

## **Enhancing Information Technology Decision-Making via an Enterprise Framework** *By Joe Boutte*

Decision-making across the United States government requires a consistent approach in regard to information technology management, acquisition, and support. Federal contractors supporting government agencies require expertise in assisting their government customers in identifying and documenting the complexities of modern enterprise systems to improve decision-making. A framework of tools and processes that enables enhanced decision-making is the Federal Enterprise Architecture (FEA).

The FEA is a common framework that cuts across the federal government to improve collaboration, consolidation, and the leveraging of investments. The FEA website says, “The FEA is being constructed through a collection of *interrelated* “reference models” designed to facilitate cross-agency analysis and the identification of duplicative investments, gaps, and opportunities for collaboration within and across federal agencies ([www.whitehouse.com/omb/egov/a-2-EAModelsNEW2.html](http://www.whitehouse.com/omb/egov/a-2-EAModelsNEW2.html)).

The FEA identifies opportunities to simplify processes and unify work across federal agencies and within the lines of business of the federal government. The outcome of the FEA will be a more citizen-centered, customer-focused government that maximizes technology investments to better achieve mission outcomes for improving:

- Budget allocation
- Horizontal and vertical information sharing
- Performance measurement and budget performance integration
- Cross-agency collaboration
- Improved services to the citizens
- E-government
- Service component-based architecture

The FEA was commissioned on February 6, 2002, and drivers include Presidential mandates, budget guidance, technology, GAO reports, interoperability, standardization, laws, mission needs, and other guidance. The following activities, federal laws, mission needs, stakeholders, and guidance are examples of FEA drivers:

- Citizens, partners, the President, Congress
- Need to define and align federal business functions and supporting IT via a set of common models
- Agency missions
- Identify opportunities to re-use and re-deploy IT assets across the federal government
- Improve effectiveness of IT spending to help yield substantial cost savings and improve service delivery for citizens
- Government Performance and Reform Act of 1993
- Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995
- Clinger-Cohen Act of 1996
- Executive Order 13011
- Office of Management and Budget A-11 and A130 regulations
- Government Paperwork Elimination Act of 1998

- Federal Information Security Management Act of 2002
- eGov 2002 (formalized CIO Council and EA and contains FISMA)
- Agency mission needs and compliance to legislation, regulations, and executive orders
- Improve investment decision-making

The FEA consist of five reference models: the Business Reference Model (BRM), Performance Reference Model (PRM), Data Reference Model (DRM), Technical Reference Model (TRM), and Service Component Reference Model (SRM). Other elements of FEA include eGov initiatives (i.e. IPv6, HSPD-12), the Federal Transition Framework (FTF), lines of business (LOB), annual self assessment, principles, and artifacts used in a holistic manner to assist federal agencies to become more efficient through improved decision-making supported by enterprise architecture.

The FEA's focus is customers, and the strategy is to improve government operations. FEA equips the OMB and federal agencies with a common language and framework to describe and analyze IT investments, enhance collaboration, and ultimately, transform the federal government into a citizen-centered, results-oriented, and market-based organization as set forth in the President's Management Agenda (PMA). The Consolidated Reference Model (CRM) describes the strategic intent of FEA as guided by three core principles:

- **Business-driven**

The FEA is most useful when it is closely aligned with government strategic plans and executive level direction. Agency mission statements, presidential management directives and agency business owners give direction to each agency's enterprise architecture (EA) and to the FEA.

- **Proactive collaboration across the federal government**

Adoption of the FEA is achieved through active participation by the EA community in its development and use. The FEA community is responsible for the development, evolution, and adoption of the FEA.

- **Architecture improves the effectiveness/efficiency of government information resources**

Architecture development is an integral part of the capital investment process. No IT investment should be made without a business-approved architecture.

Agencies that embrace enterprise architecture and use it to support decisions reduce redundancies, conserve resources, and achieve better evaluations in the Presidential Management Agenda. Using EA to capture the complexities of government agencies to identify relationships between processes, information, functions, and departments enhances an agency's ability to remain agile, effective, and responsive. EA as an integrated set of disciplines, processes, and tools enable organizations throughout the government to make better decisions. EA reduces risks, lowers costs, and provides the method for organizing facts, relationships, and process in context to enable organizational leaders to make better decision. EA provides knowledge for action in organizations and is an enabling tool for transformation as well as creating a learning organization.

Two successful EAs in government can be found at the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of the Interior. Both agencies have mature EAs that are complete, used, and achieving business and mission success for the agencies. Details on these EAs can be found at:  
[http://www.va.gov/oit/ea/EAS/eav4\\_2\\_1/COID-27976.html](http://www.va.gov/oit/ea/EAS/eav4_2_1/COID-27976.html)  
<http://www.doi.gov/ocio/architecture/mbt/guidance.htm>