

Maximizing the Value of Government IT: Insights from Mary Davie, Assistant Commissioner, Office of Integrated Technology Services, Federal Acquisition Service, U.S General Services Administration

By Michael J. Keegan



Today, government executives confront serious challenges to mission effectiveness. The Office of Integrated Technology Services (ITS) in GSA's Federal Acquisition Service (FAS) positions itself as a facilitator and enabler of government IT savings. By reducing federal agency customer costs, ITS can assist them in focusing on their core missions with smarter, more efficient IT purchases. At the same time, ITS looks for innovative approaches to

maximize value while lowering cost.

What are the strategic priorities for GSA's Office of Integrated Technology Services? How does ITS maximize the value of government IT while lowering cost? What is ITS doing to improve its operations and become more efficient and agile? Mary Davie, Assistant Commissioner, Office of Integrated Technology Services, shares her insights on these topics and more. The following is an edited excerpt of our discussion on *The Business of Government Hour*.

Would you describe the mission and continued evolution of the U.S. General Services Administration's Federal Acquisition Service?

Mary Davie: It is GSA's mission to deliver the best value in real estate, acquisition, and technology service to government and the American people. We focus on the values of integrity, teamwork, and transparency to deliver better value and savings, serve our partners, make a more sustainable government, and lead with innovation. FAS is vital to GSA's mission. Given the needs of government are constantly shifting, we are continuously looking at ways to improve.

I'd like to understand more about FAS' Office of Integrated Technology Services. What services does it provide and how is its portfolio organized?

Mary Davie: About a quarter of all federal IT spend comes through ITS. We stand up acquisition solutions for our agency customers that allow access to mission-enhancing IT products and services.

We're currently organized into three groups: Schedule 70 is the largest and most comprehensive IT acquisition vehicle in the federal government, spending about \$15 billion last year.

The Office of Strategic Programs contains our strategic blanket purchase agreements (BPAs)—E-mail as a Service, SmartBUY, our USAccess program that provides identify verification services, our GWAC program, and a portfolio of network services solutions like Networx, Connections II, the mobility program, and the Commercial Satellite program.

We have about 550 people across the country and we do everything from making contracts accessible to providing people with training on how best to use those contracts. We've moved away from simply contract build focus to a solutions-based approach to administration priorities such as cloud and data center consolidation.

My biggest duty is to support the folks that carry out the functions of ITS. Information technology is recognized as a critical mission enabler for federal agencies. It helps agencies deliver services and improve citizen accessibility to government services. I facilitate and manage relationships while working to forge collaborative solutions. I strongly believe in IT and GSA's mission as that central buying arm, providing central services and support, which is exactly what ITS does.




“We’ve been focused on sharing information across government and across the buying space. Today federal buying is so fragmented. We ask ourselves what can we provide to agencies to improve their buying power and buying decisions?”



“We have three main strategic goals: deliver efficient operations, drive world-class value, and be agile and innovative. For years, we were focused on contracts. Now it’s more about what our customers need and how we can best use common solutions across agencies. We’re moving from a contracts-focused model to a solution-oriented model.”


What are your top challenges and how have you sought to address them?

 **Mary Davie:** The first challenge is keeping up with the pace of technological innovation. Technology is evolving so rapidly that it is difficult for government to keep up, especially when technology challenges someone to change a business model like cloud, and make it available quickly and safely for government. Given government takes extra precautions, we realize we’re never going to be right at the innovation curve, but we want to be as close as possible. As my deputy Mark Day likes to say, we need to anticipate skating to where the puck is going. For instance, we have created innovative technology Special Item Numbers (SINs), so new technologies that do not fit our current structure on Schedule 70 have a landing pad so agencies can access them quickly. We also have flexible contracts like our GWACs that allow for companies to make new technologies available.

A second challenge is how technology evolves. Technology no longer means you have new software that you install. IT solutions like cloud, cybersecurity, and network services require a collaborative effort between chief financial officers, chief acquisition officers, and chief information officers. We’re also sharing lessons learned, whether for cloud implementation, when we switched to E-mail as a Service, launched our Mobility program, or made the Networx transition. You need that coordinated effort to succeed.

The third challenge is that for a long time, we were solely an acquisition organization. ITS has undergone a major recruiting and training effort to ensure our program representatives are experts not only in acquisition, but in technology. We cannot drive value or create solutions for innovative technologies without understanding them.

What are your strategic priorities?

 **Mary Davie:** We have three main strategic goals: deliver efficient operations, drive world-class value, and be agile and innovative. For years, we were focused on contracts; we’re moving from a contracts-focused model to a solution-oriented model. We’re also looking to increase the amount of


information available for agencies to make informed decisions. We’re looking at making prices paid available for our acquisition vehicles so agencies can conduct better research and better negotiate prices with vendors.

Our second priority is delivering world-class value. Today federal buying is so fragmented. What can we provide to agencies to improve their buying power and buying decisions? Part of driving world-class value is sharing best practices. Another part is “speed to value.”

We know cloud has the potential to save government millions, but if you can’t access innovative technologies like cloud quickly and efficiently, that is lost opportunity. We’re working to provide greater visibility on the prices paid by government agencies for commonly purchased goods and services and related purchasing behaviors to the acquisition community, in order to support efforts to reduce total cost of ownership for these goods and services. We’ve also introduced the solutions navigator tool on our website. We have an 800 number and an online chat so people can ask questions.

My third priority is being agile and innovative—being ahead of the market. We talk about skating to where the puck is going and anticipating if we see a shift toward a specific trend. How do we need to start revamping our contracts and our solutions to help meet these needs? Our infrastructure as a service and e-mail as a service blanket purchase agreements really did anticipate that future. We offer choices for where we are today, but also give them the ability through contract solutions to get them where they need to be.

Your Network Services Program has undergone some major initiatives with Networx Transition being complete, Network Services 2020 (NS2020) underway. Could you go over some of the things you’re doing and how they’re helping the government?

 **Mary Davie:** It has been a year since we transitioned to Networx. This was a heavy lift for the agencies ... the contract was actually awarded six years ago and the technology landscape was changing. It is important to remember

that Networx saved the American taxpayers more than \$678 million in 2013. We can expect that to increase as agencies fully use the capabilities of Networx. We are talking to agencies to share the lessons learned from the transition and will continue to do so.

NS2020 is not a single contract but rather a strategy recommending a portfolio of contracts that address a broad range of infrastructure, IT and telecommunications needs. GSA is working with industry and our customers to be as forward-thinking as possible—putting in place the most robust and service-rich contracts possible. The key to meeting the need for future technologies will be flexibility. We have to have the systems and processes that can support the ordering, billing, and inventory management for new services that may emerge over the next 10 years. We are working with the GSA CIO, agencies, and suppliers to ensure our systems efforts are headed in the right direction. One of my priorities is to be better buyers of telecommunications and make the transition less lengthy, costly, or complex.

Many agencies actually face reduced or flat IT spending, yet missions continue to grow and demands continue to expand. What is a winning formula for smarter IT spending?



Mary Davie: It's really about continuing to innovate and invest while reducing our IT spend.

While these seem contradictory, I think they actually go hand in hand. Feedback from customers shows us that most of the time and money is actually spent on operations and maintenance of legacy systems. When we talk about things like "cloud," we're not talking about it because it is just a new technology, but because it is a proven way to save on infrastructure costs and free up funding to allow CIOs to invest in mission-enhancing technologies.

Governance and program management are also critical. We need to make sure that some of the more highly visible projects are being executed on time and within budget. Collaboration is also important because agencies can learn from the experiences of other agencies. Given the changing acquisition environment and process, we need to be more agile and flexible pursuing modular development. We may

need to do things in smaller chunks; either it's successful in four to six months and we move on to the next phase or it's not and we change course.

Tactically, other pursuits can make a difference. GSA manages the Presidential Innovation Fellows, deployed across government in six to nine-month increments and charged with solving a specific problem through technology. There is also strategic sourcing. GSA has been helping run Federal Strategic Sourcing contracts for some time. ITS has the lead for FSSI Wireless and the upcoming large publisher BPA. Both of these allow agencies to pool their dollars and buy as a federal government rather than individuals. Then there is the move to shared services where agencies don't need to invest in their own systems and services, but can access mission support functions from recognized shared services providers. Lastly, there is also the speed to savings. Agencies don't have to use GSA to acquire their IT needs, but besides saving in dollars, we save them time. If an agency goes open market for a \$100 million acquisition and it takes on average a year, that time it takes acquiring the technology is time that agencies are missing out on savings and they can't get back. Instead, when agencies use us, an average of one year on the open market for a \$100 million project gets shortened to three months. That is nine months of savings realization agencies lose by not coming to us. ■

To learn more about the U.S. General Services Administration, go to www.gsa.gov/portal/category/21383.



To hear *The Business of Government Hour's* interview with Mary Davie, go to the Center's website at www.businessofgovernment.org.



To download the show as a podcast on your computer or MP3 player, from the Center's website at www.businessofgovernment.org, right click on an audio segment, select Save Target As, and save the file.



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