

# Factors to Consider for a Successful EIS Contract Transition

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Government IT leadership is grappling with how to leverage a huge government contract to transform their IT infrastructure. The Enterprise Infrastructure Solutions (EIS) contract is poised to replace existing contract vehicles such as Networx and WITS 3 by 2023, and there is a lot of work to be done prior to that date. The \$50 billion contract has been designed by the Government Services Administration (GSA) to modernize and transform agency IT networks, giving them the performance capabilities and efficiencies of the latest private sector IT networks.

The deadline to transition was originally 2020. In December, GSA announced that it intends to extend legacy contracts such as Networx and Washington Interagency Telecommunications System (WITS) for another base year, with two additional one year options. To qualify for these extensions however, agencies must include several modernization concepts into their transition plans, including tapping cloud, moving to managed services and improving cybersecurity.

Despite the extension, GSA still is requiring agencies to submit their EIS task orders by September 30th, 2019. In comments made to Federal Computer Week, Bill Zielinski, deputy assistant commissioner of the Office of Information Category in GSA's Federal Acquisition Service, made it clear agencies need to act now:

"I'd stress that this isn't simply moving the deadline to the right," he is quoted as saying. "This doesn't change the urgency on the front end."

"GSA displayed a lot of forethought in how they handled the process that produced the EIS contract," says Nicole Goyette-Billingsley, Manager of Federal Strategy at Verizon. "They were early with the RFI, released a draft and also created a portal that allowed for a great deal of valuable dialogue between industry and government. They also worked with DoD and DHS to increase the minimum security standards of the contract, which will strengthen cybersecurity."

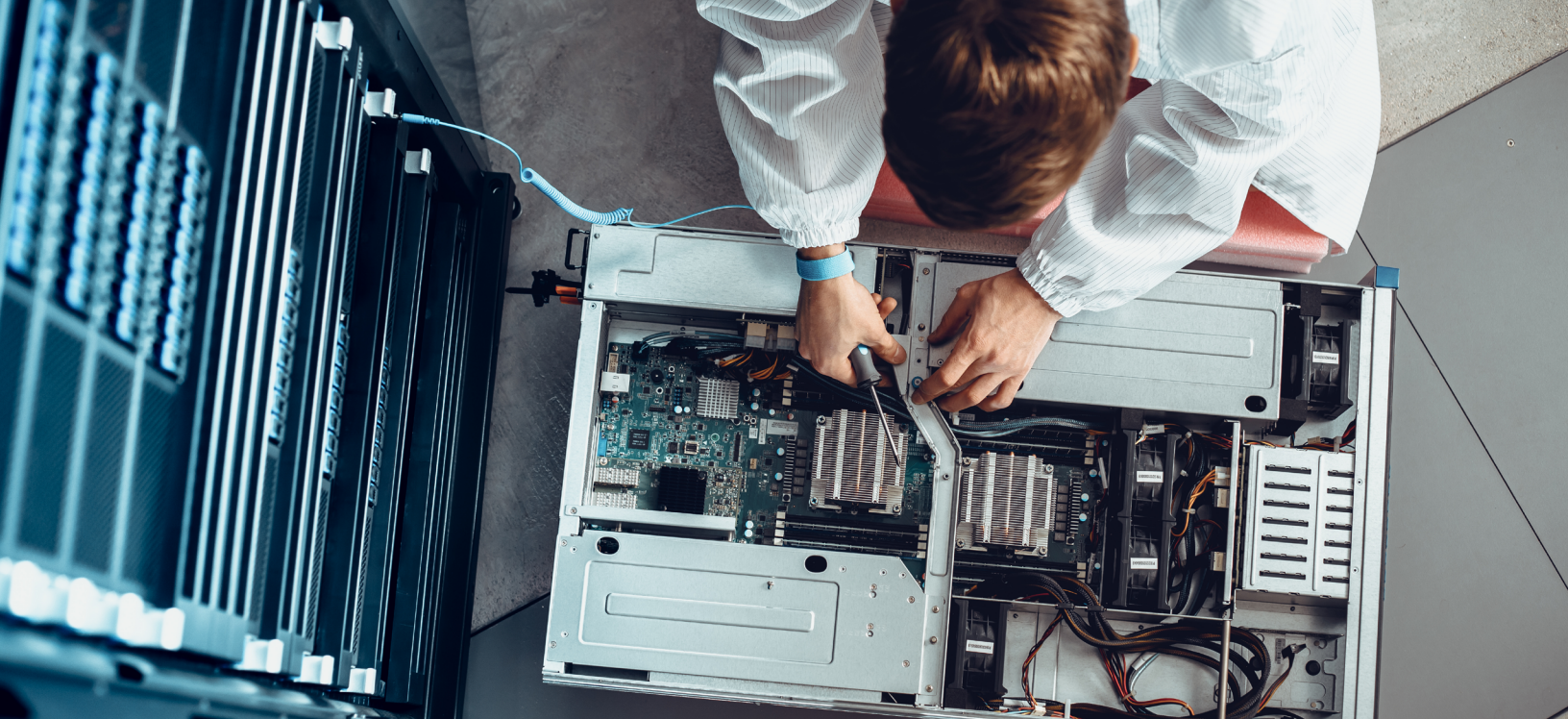
**"I encourage agencies to view EIS in a holistic way, so that the tools can be integrated into a single IT outcome," explains Steve Lefrancois, Federal CTO at Verizon.**

While presenting enormous opportunity for agencies, the EIS contract also brings challenges. Larger agencies may have thousands of circuits and millions of numbers that have to be transitioned. Agencies the size of Fortune 50 companies have to invest time and staff now to establish an IT baseline, so they can put a comprehensive modernization plan in place. While agencies may have already started a modernization process, or gone through a recent IT upgrade, the time investment for EIS can be a challenge on top of their daily work.

"Agencies are trying to balance the urgency of contract transition with the complexity of strategic modernization," Tom Colatosti, Verizon Executive Director of Public Sector Programs, said. "It is increasingly challenging to allocate capital and resources across multiple priorities including executing on the mission, transitioning to new contracts, and modernizing infrastructure. Agencies need a strategic partner that can help them identify transformative solutions that maximize return on investment and minimize risk to the mission."

The EIS transition may present different challenges to smaller agencies, who have fewer internal resources and may not have the billing personnel needed for EIS. This is because Networx allowed small agencies to delegate some billing needs to GSA, which the GAO has ruled will not be possible for EIS. Some agencies will be dealing directly with vendors for the first time, stressing their internal staff and complicating their ability to take advantage of consumption-based pricing.





Most stakeholders agree that these challenges are heavily outweighed by the enormous benefits of IT modernization offered via EIS. EIS can be the vehicle for agencies to consolidate their infrastructure, streamline their IT processes and make their workforces more productive. Advanced Ethernet technology can deliver far more bandwidth than legacy technologies, as well as the ability to ramp that bandwidth up or down based on mission requirements. Software-defined networking (SDN) can virtualize government networks for far greater flexibility and performance, much like the cloud is changing computing and storage capabilities. These technologies also improve cybersecurity by increasing network and application visibility, and making it easier to implement automated tools and continual assessments.

"Ten years ago, cloud computing was just starting to change infrastructure, bandwidth demands were much lower and there was no push for mobility," explains Billingsley. "Today government simply cannot meet bandwidth demands using legacy TDM equipment. Aging technology is hamstringing IT enablement of the mission."

**"We are committed to SDN because as a wireless and wireline leader that's where the market is heading," added Billingsley. "Networking is core to our future, and its critical to enabling a future modernized government."**

"SDN allows for so much more flexibility from a mission execution perspective," says Lefrancois. "In many of our cybersecurity initiatives, we find old policies and procedures that are five or 10 years old. More nimble and transparent networks are powering the industry move toward cyber risk scoring, which many insurance companies now require when assessing rates. Modernization won't just save money, it will increase cybersecurity."

Too many agencies are locked in legacy IT infrastructure that does not easily support the mission. In recent years private sector IT has raced forward, dramatically increasing capacity and efficiencies with new virtualized technology. This IT transformation has unlocked gigantic value and productivity that consumers experience every day. The impact of new technologies in the private sector has dramatically raised citizen expectations of what IT can accomplish, and led directly to the new services available via the EIS contract.

Federal leaders can follow the same roadmap by partnering with vendors who have built these networks for their private sector customers. The EIS contract is a chance to focus more on IT outcomes, and it is less prescriptive and restrictive in language for how to get there. EIS lets vendors put in place the latest commercial IT innovations to support agency missions. An experienced vendor partner is critical, whether making the transformation leap immediately or after the initial contract transition.



**There are nine approved vendors for the EIS contract. When choosing which vendor to partner with for a successful transition, these subject matter experts suggest considering the following:**

- 1. Past experience and performance** – Does the vendor have relevant experience performing transitions of this scope and magnitude? Understanding the need to transition quickly, can they share a project plan that offers a strategy to mitigate risks and minimize downtime? Can they demonstrate success in transitioning agencies between complex contract vehicles? Are they able to tackle the contract transition and IT modernization elements of EIS separately?
- 2. Understanding how the mission impacts the IT transition** – There will be times when a major technology transformation will be too disruptive for the agency mission. Does the vendor understand when these high-risk periods are?
- 3. Does the quote factor in all costs?** – Vendors can make it difficult to compare apples to apples. Questions to ask include whether a parallel network will be required, are all expenses for new staff and equipment included, and whether the project management office is included in the quote or will be invoiced later.
- 4. Does the vendor offer a comprehensive suite of integrated solutions with nationwide availability?** Do they possess proven expertise in areas like full lifecycle communications integration, mobility, secure collaboration, managed security services? Are they a one-stop-shop with internal product development expertise? Are they everywhere your network needs to be?
- 5. Is the vendor operating like a strategic partner working with you to transform your IT infrastructure?** EIS should be viewed as a transformational opportunity, either immediately or after the initial contract transition. With the right partner, going “like for like” initially should not preclude improving or expanding on existing technologies.

Properly managed, the right EIS partner can show agencies the way to improve performance, increase network flexibility, strengthen cybersecurity and lower costs. The opportunity for agencies is immense.

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