GSA pushes for larger market share

By Mark Rockwell
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Mary Davie: Agencies should consider GSA vehicles, but also determine what contract solution best fits their needs. (File photo)

Even though Government Services Administration leaders hopes to transform the agency into the go-to supplier of federal IT products and services, they realize GSA can't be all things to all agencies and vendors, according to the assistant commissioner of the Office of Integrated Technology Services in the Federal Acquisition Service.

Efforts such as the One Acquisition Solution for Integrated Services (OASIS) bill and the Federal Strategic Sourcing Solution Initiative (FSSI), are helping consolidate federal contracting, Mary Davie, assistant commissioner for the Office of Integrated Technology Services (ITS) told Deltek's Federal Marketview 2013 in Tysons Corner, Va., on July 25. But, she said, "not everything is solved by a common solution."

Davie said her boss, recently confirmed GSA Administrator Dan Tangherlini, is pushing for a bigger share of the federal IT budget. "He wanted to know why it's only 25 percent," she said. Tangherlini has said he wants to capture 90 percent of federal procurement spending within 10 years, as federal agencies look to consolidate and streamline spending on their IT needs.

Tangherlini has been meeting face-to-face with as many federal agency heads as he can, pushing to get them to sign on to GSA's centralized acquisition vehicles.

OASIS, set for release by the end of July, is one of those vehicles. The indefinite-delivery, indefinite-quantity contract (IDIQ) aims to meet cross-government demands for professional services, complementing GSA's Multiple Award Schedules program and provide agencies with more flexible full-service options. It is expected to be the next-generation contract designed to address agencies' needs for management and consulting, professional engineering, logistics and finance.

While OASIS and mobile services purchasing agreements can bring down costs and consolidate a sprawling cast of similar contracts, Davie said in some cases her agency won't be able to address specific needs or obtain the best price. That doesn't mean, she said, that agencies shouldn't use GSA's agreements. But they also need to determine what best suits their specific needs.

"Agencies see wireless BPAs [blanket purchase agreements] and say they can do better on price," said Davie. Basing an assessment only on price, however, might be too limited a view to squeeze the most value out of agreements. The price arrived at through an agency's individual contract might not include features that the BPA does. Ultimately, the lower price could lead to higher costs in the long term, or the sacrifice of useful capabilities.

The upcoming OASIS release, said Davie, is another contracting vehicle that might not be satisfying to all. "We won't make everyone happy" with OASIS but, she added, the bulk of those who use it will find it suits them.

In conjunction with the conference, Deltek released data showing that government agencies were indeed swinging back toward using centralized contracting, but the pendulum probably wouldn't swing completely in that option. "Agencies have been moving away from agency-specific contracts," said Kevin Plexico, vice president of information solutions at Herndon, Va.-based Deltek. Agencies, he said, have now "found a balance" between making their own contracts and using GSA's contracting vehicles.

Deltek's 2013 Marketview research showed that single-award and sole-source contracts and agency-specific IDIQs have long overshadowed Schedule 70 and GWACs in terms of IT contract obligations, but are gaining some ground. Single-award and sole-source awards, according to Deltek, made up a bit more than 40 percent of federal contract obligations in 2007, while Schedule 70 garnered 25 percent. In 2012, according to the research, single

awards and sole source dropped to about 37 percent, and Schedule 70 increased to slightly more than 20 percent. GWACs had about 5 percent in 2007, with almost 10 percent in 2012.

While agencies are moving to a more centralized ITS approach and narrowing the field of contracts used to procure IT, enterprise-wide procurements such as software licensing agreements will continue. Along the way, Plexico said, initiatives such as the Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act and strategic sourcing programs could have a significant effect on agencies' decisions to move toward more centralized contracting.

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