The IAE Digest

News and Program Updates from the Integrated Award Environment

GSA

From the Assistant Commissioner

How Agile is Improving IAE

If you're one of the many stakeholders who pay attention to the progress we're making in IAE and with our systems – or if you've read one of the previous editions of this newsletter – you no doubt have noticed a tremendous amount of change occurring in this program. It is an exciting, vibrant time to be associated with IAE and the work we're doing to create a better business environment for those who award, administer, or receive federal contracts and financial assistance.

Even with all of the forward movement happening in IAE these days, a paradigm shift that stands out above the rest is the fact that the Integrated Award Environment is now an Agile office that has embraced Agile technology and is employing Agile methods in our transition to the future state. IAE uses Agile program management by adapting the Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe) to the IAE Program Management Office (PMO). Thus IAE has begun to establish Product Management, Release Management and System Teams to define and prioritize the program backlog, govern the release planning, and build and use the development infrastructure - including continuous integration, test automation and code quality integration. The anticipated results of these concerted efforts are shorter development times and user-centric system designs.

Being Agile fits neatly with one of IAE's main operating principles: We will use continuous improvement to drive innovation. As we shift the functionalities of our 10 federal acquisition and financial assistance systems into one environment, we have transitioned ourselves into fully embracing the advantages of Agile software development, including increasing our openness and transparency. Just this quarter, we used Agile software development in the first release of the IAE Common Services Platform (CSP). You can read more about the CSP and its Platform-as-a-Service (PaaS) capability in the *Quarterly System Updates* section of this newsletter.

Some of you may be asking, "What is Agile and what does that mean?" There are two ways to answer that question about this methodology created in 2001; the first is to give you a textbook definition: "Agile Software Development is a lightweight software engineering framework that promotes iterative development throughout the life-cycle of the project, close collaboration between the development team and business side, constant communication, and tightly-knit teams."

But really, the better answer to "What is Agile" is to explain what it means to IAE and why we have embraced it here.

To be sure, we have embraced Agile as a way of life in IAE in response to the government's mandate that agencies find ways to enhance the

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delivery and performance of IT tools, applications, and services for all of their stakeholders.

The TechFAR – a key source within OMB – says Agile is "a technique for doing modular contracting and a proven commercial methodology that is characterized by incremental and iterative processes where releases are produced in close collaboration with the customer." A key way we connect and collaborate with our user and stakeholder community is through focus groups. We are continually checking the pulse of the IAE user and stakeholder community. For example, in the first quarter of this year, we held a series of focus groups centered on the future of Federal Business Opportunities (FBO) management. You can read more about the focus groups and what we'll be doing with the information gathered from them in *Federal Business Opportunities Update* in this newsletter.

Here in IAE, we know that the Agile process improves investment manageability, lowers risk of project failure, shortens the time to realize value, and allows us to better adapt to changing needs.

We already are seeing promising results from applying the Agile software development process to our IT projects. Last summer, IAE used Agile to build a 'Status Tracker' for the System for Award Management (SAM), which allows users to quickly see the status of their registration in that system.

By defining SAM Status Tracker requirements in a flexible and nimble manner, iterating on them with multidisciplinary team members at GSA, and developing a prototype of the product, IAE was able to reduce the cost

of implementation and improve the efficiency of the development process.

We also currently have, for the first time, made IAE programming code public and available on GitHub. Here, we currently are collaborating with stakeholders on active programming, using the community and their varied experiences and expertise to help make our product as strong as it can be. Toward that end, we are going to publish our IAE modernization architecture on the openIAE site of Github.

The Agile software development process is at the heart of everything we believe in and do as a program office. We are committed to espousing words found in the *Manifesto for Agile Software Development*:

> We believe in individuals and interactions over processes and tools.
> We believe in working software over comprehensive documentation.
> We believe in customer collaboration over contract negotiation.
> We believe in responding to change over following a plan.

As we march toward implementing one, strong, streamlined environment, I will keep you posted in this space about our progress.

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

Karen Kopf
Assistant Commissioner (Acting)
Integrated Award Environment

IAE Governance

IAE's Governance Bodies

The Integrated Award Environment is governed by three separate bodies that together provide guidance, add extensive experience and expertise, and influence the work done by the program office. Additionally, the IAE has several other groups that are closely involved in providing additional guidance and helping to plan for the work that goes on here, including and critically, the Change Control Board. All told, each governing and planning body in one way or another is involved with the policy, oversight, governance, and operations that impact IAE systems and services. In future issues of this newsletter, we'll bring you specific information about each entity and provide updates about their interaction with the program.

A key body that provides governance to the IAE, the Award Committee for E-Government, or the ACE, serves multiple roles. The ACE provides a disciplined process and approach to decisions, priorities, and community needs for the IAE systems; resolves conflicts in priorities from other elements of the governance process; and helps to identify policy or other considerations for Office of Management and Budget (OMB) decisions or actions. The ACE also is responsible for approving algorithms and associated funding levels required of 24 CFO Act agency partners.

ACE membership is composed of senior leaders from both the procurement and financial assistance communities, as well as representatives from the OMB and other non-voting advisor agencies. More information about the ACE can be found at: https://cao.gov/award-committee-for-e-government/.

The procurement communities are represented by the Procurement Committee for E-Government, also known as the PCE. The PCE serves as the community voice regarding data collection, reporting, and the analysis of the outcomes expected from the IAE portfolio of systems. This group will resolve any decisions regarding scope or other issues arising from the IAE systems unique to federal procurement.

The financial assistance communities are represented by the Financial Assistance Committee for E-Government, or FACE. The FACE is dedicated to addressing the needs of the federal financial assistance community as it pertains to collecting, using, disseminating, and displaying federal financial assistance data.

"We appreciate the leadership and guidance from the all of our governance bodies as we have embarked on this flight path from ten systems to one streamlined, integrated environment," said IAE Outreach & Stakeholder Management Director Judith Zawatsky, "Each body represents a diverse cadre of experienced and forward thinking leaders from various organizations of the United States Government. Their input is critical in the work we do, and we are grateful for their dedication to creating a better environment for those who do business with and seek financial assistance from the federal government."

Did You Know?

Next time you need the Federal Service Desk (FSD), you may want to consider skipping the phones. By contacting the FSD via its web form, (available at https://fsd.gov/fsd-gov/submit-question.do), you might be able to get quicker service.

You also may be able to find the information you need by using the search box on the fsd.gov home page.

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IAE Program Update

Risk Reduction Successes

Successful program management in almost every instance includes the tracking, managing, and mitigation of risk. Understanding our risks is a priority for IAE.

"The work being done in IAE is transformational and it's groundbreaking," said Kevin Youel Page, FAS Deputy Commissioner and former Assistant Commissioner of IAE. "With that mindset, we never expect to be at zero risk. But we do know it's critical to track our risks and work to mitigate them every day."

Throughout the past few years, IAE has worked carefully to identify and mitigate risks to the program as a whole and to the move to the future environment. Thanks to the tedious and hard work of the dedicated IAE staff, more than 200 risks have been identified to-date.

Of those risks, approximately 80 percent have been mitigated and now are considered closed. In fact, as of this writing, only 44 risks remain.

There's much to be proud of in our efforts at risk reduction. Notable accomplishments include:

- ✓ The restructuring of existing contracts for SAM future migration to mitigate deployment issues
- ✓ The successful purchasing and support migration of FPDS-NG after the vendor announced bankruptcy
- ✓ A technical refresh of CPARS to double its memory capacity as it neared its system memory limitation
- ✓ The restructuring of the FSD contract and awarding of a new contract for helpdesk Tier 1 support to mitigate the risk of having an insufficient number of trained agents for the SAM startup

Currently, the IAE is working to mitigate each of the remaining risks.

System for Award Management Update

Helping with Disaster Response

Before the SAM quarterly release in March 2015, you were able to search SAM for registered contractors who declared they wanted to be on the Disaster Response Registry, but there was no way to narrow the search by geographic region where they could provide services.

User feedback also proved it was difficult to find the Disaster Response Contractor filter and that contracting officers didn't know what that filter meant.

Thanks to the new Disaster Response Registry Search page in SAM, users now can quickly identify contractors that indicate their readiness to provide disaster and emergency relief services by the geographic area they serve, by socio-economic category, by industry classification, as well as by products and services offered.

On the surface, this might not seem significant, but it truly is a big deal for contracting officers who need to quickly find potential contractors that can respond to emergency situations.

We created this page using Agile by dividing the requirement into component user stories and working them across three Agile sprints. We heavily engaged subject matter experts from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) during each iteration to get input on user stories, ways to agree on the acceptance criteria, how to show screenshots, share test results, and how to demonstrate capability.

The resulting software enhancement delivered a quick and easy to use functionality that met the needs of contracting officers. Read the SAM Quick Start Guide then go to SAM.gov > Search Records > Disaster Response Registry Search to try it for yourself.

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Transparency Initiative Update

The SAM APIs

Launched in the first quarter of 2015 as the cornerstone of IAE's Transparency Initiative, the SAM API service of the openIAE website already has received more than a half-a-million hits.

"openIAE is our start at creating a community centered around IAE's data," said Navin Vembar, director of IT for the Integrated Award Environment. "The recent SAM API is a perfect example – with more coming soon – and we hope to see our user base grow and flourish not just by having the information they need, but giving us feedback about how we can be better."

Built on the Github platform, the openIAE site enables developers to build their own tools using application program interfaces (APIs) to retrieve publicly available System for Award Management (SAM) data about entities doing business with or seeking financial assistance from the United States Government. Currently, hundreds of developers are using the openIAE site for conducting lookups of documentation and code for their own applications. In addition to continuing to grow and engage the global developer community, Vembar has exciting plans for the openIAE site moving forward.

"We're going to add more information about FPDS-NG, update the documentation so it's clearer, and post more up-to-date information about the SAM API, especially around the use of Representations & Certifications," said Vembar.

For more information about the Transparency Initiative and openIAE, please visit http://gsa.github.io/openIAE/.

Federal Business Opportunities Update

Focus Groups Prove Valuable

Between December 2014 and February 2015, IAE conducted 10 focus groups centered on the future of the management of the key functions of Federal Business Opportunities (FBO).

The focus groups allowed IAE to gather valuable input from nearly 100 participants across the government acquisition and contracting community. Conducted mostly in a virtual environment, focus group participants shared their overall thoughts about what they want to see out of a new business opportunities management environment. Participants covered such items as user experience and interface, search, notifications, collaboration, workflow, data ingestion, and support and training.

As appropriate, input from the focus groups will be integrated into the features backlog as we modernize the environment. Input will also be used to build a personal library to capture the variety of user types across IAE and to create a user-centric common platform.

Conducting focus groups aligns closely with IAE's goal of enhancing user experience. Input from a broad spectrum of stakeholders will be essential to the successful development of IAE's future environment.

We look forward to continuing the conversation and engagement with our users through subsequent focus group events in the near future. If you would like to volunteer to participate in IAE focus groups, please email IAEoutreach@gsa.gov.

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Quarterly System Updates

System for Award Management

With each software release, we work to improve the System for Award Management (SAM) user experience, improve the quality of information available from SAM, and reduce the burden for those wishing to do business with the federal government. We do this through a combination of minor enhancements and fixing known issues. In addition to incorporating a new Disaster Response Registry search page (see article on page 4 of this newsletter), the March 27th quarterly release included improvements that:

- ✓ **Focused on providing more clear information to users where they need it.** For example, we added a message that displays on the Assertions and Representations and Certifications pages to explain these sections are completed based on why the entity registered, e.g. they are not currently required for an entity who only registered to pursue Federal assistance opportunities. This will reduce confusion for Federal officials viewing the registrations.

- ✓ **Continued to incrementally enhance usability of the site.** Among other things, we updated error messages on the Points of Contacts (POC) Details page to make them specific both to the POC type and the data field containing the error increasing usability.

- ✓ **Streamlined the information presented around Data Access.** Here, we updated the General Data Access Information page to be consistent with the Individual and System Data Access Information pages to provide more clear guidance for users wanting to use the data in SAM.

- ✓ **Addressed several concerns for international registrants**, such as adding Kosovo, West Bank, and Gaza Strip to the valid country selections for registrants increasing data accuracy for international entities.

- ✓ **Continued to incrementally improve the SAM Status Tracker.** Improvements here included adding CAGE/NCAGE as a search parameter to the SAM Status Tracker increasing usability for quickly checking an entity's registration status.

The SAM 2015 2nd Quarter Release also helps registrants more accurately describe their entity, enables the Suspensions and Debarment community to improve the exclusions management functionality, improves the process for managing SAM user roles, incorporates accessibility best practices, and much more.

While this is only a partial list of the improvements in the March SAM release with a few examples only, the full release notes are available at SAM.gov > General Info > News > Release Notes and at https://www.sam.gov/sam/transcript/SAM_Release_Notes_2015-03-27_v4.pdf.

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Quarterly System Updates

Common Services Platform

We did it! The first release of the IAE Common Services Platform (CSP) was completed at the end of this quarter.

During the three months in which we built the CSP we developed the first version of the Platform-as-a-Service (PaaS) capability on which all IAE applications will be housed moving forward.

The first release included a full, end-to-end capability that demonstrates that we have a cloud-hosted environment and configuration in Amazon Web Services; an identity and access management (IAM) solution that allows users to authenticate themselves with a user name and password; a data lake that lets us demonstrate how we can push in a real legacy data file and run some basic reports and drill down into that file; a user interface that gives developers access to those functions; and a repository for all our code tools that allows us to continuously integrate the code as it is built.

Importantly, all of this has been done with security as foundational: built in from the ground up.

"Watching all these functions come together has been inspiring, to say the least," said Navin Vembar, director of IT for the Integrated Award Environment. "The team worked hard to make it happen and we're jumping ahead by leaps and bounds. But just as important as what we did was how we did it."

IAE established an Agile process built off of the Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe) model, designed for larger organizations to manage their Agile portfolios. That process enabled us to deliver new capabilities bi-weekly, watch the incremental progress, and redirect when we needed to make sure we were building only product we needed on platforms that met our requirements.

IAE also established an Enterprise Architectural Framework, that captured the blueprint of what IAE is now and what it will become in the future.

IAE will use that architecture to drive strategic decisions across the business and technical considerations of the program. We'll be able to optimize what our solution looks like, avoid duplication, and avoid creating a product we are unable to maintain, all while keeping a delivery-focused cadence.

Everything IAE has done in the last few months has been foundational and transformational. We've moved a program that was entirely waterfall driven and infrastructure-heavy to one that's both lower-case and upper-case agile - that can react to change in its planning, its operation, and its delivery.

In Case You Missed It: Industry Day 6

➢ Held on March 24, 2015
➢ Featured IAE IT Director Navin Vembar
➢ Focused on the Common Services Platform (CSP), including the platform's architecture, and how application developers can use the CSP and its Developer Marketplace
➢ Materials from this event and all previous Industry Day events are available on IAE's Interact Community site at interact.gsa.gov

Don't miss Industry Day 7! Please join IAE's Interact community to receive information on our next event.

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IAE Team Member Spotlight

Program Manager Charles Xia

Charles Xia is a program manager for the IAE Business Operations Division, also known as BOPS. He is a key member of the BOPS team and supports the Federal Procurement Data System – Next Generation (FPDS-NG). Charles led the strategy to transition the FPDS-NG system contract to IBM last year. His current primary focus is rebuilding the aging system on the Common Services Platform (CSP).

Before coming to IAE in February 2014, Charles served as a project manager for the GSA Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) for two years. He managed various projects, including the Acquisition Navigator. Charles first became aware of IAE and its mission through his work on the Enterprise Data Warehouse project during his tenure at GSA OCIO.

Charles is slated to receive the FAS Spotlight Award next quarter for his contributions to the Navigator project. Prior to his public service, he managed projects across a diverse set of private sector industries.

"I was very excited when I had the opportunity to work with BOPS," said Xia. "I knew it would widen my knowledge and bring me many new challenges."

Exactly 20 years ago, Charles came from Shanghai to pursue his master's degree. He loves to watch his daughter perform rhythmic gymnastics and his son rebut competitors at debate tournaments. Charles also enjoys running and playing tennis.

Connect with IAE:

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