

Retirement Modernization, Take Five

By Tammy Flanagan

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The Office of Personnel Management has made various attempts to modernize the federal retirement process over the past couple of decades. These efforts have involved developing an integrated system and automated processes, but have [failed to meet their goals](#). Recently, AINS Inc. [announced](#) that OPM had awarded the company a contract worth a potential \$24.1 million over five years to use its cloud-based case management platform to try again to modernize federal retirement, and also upgrade the agency's investigative processes.

I recently interviewed AINS CEO Moe Goswami about the contract and whether the new effort will succeed where others have failed. An edited transcript of our conversation appears below.

What product will be used to upgrade the system?

eCase is the product that was acquired for this contract. OPM is also considering many other products. The eCase platform allows us to build any kind of case management system.

Do you have experience with projects of this scale at other government organizations?

We have completed similar projects for other federal agencies, such as HUD and DHS. We will work with OPM to implement this project as a partnership between our two organizations.

Will the retirement process become employee-driven, like the process used to apply for Social Security retirement? In other words, will the employee have a paperless and accurate transition to retirement?

We don't know the exact details of the process. We do know the plan is to have the retirement caseworkers utilizing the systems. We will be providing technology support. The employees will be able to access online information about their retirement and apply for benefits online. In the future, there is the capability to add applications designed to run on mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablet computers.

Will the system become operational in stages?

We don't know about the details of how OPM plans to begin and proceed with this project. My guess would be that it will be done and implemented in pieces. I don't have a timeframe yet. I am not aware of the approach that is planned for this project at this early stage.

Have you studied OPM's previous efforts to modernize retirement processing?

We are familiar with past efforts. I can't speak to what went right or wrong. Our technology is very flexible to changing environments. There has to be a team effort to succeed. We have to work as two partners.

Why do you think you will be successful where other efforts have failed?

We may be more successful because along with our technology are our various frameworks that will speed up the development. We already have frameworks that we can modify for human resources, investigative processes and so forth.

What assurance can you provide to Congress that your system will work, considering that, [according to the Washington Post](#), over \$100 million has already been spent with no real improvement in the time it takes to process a retirement case.

This will most likely be OPM's responsibility and we will work with any requirements that we are made aware of by OPM.

How do you plan to avoid the technology and management issues that plagued past modernization efforts?

Technology is changing, and those problems that were encountered in the past are not necessarily the fault of one system or the other. With eCase implementation, we will be using agile methodology, which is more transparent in its development. We will build the solution in stages. Each of these stages are called sprints. During each phase of the sprint, we will build and demonstrate that stage of the project. At that point, if it doesn't meet the requirements, then you incorporate new solutions to help mitigate the problems.

One of the other areas is change management. In every system that is designed, the project will go through changes to the policy or organizational changes. With our technology, it is very easy to change the business processes with systems that are built on eCase.

Will you work with vendors such as Economic Systems Inc., which has developed forms and retirement calculation software?

We will be working with retirement case processing initially. The calculators may come later on. We will be open to working with other vendors, but the direction will come from OPM.

What can you say to the 2.7 million federal employees who work for the federal government and are looking forward to a smoother processing of their retirement applications?

I know that OPM is very committed to the success of building this retirement system and AINS is very committed to the goals that will be set out by OPM.

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