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Deploying and Modernizing VistA – A Case Study for Legacy System Transition

Executive Summary

The Federal government has developed a healthcare management system – the Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VistA) – that can help achieve the nation’s goals regarding electronic health care records (www.va.gov/VISTA_MONOGRAPH/). Developed and managed by the U.S. Department of Veteran’s Affairs, and in use in hospitals throughout the U.S. and the world, the system supports functions that could be of value to many other participants in the healthcare arena.

It has been suggested that there may be advantages in making VistA available to a broader community that could include both government and non-government entities. While no decision has been made about such an initiative, the VA’s management is interested in understanding the issues, challenges and opportunities associated with such an action. The government is also seeking advice on how to upgrade the system to take advantage of innovative software and technologies (VistA was developed in MUMPs).

The VA’s Chief Information Officer has asked ACT-IAC to assist in addressing the above issues. While the major objective of this project is to look at the VistA system, a second objective is to identify and develop a set of principles and guidelines that can be applied to other governmental systems that may have similar issues. The project will be conducted by volunteers from IAC member companies. The entire government IT community and other relevant constituencies will be invited to participate as appropriate.

Objective and Deliverables

The objective of this project is to provide an industry-based, community-wide answer to the following questions:

- Is VistA a system that could be deployed to a wider community? If yes, what is the most appropriate deployment model: open source code; cloud computing; business process/methodology; other? (NOTE: this project will not address whether VistA should be deployed as that is beyond the scope of ACT-IAC’s mission.)
- If VistA is deployed and used by other government agencies or private sector entities, what organizational and management structure should be developed? Possible questions include:

- Which organization(s) should have responsibility for maintaining the system?
- Should VistA be established as a national standard? What are the implications of this action?

- What is an appropriate strategy for modernizing VistA and transitioning it to a more current and innovative architecture? The strategy should result in an appropriate, creative and agile acquisition and development plan. (NOTE: The project will establish the general guidance and principles for this strategy and will not be involved in matters pertaining to any actual acquisition.)

- What are the opportunities and impact of modernizing and deploying VistA upon private industry, the healthcare community and other key groups.

- Based on the above, what principles and best practices should be documented and distributed for use by other government agencies considering similar issues?

The deliverables of this project will include a report that documents and summarizes the answers to the above questions. Other deliverables (such as roundtables, seminars, video training, etc.) may be identified by the project team.

Schedule

The goal is to have the entire project completed within six months from inception. However, the actual project schedule will depend upon the final scoping of the project.

After selection of the project team, the first milestone will be the project scope, strategy and schedule. This should be available by October 30, 2009.