

Statement of Rob Cook
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Before the Subcommittees on Government Operations and Information
Technology of the
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Introduction

Good afternoon, Chairmen Meadows and Hurd, ranking members Connolly and Kelly, and members of the committees. Thank you for the opportunity to come before you to discuss the U.S. General Services Administration's Technology Transformation Services or TTS, a component of the Federal Acquisition Service. I am honored to be here sitting next to Alan Thomas, the new Commissioner of FAS.

Background

Members of this Committee are very familiar with the problems that plague Federal IT. This fiscal year, the Federal Government will spend almost \$85 billion dollars on IT projects. However, too much of this money is spent on maintaining legacy systems and networks. Even more is spent on projects that are over budget or behind schedule.

There are many root causes to these problems. Too many systems have been designed for stakeholders instead of users. Funding streams are not well aligned to the IT refresh cycle and generally don't provide enough flexibility. Furthermore, we see minimal adoption of agile development practices across the Federal landscape and a significant reluctance to implement modular procurement practices.

However, the path to a successful IT future is possible and within our grasp. Such a transformation, though, will require changes to both culture and policy. It will require hard work and sustained attention from many people, including high-level executives, program managers, and also Congress.

By improving how we buy and employ IT, by shifting away from legacy systems, and by continuing the push towards transparency and open data, I am confident that we can significantly improve Federal IT and, ultimately, how agencies serve the American people.

GSA has a significant role to play in these efforts. Historically, GSA has played a central role in supporting and assisting Federal agencies. As Alan pointed out in his testimony, one of the primary ways in which GSA has served the broader Federal IT community is by helping agencies buy and build technology and related services. We help by assisting agencies in accessing and purchasing from technology companies, informing and building out agency technology services, and building new government-wide platforms and products at scale.

Technology Transformation Services

In addition to the traditional work that GSA performs through the Federal Acquisition Service, the agency has recognized that there is a need across the Federal community for services that will help agencies think differently about how they are buying and managing information technology. TTS was created to meet this need.

The mission of TTS is simple—to improve the public’s experience with the government by helping agencies build, buy, and share technology that allows them to better serve the public.

To accomplish this, TTS applies modern methodologies and technologies in helping agencies make their services more accessible, efficient, and effective. TTS also creates government-wide products that exemplify these values. We employ modern software design, product development, and outcome measurement as we build and share technology applications and platforms with Federal agencies, all with the goal of improving the public’s experience with government.

TTS is currently made up of four main offices.

18F

First, the 18F program was created to help improve how agencies interact with their customers and the American public and to also improve how agencies buy and manage information technology. Built in the spirit of America’s top tech startups, 18F consults with agencies to help them rapidly deploy technology tools to create great services for the public. 18F hires via a “tour of duty” model and brings in talented people for short stints in the Federal Government. 18F staff are hired for two-year terms, with the ability to extend for a second two-year term.

18F seeks to provide Federal agencies with user-centric customer solutions that address a client's unique challenges. For example, 18F helped Treasury implement the DATA Act, which provides data on how the Federal Government spends money through an easy-to-use, searchable web tool. To accomplish this work, 18F assisted Treasury with agile development, public engagement, procurement strategy, and training. Treasury credits 18F's approach as a key success factor in the implementation of the DATA Act. 18F also created the U.S. Web Design Standards to guarantee readability and accessibility of government websites while saving duplicative design and development costs. The Web Design Standards are currently used by hundreds of government websites registering millions of page views every month. In addition, 18F develops high-demand products and platforms to scale and institutionalize across government. For example, 18F is currently offering a cloud platform, through a pilot program, to agencies that need such services.

Office of Products and Programs

TTS also operates the Office of Products and Programs (OPP), which helps deliver information and services to the public. OPP's origins began in GSA's Office of Citizen Services and Innovative Technologies (OCSIT). For decades, GSA has been a leader in connecting citizens with government information through traditional media such as publications and call centers or websites such as USA.gov or gobiernoUSA.gov. Prior to the creation of TTS, these programs were run out of OCSIT. Now OPP continues to deliver key government information to the public by working closely with Federal agencies and developing innovative products and services to the public.

For example, OPP operates data.gov, which is the Federal Government's portal for agency data sets. They also encourage agency use of challenge.gov, the official hub for technology challenge competitions that ask the public's help in improving information delivery. In addition, the Federal Risk and Authorization Management Program or FedRAMP was created in 2012 to help standardize and improve security for cloud products and services that help provide information to the public. OPP has five primary portfolio areas, which include Secure Cloud, Public Experience, Data Services, Innovation Portfolio, and Smarter IT Delivery.

Presidential Innovation Fellows

Next we have the Presidential Innovation Fellows program, or PIF program. The Presidential Innovation Fellows program brings the principles, values, and practices of the innovation economy into government. This highly competitive program pairs talented, diverse technologists and innovators with top civil servants and change

leaders to tackle some of government's biggest challenges. These teams address complex issues that involve people, processes, products, and policy to identify and implement solutions that achieve lasting impact.

Presidential Innovation Fellows serve for 12 months, during which they work on one or several initiatives. Fellows operate with wide latitude to allow for individual initiative in working with agencies to tackle difficult problems. They also spend a portion of their time co-working and collaborating with other Fellows. Throughout the program, Fellows receive support from partners and change agents in the White House and across various Federal agencies.

Office of Acquisitions

Finally, the Office of Acquisitions exists to help make government a better buyer of technology. The Office seeks to improve the acquisition process for TTS product leads, agency customers, and industry partners. They ensure that informed buyers are confident they are purchasing the right products and services to meet their need, and they make the acquisition process easier and more accessible. The Office seeks to design and promote acquisition approaches that are aligned with current technology-industry development practices to ensure government technology purchases have a high degree of success and meet the needs of agencies and the people they serve.

The Acquisition Office's projects include partnering with GSA's Federal Acquisition Service to create the Agile Blanket Purchase Agreement (BPA), in which vendors qualify for Schedule 70 by submitting actual code, or proof of expertise, rather than large amounts of documentation. The Agile BPA helps to attract vendors who excel in user-centered design and agile software development. In addition, the Acquisition Office helped HHS and California achieve significant savings by redesigning the procurement of California's new federally funded Child Welfare System. TTS's continued engagement led to California launching its own agile vendor pool. Through these and other efforts, the Office of Acquisition is helping agencies implement modular procurement practices and be better buyers of technology.

Conclusion: What the Future Holds

The rapid transformation of information technology and how Americans interact with private-sector companies and financial institutions has radically changed the online experience for the public.

The sea change in the digital marketplace has left Americans expecting more from their government. Meanwhile government agencies are experiencing outdated technology and lengthy IT projects that don't deliver as intended. This results in frustrating and lengthy paperwork exercises to engage with Federal agencies that are not acceptable to the general public.

Federal agencies must continue to adapt to the modern, digital world in ways that are easy and secure for the American people. We are at a crossroads—opportunities abound to better use technology to help agencies perform their missions and serve the public, and so do challenges and outside threats. The next decade will bring increasingly complex challenges, and TTS, with our ability to implement cross-government solutions, is uniquely positioned to help agencies address them.

The Committee's Modernizing Government Technology Act is a positive step to help agencies make this transition and overcome funding challenges. Providing agencies with more flexibility through individual working capital funds and a centralized Technology Modernization Fund (TMF) will help them better align agency funding to the IT refresh cycle. In particular, the centralized nature of the TMF will strengthen the ability of the Federal Government to strategically prioritize investments across government as well as inside agencies.

I speak for everyone in TTS when I tell you that we are excited to help agencies make this transition and to work with this Committee to make that happen.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to your questions.