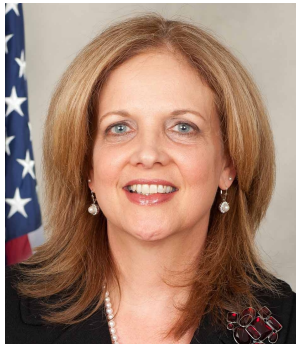
The IAE Digest

News and Program Updates from the Integrated Award Environment

Volume 2, Issue 1
Fall FY2015

From the Acting Assistant Commissioner



Transparency is foundational within IAE. To us, transparency means opening up to the world the "sausage making" that goes on in managing and improving the IAE systems; work that traditionally was done behind closed doors. It means putting our work "out there" for interested parties to comment on, challenge us about, and certainly to help us make an even better end product.

Throughout this and other editions of the IAE quarterly newsletter, you will read various articles about the work we are doing to embrace transparency and how we are using it to improve quality within the IAE systems. Our move into using open sourced tools and showcasing our work in progress – while treating security as paramount – coincides with the government-wide effort to do the same.

IAE already has realized benefits from being transparent. We released our "3 Cores with API" conceptual architecture for public comment when designing the TO-BE environment. From that, we received high-quality, objective feedback from the community of interest. That input allowed us to incorporate that feedback, which in turn, enabled us to devise a better-articulated conceptual architecture. As a result, vendors who bid on our Statement of Work were able to propose a more detailed solution than would have been possible had we stayed the traditional, less open course.

As mentioned in the last edition of the newsletter, IAE recently launched the Transparency Initiative. And as you'll read below, we're excited to announce that in the first quarter of 2015, we launched one of the first efforts of the Initiative: the openIAE website. We'll be sharing many other examples of our transparency efforts in future issues of this newsletter, among other venues.

So why the focus on transparency? How does increasing transparency make smart business sense and how does it help to improve the systems within IAE that we manage?

Among other things, transparency in IAE will serve to broaden understanding and awareness of IAE systems, especially as we migrate into the new environment. This will allow for much greater involvement and participation from outside entities that may have innovative solutions or concepts and ideas not previously incorporated. Transparency also will allow us to meet the needs of stakeholders who are interested in award information while providing resources to the broader award community within GSA and across the federal government. This will serve to encourage harmonization of the award systems.

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From the Assistant Commissioner (continued)

By embracing transparency, we even have the potential to create partnerships that have not existed before. We can now reach developers who can use IAE APIs to connect to our publicly available data and who can consume and report on it in targeted ways. For example, to assist a group interested in learning how many vendors are registered in sam.gov for federal assistance awards only, a developer can register to use our API and then search and focus solely on that data. The end result is a low cost way to access targeted data not easily found in the current design.

With the primary goal of improving the award process for systems that implement the new IAE architecture, we already are engaging our target audiences in a variety of ways, including launching the aforementioned openIAE GitHub site; holding meetings with key government and vendor stakeholders – including a recent IAE "Industry Day" focused on the topic; and by beginning to form a technical community with both government and industry participation. That technical community will help us to identify potential problems and solutions in an on-going dialogue, both formal and informal.

Throughout the entire effort, we will continuously gauge our effectiveness by measuring transparency's impact on the IAE program as it is today, impacts on the new environment as we build it, and improvements in meeting the needs of end-users. We'll know how we're doing by seeing how much of our code is published on the openIAE site and by determining how many issues are posted on the site at any given time. We'll also constantly be seeking feedback on what developers (end-users) want to see next and what information they need from us.

As we move forward with transparency and as you (our interested partners) become more familiar with the Transparency Initiative and its efforts, we want to hear from you. That's a big part of what transparency is about, after all.

As always, please feel free to reach out directly to me with thoughts, suggestions, or questions at IAEOutreach@gmail.com.

Karen Kopf
Assistant Commissioner (Acting)
Integrated Award Environment

IAE 1st Quarter Statistics

- SAM supported an average 892,000+ visits per month
- Average registration completion time in SAM is three days in Q1, FY 2015
- At the Federal Service Desk (FSD), call volume is at an average of 85,000 calls in Q1, FY 2015
- FSD average speed to answer was 30 seconds in Q1 (meeting industry standard)
- FSD average handle/talk time down to approximately nine minutes in Q1 (compared to 12 minutes in Q4)
- FSD first call resolution rate of 90 percent in Q1 (compared to industry standard of 80 percent)

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Quarterly System Updates

System for Award Management (SAM)

We had an active 1st Quarter with the System for Award Management (SAM), especially with usability improvements aimed at making the user experience better.

We enhanced the user experience by updating several pages in the entity management registration process and improving the display of information on the Entity Dashboard pages. These updates help entities know what information they need to provide to register and help Federal users more quickly find information about entities registered to do business with the government.

We also created an email notification to inform registrants of a change to their size status following any update to a SBA size standard for any of their selected NAICS Codes. This notification prompts registrants to review their information and will help expand the interaction with small businesses.

Additionally, we improved exclusion record usability by moving the excluded party's information to the top of the exclusion record for quick reference. This is one of several upcoming changes to improve how exclusion records are presented in SAM that we are working on with the Interagency Suspension and Debarment Committee (ISDC).

Throughout the first quarter, we used Agile development methodology to design and code the second phase of the CAGE Ownership of Offeror requirements in support of Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) Subpart 4.18 Commercial and Government Entity (CAGE) Code.

System for Award Management (SAM) (continued)

The user-focused design presented all the information a registrant needs to understand the regulation and how to respond when registering in SAM. This implementation introduced a real-time interface between SAM and the CAGE database allowing registrants to enter their owner's CAGE Code(s) in SAM, verify the information on file at CAGE, then certify to the information they provided in Representations and Certifications.

In Quarter 1, we also increased data quality by upgrading the SAM extracts and web services to a modern character encoding format (UTF-8) which more accurately reflects user-entered data by including special symbols and characters. SAM continues to provide the extracts and web services in the older format (ASCII) for Federal systems' backwards compatibility.

FPDS

The Federal Procurement Data System - Next Generation (FPDS-NG) recently was in a position where it needed to be transitioned from its incumbent software-as-a-service (SaaS) vendor to one that was owned by the government and run by IBM.

While a significant task to make that happen, we successfully conducted a technical transition to IBM in the first quarter of 2015, and we're happy to report we did so with minimal disruption.

Currently, IAE is assessing the environment to ensure that its operations are sustainable under this new model of government ownership. We're also doing some deep dive architectural analyses that will help us determine the right path forward toward modernizing FPDS-NG. Stay tuned for more details.

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Quarterly System Updates

PPIRS-RC

In the first quarter of 2015, PPIRS-RC added two improved tools for sorting, filtering and viewing reports.

The first, the Assessment Report feature, improves search capabilities and displays data in sortable tables via graphical representation and through download capability. The Assessment Report features include:

1. The ability to search for evaluations using "Quick Search" to narrow by contractor name and/or DUNS, the two criteria most commonly used; and the ability to expand search criteria by selecting the "Advanced Search Options" link.
2. The capability of displaying results (both "Quick Search" and "Advanced Search") with the five most common CPARS evaluation factors (for example: Quality of Product, Cost, and Schedule).
3. The ability to display results in a data table; sort data columns via ascending or descending order; and to download and save results to a separate document.
4. The ability to display the five most common CPARS evaluation factors for a single contractor via chart and graph.

The second tool, the AD-HOC report feature, allows users to create and easily run reports that meet their needs. The AD-HOC report features include:

1. Being able to run standard reports using predefined search criteria (DUNS, Agency, PSC, CAGE code, Assessment date, Business Sector, or NAICS); download and save results to a separate document.
2. Being able to run ad-hoc reports to tailor search results; save queries and build a personal library of previously created reports.

Common Services

When looking at IAE's current systems, it's impossible to miss the redundant technical components across the board. Almost all of our systems require hosting, search, data management, management of application programming interfaces (APIs) and authentication. When we conducted a detailed analysis last year to determine the overall concept for the modernization of IAE, we determined we needed a platform that would support all of these shared capabilities.

We awarded the development contract for the IAE Common Services Platform to Booz Allen Hamilton in September 2014. Since then, and throughout the first quarter of 2015, we have defined the specifics of the architecture using industry standard tools. Those tools will support the development of a flexible platform that will allow IAE to produce high-quality, user-focused software. They also will allow us to control costs by exploiting the efficiency of cloud computing and will enable us to connect the complete data set within IAE's stewardship for the purposes of analysis and decision-making.

Of particular note, we will be using an Agile approach to software development to build out the IAE Common Services. Currently, we're in Sprint 2 and are seeing positive results as we incrementally build out the platform. We're excited to see the government use technology and techniques that are forward-thinking, cutting edge and designed for an improved user experience.

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Quarterly System Updates (continued)

Transparency Initiative: openIAE

This quarter, we released openIAE, a critical part of the Transparency Initiative. openIAE is a Github site containing publicly available documentation and code.

On December 9, 2014, IAE hosted an Industry Day about the Transparency Initiative and openIAE, featuring IAE's Transparency Champion Pam Miller. Pam provided a tour of the site and introduced the IAE Technical and Interface community, which will facilitate communications related to the building and operation of the technical components of IAE. The Industry Day presentation and a full recording of the event are available on Interact.

More documentation and code will continue to be added to openIAE as it becomes available, including the release of IAE's Common Services Platform (CSP) Architecture, additional SAM data documentation, and FPDS data documentation.

Visitors to openIAE can contribute to the site by reviewing documentation and code, logging issues, and providing feedback. For those of you unfamiliar with Github, we encourage you to visit the site and sign up for your own Github account.

IAE Team Spotlight: Meet Pam

Pam Roller is special assistant for the IAE Program Planning, Analytics and Control Division (also known as PPAC). PPAC supports both IAE programs and its governance councils.

Pam joined GSA in 2006 when she began working in the Office of the PBS Commissioner. Since then, she has held positions in the Office of the Administrator and the Office of Administrative Services. She became aware of IAE and its mission through interaction with several IAE/CAP members and was immediately impressed with the professionalism and dedication to their mission displayed by the team.

"I was thrilled that an opportunity became available on the PPAC team when it did," says Roller. "I was looking for a new challenge right at that time, and I knew some of the great people here in IAE. So it was a natural fit. I consider myself to be extremely lucky that the stars aligned and that they chose me!"

Since starting in IAE in July of 2014, Pam says she has been most impressed with the caliber of employees within IAE/CAP who are working to create an environment that is responsive, compliant, and meets the needs of those doing business with the federal government. She greatly enjoys the variety of the work she is able to do within IAE, especially working with recent college graduates, interns, and others just coming into federal service.

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IAE Team Spotlight: Meet Pam (continued)

"I'm always thrilled to see great, young talent choosing federal service, and especially when they chose to come here. To me it's pretty clear; the wonderful leadership in IAE and the exciting agile, open, and transparent work environment makes this an attractive option for them – or for anyone looking for a great challenge and a great learning opportunity."

Before joining GSA, Pam spent time on Capitol Hill as deputy chief clerk on the Senate Banking Committee, and as office manager and scheduler for a senior congressman from California. In the Executive Branch she served as special assistant to the Deputy Secretary of the US Department of Health & Human Services. In the Judicial Branch she spent seven years (including five in Little Rock, Arkansas) as special assistant on the Whitewater investigation.

Pam is a native of Alexandria, Virginia, and has called Arlington home for the past 40 years. She enjoys knitting, single scull rowing, and belly dancing. And, although she hasn't used a forge in many years, Pam is a certified blade smith.

Did You Know?

In 2014, the support provided by IAE business systems:

- Allowed **538,000 entities** to register to do business with the federal government
- Resulted in **$2.3 trillion** in federal assistance awards through **3.6 billion transactions**
- Resulted in **$443 billion** in federal contract awards through **2.5 million transactions**

Connect with IAE:

- Join our Interact community by visiting interact.gsa.gov
- Email IAEOutreach@gsa.gov
- For information and assistance with the systems serviced by the Federal Service Desk, please visit www.fsd.gov