate result is the destruction of trees and, over time, entire forests.

Sustainability conscious agencies are recognizing that resources can, and frankly must, be preserved when preparing and offering response to the exigent protest defense. Sustainability conscious contracting and program professionals at my agency are exploring, evaluating, and utilizing new ways to reduce the environmental impact of a protest and are beginning to reap benefits.

A program manager once shared with me that on a particular protest response her office was overspread with binders stuffed with printed e-mails relevant to the action under protest to include the untold hundreds of pages of file attachments converted to hard copy in their various drafts to final stages of revision. Not only was it necessary for her to print, collate, organize, and

bind every electronic communication and attachment relevant to the action under protest, but each one of the other team members were similarly tasked with the same paper-truck rolling exercises. In this way, it is possible for a single e-mail thread to translate into a binder filled with printed documentation, documents that are in turn often reproduced for distribution to the various stakeholders. Again, in the event of a protest, every e-mail, for each team member, with their associated file attachment(s), must be printed, collated, bound, and distributed to each stakeholder.

Moreover, document-laden team e-mail communication threads rapidly accumulate and are difficult to track and maintain from a configuration management perspective. With many e-mails circulating and various revisions of documents being stored on local and shared drives, it is difficult to maintain version control, making it even more resource-consuming to assemble a correct and cohesive protest defense. This experience convinced her, and she in turn convinced her team, to make use of online collaborative tools going forward in an attempt to promote sustainability; thus reducing requirements for paper, ink, binders, floor space, copier time, kilowatt hours, and the aforementioned rolling of paper trucks and forest felling.

COLLABORATION TOOLS— A WORD OF CAUTION

One promising area for resource conservation in the face of a protest is for an acquisitions team to make use of one or more online team collaboration tools. Not only will environmental sustainability be served, but online collaboration also enhances configuration management, making a protest response a more manageable and efficient task.

A word of caution before deciding to venture into the brave new (to some) world of online collaboration: some team members may be reluctant to try something new, regardless of the promised benefits. There is a sharp learning curve involved when deciding to employ online collaboration tools. Some team members may be reluctant to change

the processes they are presently using because their routine works for them, and some level of reluctance should be anticipated. Therefore, the team leader/ project manager must be prepared to make reasonable accommodations for a team member who wishes to maintain his or her procedural status quo.

Furthermore, I proffer a caution to be cognizant of your agency's IT and security policies regarding the use of online collaboration tools—the last thing you need when presented with a protest is for agency compliance personnel advising you that the use of a certain collaborative tool, or tools, which your team has relied on during the

acquisition is not supported or is not agency (IT and security) policy compliant. Therefore, before deciding to implement a team collaboration tool, it is advisable to review your agency's security and IT services policies to ensure that the collaborative tool is supported and provides a sufficiently secure environment capable of hosting the source selection sensitive and "for official use only" documents/information that will be posted, edited, and discussed on the site. I acknowledge that challenges exist to introducing online team collaboration tools; however, I suggest that the benefits to team productivity, cost savings, efficiency, and environmental sustainability form a cogent case for working through the challenges.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF TEAM COLLABORATION TOOLS

The use of online collaboration tools, such as IBM's Lotus Quickr,[2] which we engaged as our "team site" for an acquisition, significantly reduce the necessity of e-mailing team members manifold versions of the diverse documents associated with an acquisition. This reduced electron traffic in turn translates into significantly reduced hard copy printing in the event of a protest, as well as the added benefit of a reduced opportunity for document version conflicts.

"Quickr is social team collaboration software, used by teams of people to share content."[3] With Quickr, an acquisition team has the ability to securely post varying (draft to final) revisions of acquisition documents to an online collaboration library. Once posted, these documents may be read, edited, downloaded, deleted, shared, or commented upon (based on predefined individual permissions) by site members. Site members also have the ability to create and post notices and messages for the team, stand up Wikis, initiate and monitor team discussions, track issues, maintain a shared acquisition milestone schedule (via use of the calendar tool), assign and monitor team member tasks, among other functions—all within an online, web-based, secure environment. Setting up a team Quickr site is straightforward and there are many Quickr site templates available

online if you do not wish to establish your team site from scratch.

In addition to Lotus Quickr, there are many (open source or proprietary) team collaboration tools available to assist acquisition professionals to work more efficiently, effectively, and sustainably. It is not practical to review all of the collaboration tools available; however, I suggest checking out Robin Good's mindmeister "Best Online Collaborative Tools 2010" site[4] which "mind maps" collaborative tools according to function—e.g., project management, team collaboration workspaces, event scheduling, web presenting, etc.—which will assist your team in making an (organizational policy compliant) entrance into online collaboration.

Some of the collaborative tools presented on Good's site are available as freeware (at least for limited/basic versions), while others are commercially available. Good's mindmeister site is also a useful resource if you're concerned about entering the world of online collaboration; the site will assist you in selecting a tool that will best serve your team's recurring or exigent need.

For example, "Dabbleboard" is indicated on Good's site under the "white boarding" collaboration area. Dabbleboard is "an online whiteboard that will help you visualize, explore, and communicate ideas."[5] The site hosts an excellent video that demonstrates how a team can visually share flowcharts, network diagrams, etc. Dabbleboard also appears to be a very useful brain-

storming device through which team members may freely conceptualize in a secure environment from any Internet-available location. This (nearly) real-time collaborative tool will reduce the need for back-and-forth team e-mailing and encourages spontaneous creativity.

Another example under "team collaboration workspaces" is "Campfire." Campfire is "a web-based group chat tool that lets you set up password-protected chat rooms in just seconds."[6] Campfire also boasts an application that allows team collaboration from an iPhone. I use Lotus SameTime for real time messaging; of course, Lotus Quickr plays well with SameTime, even displaying the "presence-awareness" of team members (i.e., whether the team member is available, in a meeting, away, etc.). There are also numerous (secure and otherwise) Cloud-based collaborative applications indexed and linked on Good's site.

CONCLUSION

Your team's discerning use of collaborative tools will likely improve acquisitions and enhance project efficiency, effectiveness, and team cohesion. Moreover, for government agencies facing a protest, agency policy compliant online collaborative tools will aid in the government's preparation of a comprehensive, veracious, and environmentally conscientious response. **CM**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MARK TERZANO, M.A., CFCM, PMP, is a project manager for the federal government. He can be reached at **kimandmark_2000@yahoo.com**.

Send comments about this article to cm@ncmahq.org.

ENDNOTES

1. World Commission on Environment and Development (WECD), 1987.
2. Registered trademark of IBM Corporation.
3. **Ibm.com**.
4. **www.mindmeister.com/12213323/best-online-collaboration-tools-2010-robin-good-s-collaborative-map**.
5. **www.dabbleboard.com**.
6. **http://campfirenow.com**.