Category Management Policy 15-1: Improving the Acquisition and Management of Common Information Technology: Laptops and Desktops

Technical FAQs

Configurations

1. How did the Workstations Category Team determine the standard configurations?

   Answer: The Workstations Category Team (WCT), led by NASA and consisting of over 27 agencies, conducted extensive data analysis of the Government's largest laptop and desktop contracts and determined that about 90% of basic laptop and desktop needs could be met through common standard configurations. The policy mandates that agencies buy one of the five standard configurations for at least 80% of basic laptop and desktop requirements, unless an exception is granted by the agency's CIO. Non-standard requirements, such as scientific and military needs, are not subject to this policy. Furthermore, the WCT used input from these organizations to define the set of configurations and technical specifications for standard desktops and laptops, and standard upgrade options; these specs were validated by industry via a formal Request for Information issued by NASA.

2. Are these minimum specifications? If so, how does this align with standardizing configurations?

   Answer: The specifications define minimum required functionality for each category of system for each standard configuration. Since there is variation in what industry may offer, the minimum specifications may be exceeded yet remain in the original category, as long as the capabilities do not push the offering into the next higher category. Workstations are purchased in discrete categories (currently, one of the five offerings). The purpose of standard configurations and specifications is to define minimum required capabilities while also providing flexibility and allowing market competition on solutions within each category, driving value for the customer.

   The specifications in each category should be followed as closely as possible. For example, a specification for a 1 TB disk might be met exactly by one manufacturer, but another may only have a .75 TB and 1.25 TB disk available. They could bid using the 1.25TB disk but not the .75TB disk, which does not fulfill the minimum requirements.

3. How was industry engaged in the development of the terms and conditions and standard configurations of the offerings?

   Answer: NASA, as lead of the Workstations Commodity Team, issued a Request for Information in 2014 to obtain industry feedback on various terms and conditions, including refresh cycles and months, warranties, pricing, and delivery times. The terms and conditions were shaped by the responses of almost 40 industry representatives, including manufacturers and resellers. In spring of 2015, NASA and implementation

partners from GSA and NIH held meetings with select desktop and laptop manufacturers to obtain their feedback on the feasibility/viability of technical specifications of the proposed standard configurations. Their feedback was incorporated into the current baseline specifications.

4. Will industry have an opportunity to modernize the technology moving forward?

   Answer: Yes, a technology refresh will occur every six months aligned with new industry offerings. The standard configurations will be updated to reflect government agency requirements based on their feedback to the current specifications as well as technology updates from industry. Also, the current standard configurations represent minimum requirements for each of the five offerings. These minimums do not limit industry from proposing solutions that incorporate new technology.

5. How will the WCT engage industry moving forward on the refreshment of the current specs? When will that engagement begin?

   Answer: NASA has begun reaching out to major desktop/laptop manufacturers who provided feedback to the initial standard configurations and plans to conduct meetings with all major desktop/laptop manufacturers in January, with participation by GSA and NIH. NASA, GSA, and NIH are also collaborating to hold an open industry meeting in January 2016 to present the proposed updates to the standard configurations and to obtain broader industry feedback. The date will be announced soon.

6. Why don't the specifications address thin clients or tablets?

   Answer: The WCT determined that thin clients, tablets and hybrids represent less than 1% of today's overall spend. If the federal community begins to use a greater share of these devices, the WCT will initiate work on additional standard configurations based on special usage cases to ensure a consistent approach to acquiring and managing these devices.

Acquisition Strategy

7. What if the vehicles are not performing as expected?

   Answer: Annually, OMB, working with the WCT, will review input from users and vendors, to evaluate the performance of the approved contract vehicles. Based on these factors, the list of approved vehicles will be modified, if necessary.

8. How many vendors are on these contracts?

   Answer: There are more than 1,000 vendors on these contracts, and some vendors are on two or even all three. Approximately 45% of the workstation vendor community is already on these vehicles, and these vendors receive 89% of total spend. Although some

vendors are not on the list of approved vehicles, the current policy only mandates 75% adoption by FY2018. In other words, agencies can continue to use vendors who may not be on the approved vehicle list and still meet their policy targets.

Transition

9. How will OMB know that agencies are complying with the requirement to purchase 80% of their basic laptop and desktop needs through the three approved vehicles?

   Answer: OMB will measure spend through the contract vehicles and agency compliance with purchasing standard configurations.

   a. Spend Through Approved Vehicles – OMB will collect transition plans from agencies as part of the February 28, 2016, Integrated Data Collection (IDC). Agencies will be required to describe how they will meet the goals of this policy including the transition to Enterprise Software Category Team (ESCT)-approved vehicles while maintaining small business goals. OMB will track agency progress through analysis of federal contracting data.

   b. Standard Configurations - The Memo requires the contract managers of the approved vehicles (NASA, GSA, and HHS) to report agency compliance with the requirement to purchase standard configurations. OMB will monitor compliance on a quarterly basis.

10. The policy says no new solicitations can be issued. Does this mean no new delivery orders can be awarded?

    Answer: With limited exceptions, agencies are prohibited from issuing solicitations for **new** contract awards. With so many providers now under existing agreements, the government should be able to meet its needs without incurring unnecessary additional cost to put new contracts in place. Agencies can still award DOs under their existing agreements or the 3 preferred sources (NASA, HHS, and GSA) to satisfy their desktop/laptop needs. However, they need to start transitioning to one of the three approved sources that already exist, unless the agency has a mandatory source for laptops that meets the criteria in the memo. Agencies are in the process of preparing a transition plan to move the agency to the preferred sources, so the details/timing of that transition will be included there. Transition plans are due February 28, 2016.

11. The policy requires 75% adoption of the approved vehicles, but it forbids new solicitations. What if my agency has business needs that can't be met by the approved vehicles?

    Answer: The policy target of 75% is intended to provide agencies with flexibility in their workstation acquisitions with the knowledge that not all technology needs can be met by the approved contract vehicles or the standard configurations. Agencies are prohibited

from issuing solicitations for workstations unless the agency determines that an exemption is necessary. Agency transition plans must reflect these exemptions.

12. How will OMB hold agencies accountable for implementing the policy?

    Answer: OMB will track performance through the CAP goal and the quarterly PortfolioStat process. PortfolioStat process is a data-driven review of IT performance at the 26 largest departments and agencies in government. PortfolioStat brings together senior leadership from OMB and agencies to discuss critical management priorities in the area of information technology management. Poor performance will be addressed at this meeting and recommendations for improvement will be tracked through agency action items.

Miscellaneous

13. What expectations are there for the Department of Defense to implement a similar directive policy?

    Answer: The Department of Defense already implements many outstanding IT practices through its Enterprise Service Initiative (ESI). ESI and the DoD CIO mandate use of a limited number of solutions, such as Army CHESS. DoD will be announcing a similar list of approved vehicles and supporting policies for its components within 120 days of issuing the policy. This information will be posted on the Acquisition Gateway. OMB is working closely with DoD to implement rigorous data collection and tracking methods to hold components accountable.

14. I'm a vendor and can't access the Acquisition Gateway, where can I find the standard configurations? Will the Acquisition Gateway ever be open to the public?

    Answer: Yes, the standard configurations can be found on public site of the Acquisition Gateway here https://hallways.cap.gsa.gov/faq.html and on the NASA SEWP's website: http://www.sewp.nasa.gov/strategic_solutions.shtml.

    GSA is also working to making a portion of the Acquisition Gateway public in the future. However, critical contract information, such as contract terms, conditions, and pricing will not be available outside the federal government.