

TTS IMPACT

Supporting procurement through robotics process automation

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) partnered with the GSA's Technology Transformation Services' Centers of Excellence (COE) to build out RPA capabilities within the organization, focusing initially on piloting 3 procurement related bots to automate manual and time-consuming tasks.



THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR'S STORY

The mission of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) is to foster, promote, and develop the welfare of the wage earners, job seekers, and retirees of the United States by improving working conditions, advancing opportunities for profitable employment, and assuring work-related benefits and rights.

In an effort to meet this mission, the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) has created a goal to provide shared services across the department for the common functional areas to streamline costs and standardize capabilities. The DOL OCIO and the COE aimed to accelerate the modernization of their acquisition capabilities through the use of automation and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies.



THE CHALLENGE

DOL staff are burdened by manual, time-consuming tasks that currently take staff hours to complete. There is also associated risk due to the distributed nature of many of these tasks. The COE first started by understanding the agencies' business needs, discussing their current challenges, and creating an infrastructure to support the development process for addressing those challenges.

To address some of these challenges, the DOL and the COE selected three candidate bots (software applications that run simple and repetitive tasks). Each bot has a unique business challenge to address, including contractor responsibility determination, letter of intent generation, and market research.

To determine contractor responsibility, procurement professionals must determine that a given contractor sufficiently demonstrates their capacity to do work with the federal government to ensure successful and responsible delivery of the contracted goods or service. For the letter of intent generation, contracts can be extended by exercising an option in the contract within a prescribed deadline. A letter of intent must be sent within 60 days of the end of the contract year. This avoids the need to renegotiate the contract—a time-consuming and costly process. As part of market research, procurement professionals currently provide research for initiating new contracts and renewing existing ones as a shared service. This leads to a large volume of requests and increased amount of data required to produce reports. The DOL's OCIO also had the technical challenge of being able to support any technical solution that would be developed to address these challenges.



THE SOLUTION

The three bots are in production and were deployed in October 2020. Two are with the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive (OSPE), and one is with the OCIO.

For the two bots with OSPE, one supports the contractor responsibility determination process to help select eligible vendors for government contracting, and the other is for the letter of intent generation task as part of the exercise of options process to help execute contract options in a timely fashion. The third bot supports the OCIO's market research process, with a goal to determine new products and services available.



THE IMPACT

The COE and the DOL built bots that automate several different tasks in the procurement process. The bots significantly reduce the labor hours required to complete the task, resulting in considerable cost savings and avoidance. They also reduce the risk associated with the manual task and help DOL staff focus on high-value work over low-value work, a priority set by the President's Management Agenda Cross-Agency Priority goals.

The contractor responsibility determination bot performs a task that usually takes 1 to 2 hours in just three minutes, saving approximately 2,000 hours of employee time annually. There is also a significant reduction in risk from inconsistency in task completion before the bot. For the letter of intent bot, time to complete the task was not the issue. Instead, the bot significantly reduces risk by automating scheduled report alerting, which translates to a reduced time and cost in renegotiating contracts when exercise of options deadline is missed. There is also a large increase in compliance and standardization of process through automation. With the market research bot, cycle time for this process is reduced by 18.75% (from 8-16 hours to 5-13 hours). This saves roughly 2,000 to 3,500 hours of employee time annually.

All of the COE's efforts so far with the DOL have helped identify internal demand for robotic process automation (RPA) both now and into the future. The COE is now supporting the DOL move from these three bots to supporting enterprise-wide RPA adoption through supporting a solid foundation of data infrastructure and management. This approach will allow enterprise-wide RPA adoption by enabling RPA capabilities to integrate with other technical capabilities to solve mission challenges across DOL.

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