

HOW AGENCIES CAN GET THE MOST VALUE TRANSITIONING TO THE EIS CONTRACT

By FedScoop Staff

Time is beginning to run short for agencies that need to prepare for one of the largest telecommunications overhauls in government history.

The 15-year, \$50 billion Enterprise Infrastructure Solutions contract will serve as the General Service Administration's premier telecommunications contract beginning in May 2020. That leaves about 18 months for agencies to get their transition houses in order for an effort that seeks to replace more than 90 contracts.

Senior administration officials are positioning EIS as a critical component of the government's larger IT modernization, cloud computing and cybersecurity initiatives. The contract will usher in a wave of next-generation networking and telecommunications technologies, including software-defined networking (SDN) and unified communications, among many others. The more fully managed networking and unified communications capabilities will be supported by continuous upgrades and technology refreshes that will set the stage for IoT enablement.

Prior to the EIS contract, federal telecommunications services had been channeled through a collection of GS contract options – both Networx Universal and Enterprise and Washington Interagency Telecommunications System 3 contracts. All of those services will continue to be provided under EIS, which will now include a larger umbrella of suppliers to improved cost and geographic coverage for agencies.

The **transition to EIS** is expected to be so extensive that GSA officials decided to extend the current set of telecom contracts another three years to provide agencies time to shift their services ahead of a 2020 implementation deadline.

But if the lessons from GSA's previous transition to those contracts are any indication, agencies can't afford to wait. According to a **Government Accountability Office audit**, delays in the last transition resulted in \$329 million of lost savings for agencies, not including an additional \$18 million in administrative costs to GSA.

Getting up to speed

Agencies face some familiar challenges, including a lack of adequate staffing. In addition, vacancies in a number of leadership positions have made people reluctant to chart a course that may differ from the way the White House wants to move forward. Many agencies as a result have gotten off to a slow start.

At the same time, the EIS contract has created an unprecedented opportunity for agencies to reimagine their IT and communications future, says Dave Young, senior vice president for strategic government at CenturyLink, one of nine communications and IT services providers to **win a leading role** on the EIS contract.

"There are adequate markers in the White House's IT modernization report that have come forward, and interaction that is happening among CIOs and industry associations," he said. "So, there should be enough conversation taking place and even draft templates that GSA is providing to enable agencies to write simple requirements."

What's needed, however, is the right attention to planning and execution, said Young. He suggested five key steps to help make the most of EIS:

First things first

The most important element agencies have to confront at the outset is the **fair opportunity statement of work**, according to Young. “They need to conceptualize how they will make a determination which awardee is best able to support transition and evolution to next-gen technology,” he said.

That’s critical, Young said, to allow the EIS contractors to put their best foot forward. “They should not encumber the solicitation with too many details of location and inventory for purposes of competition, which will only need to be repeated during transition,” he said.

Second, agencies need to plan for time to interact with the EIS awardee community. Have face-to-face meetings, and take the opportunity to have pointed, yet informal, conversations with awardees to get familiar with the landscape of service providers.

Young recommends asking service providers not just where they are invested today, but where they are looking to improve in the future, so agencies have a deeper understanding of how providers and their technology platforms are likely to evolve over the 15-year life of the EIS contract.

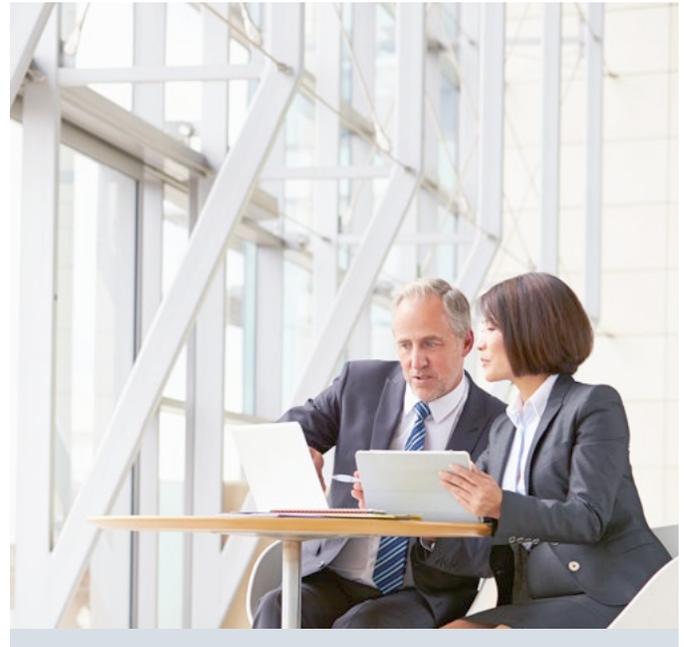
“Agencies need to do their homework and be comfortable with what the competitive landscape looks like before they get to the requests for proposals (RFPs) stage,” Young advises.

Know what’s on your network

Once an agency makes its selection based on their criteria, the next most important factor in getting from their current state to the next-generation, modernized state, is completing their inventory.

The inventory is more than just what is located at a physical location. It also includes a thorough assessment of all the network technology that connects it. Because agencies are going to move legacy voice systems and analog services to internet- and cloud-based services, the inventory is going to be more complex than anything agencies have undertaken in decades.

The good news is, it doesn’t necessarily have to be perfect, said Young. “It’s not about getting the inventory perfect for the purpose of an RFP, it’s about getting the acquisition structure flexible enough to allow it to evolve overtime,” he said.



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Establish your EIS contracting team

In the past, a “Designated Agency Representative” was a telecom and IT subject-matter expert who had designated authority to procure services. But under EIS that title no longer exists.

“There is an overlap of contracting officers and [contracting officer technical representatives] to pick up these responsibilities,” Young said. Agencies in general should establish a senior transition sponsor, a lead transition manager and a transition ordering contracting officer and ensure they are fully engaging the expertise from IT and telecom managers, acquisition experts and financial staffs.

“I’m not fully confident that there are as many contracting offices that have a history of buying these services. That’s the concern that drives our recommendation to keep acquisition as simple as possible,” he said. “Folks can get lost focusing on the trees and not the forest. Procurement professionals need to take their time to get familiar with the needs and technologies.”



Define your service requirements and strategy

Agencies will need to develop a transition plan that maps out its technological goals, transition schedule, a strategy for awarding task orders and that identifies risks.

Young, however, suggested agencies consider awarding multiple contracts in order to leverage the benefit of continuous competition. For example, Young recommends that agencies make a dual award for the network so that each contractor is responsible for providing status on health and each must compete with the other.

“Make sure a contractor is performing through greater transparency. Nobody should think they are going to get an award for an agency’s business. They should compete for that business through quality service and price competitiveness,” he said.

But agencies need to start gaining momentum soon, he said. “Everyone needs to recognize the current end date to all of these services contracts,” and the strategic work that has to be done in advance “to enable a smooth transition,” said Young.

*Look for **more resources** on leveraging EIS for next-generation cloud services, data services, communications and voice services, and more from CenturyLink.*

Five sound transition planning practices

1. Establish an accurate telecommunications inventory and an inventory maintenance process
2. Perform a strategic analysis of telecommunications requirements and use this to shape the agency’s management approach and guide efforts when identifying resources and developing a transition plan
3. Establish a structured management approach that includes a dedicated transition management team that uses clear lines of communications in addition to key management processes, such as project management, configuration management, and change management
4. Identify the funding and human capital resources that the transition effort requires
5. Develop a transition plan that includes transition objectives, measures of success, risk assessment, and a detailed timeline.

(Source: GAO)