

IT Project Proposal Report - Detail
Agency: 081 - COMM FOR BLIND & VISUALLY IMPAIRED
Budget Cycle: 2015-2017 Biennium **Version: AF - AGENCY FINAL REQUEST**

IT Project : AWARE Client Data Tracking System Procurement

General Section

Contact Name : Wes Majerus	E-mail : wes.majerus@nebraska.gov	Agency Priority : 1
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City : Lincoln		NITC Score :
State : Nebraska	Zip : 68510	

Expenditures

IT Project Costs	Total	Prior Exp	FY14 Appr/Reappr	FY16 Request	FY17 Request	Future Add
Contractual Services						
Design	0	0	0	0	0	0
Programming	100,000	0	100,000	0	0	0
Project Management	103,000	0	103,000	0	0	0
Data Conversion	50,000	0	50,000	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0
Subtotal Contractual Services	253,000	0	253,000	0	0	0
Telecommunications						
Data	0	0	0	0	0	0
Video	0	0	0	0	0	0
Voice	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wireless	0	0	0	0	0	0
Subtotal Telecommunications	0	0	0	0	0	0
Training						
Technical Staff	6,871	0	6,871	0	0	0
End-user Staff	11,353	0	11,353	0	0	0
Subtotal Training	18,224	0	18,224	0	0	0

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Expenditures

IT Project Costs	Total	Prior Exp	FY14 Appr/Reappr	FY16 Request	FY17 Request	Future Add
Other Operating Costs						
Personnel Cost	0	0	0	0	0	0
Supplies & Materials	0	0	0	0	0	0
Travel	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0
Subtotal Other Operating Costs	0	0	0	0	0	0
Capital Expenditures						
Hardware	0	0	0	0	0	0
Software	100,276	0	100,276	0	0	0
Network	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0
Subtotal Capital Expenditures	100,276	0	100,276	0	0	0
TOTAL PROJECT COST	371,500	0	371,500	0	0	0

Funding

Fund Type	Total	Prior Exp	FY14 Appr/Reappr	FY16 Request	FY17 Request	Future Add
General Fund	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cash Fund	0	0	0	0	0	0
Federal Fund	371,500	0	371,500	0	0	0
Revolving Fund	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other Fund	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL FUNDING	371,500	0	371,500	0	0	0
VARIANCE	0	0	0	0	0	0

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

AWARE (Accessible Web Activity Reporting Environment), produced by Alliance Enterprises, is used by over 31 State Rehab Agencies to manage grants from U.S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration.

Strengths: Financial component can be linked to the Edge system to track obligations and payments for case services

Required changes to federal reporting requirements are added through semiannual software upgrades
Continuity of Operations can be assured as developments and modifications are developed by the vendor
Nonvisual accessibility is maintained through close partnerships between vendor and software manufacturers
Current case management system is heavily customized and updates are costly and time-consuming; it is not feasible to add financial component.

AWARE is a product of Alliance Enterprises of Lacey, WA. It is designed to specifically meet the reporting needs of Vocational Rehabilitation agencies that report to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), which is part of the Department of Education. The system is used by 31 states and other agencies to manage grants awarded to them by the RSA. The AWARE system has a financial component that creates obligations for products and services procured for clients as a part of their case services. It is our goal to utilize this component in conjunction with data exchange with the Edge system to track obligations and payments for case services.

To meet our current case management needs, we are utilizing a system that was given to us by the state of Iowa, which we have heavily customized. Although the system currently performs effectively, a change to the AWARE (Accessible Web Activity Reporting Environment) would benefit us in the future from a continuity of operations standpoint, as well as ensuring that modifications to the system necessitated by changes in federal reporting requirements are not as costly or time-consuming to implement. In addition, upgrades to the system can be insured to be accessible to our blind staff as Alliance Enterprises works closely with manufacturers of screen access technology, operating systems, and backend database and related software.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND OUTCOMES (15 PTS):

Goals of the project:

Keep abreast of changing federal reporting guidelines
Utilize a system that is easy to maintain and upgrade
Utilize a system that is accessible to our blind staff through screen access technology
Implement financial piece to manage obligations and payments.

Project Beneficiaries:

Blind Nebraskans, due to streamlined services

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Staff, who will use an efficient system that is kept up to date
Program and administrative staff, who can better manage financial obligations on case services
Federal grantors.

Outcomes:

Accurate data and reporting
Improved link between obligations and payments

Updates made with nonvisual access in mind.

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION / BUSINESS CASE (25 PTS):

AWARE is specifically developed for rehabilitation agencies to manage their awarded grants and to track progress, obligations, and case-related indicators on the clients they serve. Because the majority of these functions will be used by NCBVI, the agency will not have to expend as much time or money in developing system enhancements to stay current with federal reporting requirements. As part of the agency's licensing plan, Alliance Enterprises provides seats on a user's group, which will allow our staff to suggest enhancements that would improve their productivity, or express any concerns they might have to the vendor. Any costs for modifications made based on these suggestions would be shared amongst all system users and covered through licensing fees. Our organization can also dialog with other agencies using the system to jointly solve problems or find solutions to complications we are facing.

One area that we have been unable to master with our current system is financial reporting and tracking. AWARE contains a financial module that currently allows creation of financial obligations on a client's case. We will leverage this module by linking it with the Payroll and Financial Center so that obligations produced in AWARE are sent to the PFC and changed into vouchers for payment. Information on payments will then be returned to AWARE for tracking purposes. AWARE can be used to report on the data it collects. One upshot of this reporting capability is providing data to interested parties such as other state officials. This would provide statistics such as numbers of clients served, aggregate demographic information, program effectiveness, or other indicators.

5. Describe other solutions that were evaluated, including their strengths and weaknesses, and why they were rejected. Explain the implications of doing nothing and why this option is not acceptable.

One other case management system was explored. Through discussions with fellow state agencies, we determined that the system had a limited customer base and that its functionality would not meet our needs. We also evaluated continuing to upgrade and maintain the current system. This is not a feasible plan as there are only two people who are familiar with internal aspects of the system. Also, it is difficult to solve accessibility issues with new enhancements in a timely fashion. Continuing on our current course would not allow us to keep up with changing federal reporting requirements. This would also compromise continuity of operations in the event that the programmer or data analyst were unable to continue work on the system. As we enhance the current system, there are possibilities that defects related to accessing the system with screen reading software will occur. From past experience, it can take a significant amount of time and resources to track down the causes and solutions for the defects. Resolution can take a large amount of time as resources for testing, support, and remedying defects must be located and scheduled.

6. If the project is the result of a state or federal mandate, please specify the mandate being addressed.

34 CFR 361.47 Record of Services - requirements for what is to be recorded in the Case record.

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34 CFR 361.88 Reporting Requirements - outlines what needs to be reported to federal US. Dept of Education/Rehab Services Administration.

TECHNICAL IMPACT (20 PTS):

The AWARE system is web-based and uses SQL databases. It is developed using Visual Studio .NET and collects the same information as our current system. The current system is based on SQL Server and .NET. We will need to remap our data definitions and undergo a data conversion process before the project can go live. This may present some challenges to the project time-line and to implementation of AWARE.

The AWARE system is available under two models. The system can be purchased and hosted on machines local to the purchasing entity or it can be purchased as part of a Managed Services contract where the software and data is hosted in a secured data center. We are working with the Office of the Chief Information Officer and Alliance Enterprises to determine pros and cons of each solution and to decide which model to pursue. The system is set up to utilize a web server to generate and handle the user interface for the system. This web server works with an SQL database server that holds client data. When the project is implemented as a Managed Services system, the database server is sized based on licenses. Each agency's data and web traffic run on an exclusive batch of hardware that is separate from other agencies using the Managed Services Model.

We have begun discussions with the staff of State Accounting to determine the feasibility of collaborating with the Edge system for the financial component of AWARE. We can meet our goal of taking authorizations from the AWARE system when products and services are purchased through a case, and then translate them into vouchers from inside Edge for payment. Edge can send data back to AWARE to show which vouchers have been paid. Facilitating this data exchange will require some communication between the two systems either by manual upload or through an interface with mainframe. We are evaluating the pros and cons of these alternatives. This financial piece is not currently available to us. We had planned to develop something that would fill this need with our current system, but found that doing so was very complicated and cost and time prohibitive. Both the financial piece and the reporting change inclusions are large strengths of the system from our standpoint. One of the major weaknesses of the system is that although it captures the same types of information about the clients we serve, the flow for entering that information and manipulating it is much less straightforward than the current system that our staff members are accustomed to. Also, as part of the accessibility of the system, customizations will need to be performed on each staff member's computer at the time of system implementation. These customizations should only need to be done once. The customizations improve the way that screen access software works with AWARE's screens and improve the way PDF documents read.

Strengths:

1. Contains federal reporting changes.
2. Regularly Updated, twice a year.
3. Accessible using screen access technology
4. Large nationwide user network that can assist in advocating for change or solving problems
5. Functionality in mobile browsers for completing many client service tasks in the field

Weaknesses:

1. Different from current system, will require staff training and modification of some business processes
2. Data from current system will need to undergo conversion to be used in new system.
3. Some customization may need to be undertaken, especially in the financial module

8. Address the following issues with respect to the proposed technology:

- Describe the reliability, security and scalability (future needs for growth or adaptation) of the technology.
- Address conformity with applicable NITC technical standards and guidelines (available at <http://nitc.ne.gov/standards/>) and generally accepted industry standards.
- Address the compatibility with existing institutional and/or statewide infrastructure.

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Discussions have already occurred regarding security and preliminary management services with OCIO.

Many of the systems used by the State are web-based, and AWARE is no exception. The system will be usable on a variety of platforms including Windows 7 with Internet Explorer and Safari on the iPhone and iPad. All of our field counselors utilize iPhones when away from the office, and this new system will be more usable on the iPhone and iPad than our current system. The data formats, Comma Separated Value files, used to exchange data between systems are compatible with AWARE and Edge. When AWARE was first developed, it was an acronym whose meaning was "Accessible Web Activity Reporting Environment". Documentation has been provided to us showing that AWARE is accessible and that it works with a number of screen access technologies and browsers. The system is updated twice a year to include customer-suggested improvements, changes to reporting outputs mandated by the RSA, and fixes to help the system work with screen access software and browsers. We will include the NITC Technology Access Clause in our contract.

Applicable Standards:

7-102, DNS Forwarding Standard

7-103, SMTP Routing Standard

8-301, Password Standard

PRELIMINARY PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTATION (10 PTS):

Project Team:

- Dr. Pearl Van Zandt: Agency Executive Director - Project Oversight with respect to budget and system implementation.
- Bill Brown: Business Manager - Develop budget and timelines for system purchase and conversion.
- Wes Majerus: Technology Program Manager - Works with technical staff of OCIO and Alliance. Ensure that system is accessible to screen access technology and other software used by the Commission. Provide support as system comes into use. Act as a liaison between vendor, OCIO, and Agency to address system functionality concerns.
- Dottie Wilmott: Data Quality Analyst and client tracking system administrator - ensure that system and data work properly once system comes online. Assist in data conversion strategies and concerns. Ensure data quality and accuracy as system comes into use. Provide support to users of the system once operational.
- Rich Burns: Office of the CIO, programmer working on our current system. Assist with data conversion and evaluation of system, assist with concerns in transitioning between systems.

10. List the major milestones and/or deliverables and provide a timeline for completing each.

- Present-October, 2014: Analysis phase continues
- November, 2014: Finalize system proposals with respect to Alliance statement of work for system and data conversion, decision about project hosting made.
- December, 2014 sign contract for purchase of system
- January-March, 2015: Data conversion and remapping from old system
- April, 2015: Customize and adapt the system to meet agency processes
- May-July, 2015 - Test completed system functionality and data integrity.
- August-September, 2015: Complete up to six trainings across the state to prepare for go-live
- October, 2015: System Go-Live
- October, 2015-December 2015: Remedy issues detected as of go-live

11. Describe the training and staff development requirements.

The system has a different workflow process. It will require extensive training for all staff at the time of implementation. Alliance Enterprises will provide three types of training

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sessions related to staff function within the system, as denoted in their Statement of Work. These trainings will include An Introduction to AWARE, Using AWARE with Assistive Technology, and AWARE Administrator Training. Training on additional system enhancements may be needed if those enhancements create a drastic functional change in the use of the system throughout its lifecycle. We are planning to have the Introduction to AWARE and Using AWARE with Assistive Technology trainings held such that they are provided to each of our six offices individually, not to exceed 6 trainings.

12. Describe the ongoing support requirements.

The AWARE system would be supported by NCBVI staff, the vendor, and the OCIO. Support would be required during the periods when upgrades were deployed and tested. A test environment would be available whether we hosted the system in Nebraska or used the Managed Services contract. Inquiries such as password resets, staff assistance with using the system, and screen access software customizations would be performed by the Technology Program Manager or by anyone who has the administrator role as needed with guidance from Alliance Enterprises. Some administrative functions would be handled by those who have the administrative role in the system.

RISK ASSESSMENT (10 PTS):

13. Describe possible barriers and risks related to the project and the relative importance of each.
Some staff may need additional training beyond what is provided.

- Data Conversion is on the project's critical path; delays and difficulties in that process could delay implementation.
- Difficulties could be encountered in data transfer between Edge and AWARE
- The core AWARE system may need unplanned customization to comply with agency or Nebraska technology standards.

14. Identify strategies which have been developed to minimize risks.

- Ensure that introductory and Access Technology trainings are provided in a small group setting to each of our six offices one at a time to allow as much hands-on introductory work in the system as possible.
- Discuss with stakeholders such as other VR agencies before choice of new system.
- Seek advice regarding pointers and pitfalls encountered by agencies in their implementation plan.
- Discuss, at a minimum, which data will need to be converted
- Clearly delineate the current data format and determine what format will be needed for new data.
- Consult with OCIO and Alliance on plans for data conversion.
- Plan to leave the old system intact for a number of years for historical data access.
- Work closely with State Accounting to determine how financial module and linkage to the Edge system can be best achieved.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS AND BUDGET (20 PTS):

This project will enhance and make much more robust NCBVI's ability to track client information, Report to our Federal partners, and manage the financial aspect of the Vocational Rehabilitation Federal grants it is charged to administer. Monies to pay onetime startup costs for this system are generally from reallocation of the VR grant and from Program income generated by successful closures to Social Security recipients.

Discussions have already occurred regarding security and preliminary management services with OCIO.

We are researching compliance with all NITC Standards.

Refer to Financial Tab for cost allocations and detailed breakdown.

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