

CONTRACT GUIDE

# EVOLVING WITH SEWP V

## INSIDE

**2**  
SEWP V SEES  
A FUTURE OF  
BROADER USE  
AND INCREASING  
GROWTH

**4**  
HELPING  
AGENCIES  
MANAGE SUPPLY  
CHAIN RISKS IS  
A NEW SEWP  
FOCUS

**5**  
SEWP V TARGETS  
LOWER IT COSTS  
THROUGH  
STRATEGIC  
SOURCING

**6**  
SEWP V OPENS  
UP TO WEB-  
BASED MARKET  
RESEARCH, LINE  
ITEM ORDER  
TRACKING

**7**  
STREAMLINED  
FEES, EXPANDED  
OUTREACH SET  
MARK FOR NEW  
SEWP

**8**  
FOR SEWP,  
CHANGE HAS  
BEEN THE ONLY  
CONSTANT

**9**  
SEWP V  
HAS A VERY  
BUSINESS-LIKE  
REPUTATION TO  
PROTECT

# SEWP V SEES A FUTURE OF BROADER USE AND INCREASING GROWTH

**T**HE FIFTH ITERATION of NASA's Solutions for Enterprise-Wide Procurement (SEWP), after a year's delay due to protests, is finally underway. Its predecessor stopped taking new orders at the end of April, passing the baton to a contract that more than doubled its government-wide usage over SEWP IV's eight-year run, with officials confident that SEWP V will at least equal if not outdo that.

"I've already said that, in my view, we should also double the usage (over SEWP V's 10-year term)," said Joanne Woytek, SEWP program manager, who has been with the Governmentwide Acquisition Contract (GWAC) from its first day. "If we don't, it's because we have not met our customers' needs, but everything seems to be telling us we've done things right (with SEWP V), so I'm optimistic."

Today's SEWP is a completely different animal than the Scientific and Engineering Workstation Procurement contract that started life in 1993 as a way for NASA users to buy computers. SEWP V covers a much broader range of products and services that reflects the complex IT that agencies have to use today, from IT and communications products to audio visual solutions, and the installation, engineering and training services needed to manage that.

More than that, however, SEWP has evolved into a vehicle that actively works with agencies to help them meet their business goals, something that many believe set it apart from other GWACs such as the National Institutes of Health's Chief Information Officer-Commodities and Solutions (CIO-CS) and the GSA's Schedule 70.

"I think we've done (SEWP V) right, and everything

we've seen so far is showing us that," Woytek said. "So I'm extremely optimistic, and that we'll play a key role in agency procurement plans."

It's not that SEWP is trying to take anything away from either the NIH or GSA contracts, she said, but she thinks people want contracts that provide the control, tracking, good access and good pricing that SEWP now provides them.

SEWP V is set to morph yet again, from a strict products-and-solutions focus to one that provides a more strategic platform for users. Woytek and her

**"WE'RE ALREADY SEEING THE SAME RATE OF ORDERING FROM THE FINAL YEAR OF SEWP IV CONTINUING INTO SEWP V." - JOANNE WOYTEK, SEWP PROGRAM MANAGER**

staff began looking at a change in SEWP's vision and mission several years ago, based both on their own experiences and on what their customers told them they needed.

"We've gone from being a purely 'come by and order' contract to one that, if nothing else, allows agencies at the highest level to track and report on what they're buying, and that also provides them with control over what's being bought," Woytek said.

As SEWP IV progressed, the program office would get a lot of feedback from people about how they could buy certain things on the contracts, if they could do this or that, and that feedback fed into a gradual realization that SEWP wasn't where its customers wanted it to be. So there was a conscious decision made for the program office to get out into the field and be more visible and be more of a leader in the acquisition world, and to try and get more of the

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strategic focus that's now a central part of SEWP V.

Industry also seems to appreciate those contracts with the widest reach and multi-year durability. It takes a lot of time to pull these contracts together, and vendors have to put a lot of money and resources into the research and processes needed to organize a bid, and then compete for business. It can take as much as five years for them to recoup that cost, at which point they have to start preparing for the next version.

Woytek and her staff spend a lot of time with both agencies and vendors to try to understand what's going on in both arenas and how SEWP might fit their needs. That's why it was so disappointing to see the kind of pushback there seems to be to the first set of awards in early 2014, the first time any SEWP awards had generated significant protests.

Woytek took a lot of the responsibility for them, for not understanding all of the issues that could potentially blow up, particularly since she took pride in getting things right before they could get to that point, something that had stood her in good stead in previous SEWP versions. In the end, the number of vendors on SEWP V ended up at 148, compared to the 41 on SEWP IV.

But she also admitted the protests, though a real headache, were a backhanded compliment that also showed just how popular SEWP has become with the vendor community. In the past, she said, the reaction to awards would have been "Oh, we didn't get one. Big deal," to (in SEWP V) "Oh My God, we didn't get one!"

That's confirmed by the number of awardees who have already been processed. Given past experiences, Woytek said she might have expected 10 percent of them to not turn up at all. But just a month into the new contract's term, only four companies had still to be entered into the SEWP system.

"We're already seeing the same rate of ordering from the final year of SEWP IV continuing into SEWP V," she said. "That's when we knew we were going to

grow substantially during the current contract."

It could also prove beneficial in other ways, she said. Companies that looked interesting initially but didn't get on are now there, and maybe that's the valuable thing that will be proven about the whole process over time, she said.

"It's been an interesting experience," she said. "Now we have all of these companies coming in and it's a

**"IT'S BEEN AN INTERESTING EXPERIENCE. NOW WE HAVE ALL OF THESE COMPANIES COMING IN AND IT'S A QUESTION OF HOW ARE WE GOING TO BRING THEM ON BOARD AND ARE WE READY FOR THIS. SO FAR I'VE BEEN SHOCKED, BUT IN A GOOD WAY." - JOANNE WOYTEK, SEWP PROGRAM MANAGER**

question of how are we going to bring them on board and are we ready for this. So far I've been shocked, but in a good way."

Anyone who was on the SEWP V website in the first week or two knows that it wasn't able to handle the growth in orders and agency customers, she said. But the program office made adjustments, and the problems haven't come up again. The office decided to change the way it operates, not meeting with every company that makes that request, for example, but instead finding other ways to address their concerns.

"It does change your perspective and working style, but that's okay," Woytek said. "Change is not necessarily bad, but it does take a while to adjust, and that's what we'll do."

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# HELPING AGENCIES MANAGE SUPPLY CHAIN RISKS IS A NEW SEWP FOCUS

**A**S A SUPPLIER OF IT to all federal agencies, including the Defense Department and intelligence organizations, the SEWP program office has made it part of its refocused mission to also help its customers with some of the broader implications involved in procurements. Supply chain risk is one that's come to the fore in recent years.

With the global spread of IT manufacturing, a lot of the components that go into the products used by the government are made outside of the U.S. and in places that have unknown quality control. Some, such as China, have to be assumed to be potentially hostile and capable of slipping in systems that could help with such things as electronic espionage in the US.

Joanne Woytek, SEWP program manager, made it a goal for the SEWP program office to develop a way to help its users assess the risks involved with the products and solutions they buy through the contract. She worked with the DOD and other agencies, as well as through participation in international standards organizations such as the Open Group's Trusted Technology Forum, to come up with the right contract language.

The approach so far is to query SEWP contract holders on their authorized reseller relationship with various manufacturers. When they add a new company or a product from a manufacturer to their list, they have to notify the SEWP program office about what their relationship is with that company or manufacturer. The program office then checks to see if they are in fact working with the vendor.

"We don't just rubber stamp things," Woytek said. "We actually have a verification process via email between the contract holder, our office and the manufacturer to ensure that, when they say they are an authorized

reseller, that's also what the manufacturer means by authorized reseller."

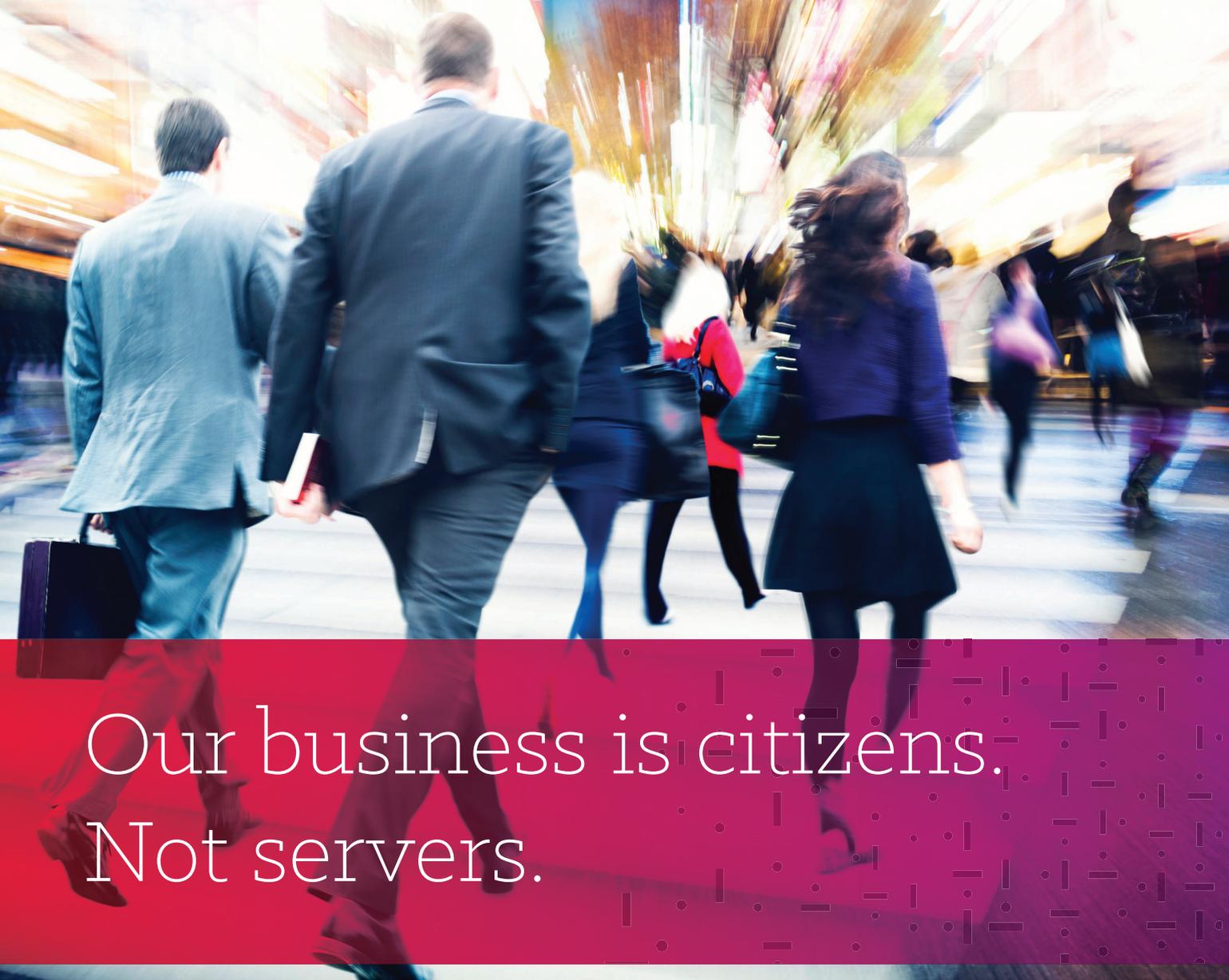
The goal is that when someone comes to SEWP to get a quote, the program office can provide an assessment of the risk for the customer about where the item they are buying came from, if it has any security issues, and whether it could be counterfeit or not. They won't be given a yes or no about whether they should buy it, but they'll at least have a decent understanding of the risk involved with using it if they do. That might not matter so much if the product is a cable, but it could if it's a router or a computer.

Other government IT suppliers are also jumping on the supply chain risk wagon. The GSA issued request for information at the end of 2014 looking for ways to do due diligence for IT procurements that "will be used by the federal acquisition, grant, and oversight communities to support government risk assessments."

The whole process of developing this supply chain risk assessment "has been an interesting learning experience," Woytek said. Things could change in the future depending on what customers tell the SEWP program office, but she thinks from the evidence so far that the process that was originally envisioned and is in place now is pretty much the right way to do it. It's starting to provide the office with a "really good database of information," she said.

The reaction so far from SEWP contract holders also reinforces that perception. In the first month of SEWP V operation, Woytek said holders had already logged into the SEWP system between 3,000 and 4,000 times to provide authorized reseller information. •





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# SEWP V TARGETS LOWER IT COSTS THROUGH STRATEGIC SOURCING

**S**TRATEGIC SOURCING IS NOT a new issue in government IT procurement, but it's been moved up the list of things to focus on by the Obama Administration, which has pushed it as a key to lowering IT costs for federal agencies. Prices are all over the place because of the multiple agency-specific contracts used to buy commodity IT, it believes, and making those purchases through just a few contracts will save a lot of money.

In 2012, then acting director of the Office of Management and Budget Jeffrey Zients sent a memo to agency heads that required every agency to name a lead official to oversee strategic sourcing. It required every member agency of the interagency Strategic Sourcing Leadership Council (SSLC), which includes NASA, to "promote, to the maximum extent practicable, sound strategic sourcing practices within their agencies."

Included in the memo was the recommendation that the SSLC identify at least five products or services for which new governmentwide acquisition vehicles or management approaches should be developed and made mandatory. In May 2014, the OMB put the SEWP program office at the head of an effort to establish a strategy that would use strategic sourcing to help reduce procurement costs of IT such as desktops and laptops throughout government.

The office is now working with the GSA and NIH to put together a desktop and laptop strategic sourcing product, according to Joanne Woytek, SEWP program manager. The three agencies will be able to take the technical specifications they agree on and then work with industry and other federal agencies to develop a suite of specifications that each contract holder will be able to implement through their own channels.

It gives everyone a chance to see how to do this, she

said, and she's hopeful some definitive result will come soon. Internally, she said, the agencies are getting to the point of making it available.

"We've had good collaboration," she said. "I would say that all three of us are very, very close to implementing a laptop and desktop strategic solution for the government. After that we'll see how things go."

As for SEWP specifically, she thinks the program has set itself up well to help agencies do strategic sourcing, and has been talking to many of them about how to use the contract for that. They would have a lot of work to do for themselves if they wanted to

**NASA SEWP V "IS THE BEST STRATEGY AND VALUE FOR MEETING MISSION REQUIREMENTS."  
- DOI MEMORANDUM, DEC. 12, 2014**

use strategic sourcing for IT purchases, she said, but instead they can use NASA's platform.

"We're building out the same sort of technology that we're developing for the OMB," she said. "We think that will be a major part of SEWP V."

Some agencies aren't waiting. In 2012 the Department of the Interior implemented an enterprise IT acquisition policy that required the use of multiple strategic sourcing contracts. Two years later it made an assessment of that marketplace and determined it would be better to use a single strategic sourcing vehicle for all its IT hardware acquisitions.

At the end of last year, the DOI made it mandatory for all of its purchases of laptops, desktops, servers and other hardware to go through SEWP, initially through SEWP IV and, as that expired, through SEWP V.

NASA SEWP V "is the best strategy and value for meeting mission requirements," the DOI said. •

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# SEWP V OPENS UP TO WEB-BASED RESEARCH, LINE ITEM ORDER TRACKING

**W**HILE SEWP HAS ALWAYS been a contract that provides a lot of help to its customers, SEWP V will take that a step further by giving its users detailed data that will let them track orders at the line-item level, and also perform market research on the products they want to buy.

The ability to track orders is something that SEWP customers have asked for in the past, so they can tell exactly what people are buying which products and better plan for procurements. While the program office tracks orders in the broad sense, and can provide total business amounts, it's never been able to give out data that can tell users exactly what they bought and sold during the year.

That's something that's always grated on Joanne Woytek, the SEWP program manager. The plan is for SEWP V to provide an automated ability for users to come to the SEWP website and look at the data

**“WE’LL HAVE A TOOL THAT I’M EXCITED BY, AND I’M NOT OFTEN EXCITED BY PROGRAMS I DIDN’T WRITE MYSELF.”**  
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that's specific to their agency. The problem is that the data belongs to the agency even though it's the SEWP program office that collects and stores it.

“It isn't our data and we can't give it out to everyone and anybody,” Woytek said. “We want to make sure that the right people at an agency are the only ones able to get to their data, though if they want other people in the agency to also get to it, we'll have a control for that.”

Right now, the program office is giving agencies this type of report manually, when they request them, in the form of Excel spreadsheets. At least that's a step up

for the agencies, which, until now have had to track their own orders and do the analysis by hand. Plus, it gives the SEWP program office a change to evaluate if it's giving its users what they want.

Meanwhile, it's looking for a good tool that can be used on the SEWP website that will give users the ability to find their tracking data, while also ensuring the security of that data so that non-authorized users can't access it. It will probably take “the next few years” before SEWP will have that capability, Woytek said.

There's better news when it comes to market research. The program office has for a time been able to do that kind of research on request, but the goal is to provide a way for users to simply go to the SEWP website to do market research, and figure out what their best options are for procurements before they issue requests for quotations.

“We'll have a tool that I'm excited by, and I'm not

often excited by programs I didn't write myself,” said Woytek. “But I think it will be really cool to give customers the ability to come and combine a catalog sort of view, which is available today, and also ask for market research on products and

look that up at the same time.”

The automated SEWP tool, which Woytek hoped would be online by the end of June 2015, will also let agency users interact directly with SEWP contract holders, so the program office will not have to act as a go-between. •

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# STREAMLINED FEES, EXPANDED OUTREACH SET MARK FOR NEW SEWP

**E**VEN THOUGH THE NUMBER of contract holders on SEWP V has more than tripled, the vehicle itself has become much leaner in many ways, which should make it even easier for both vendors and users to conduct business.

The SEWP program office also intends to be more active in interacting with both customers and vendors on the use of the contract.

SEWP V is divided into four groups of contracts, lasting for a base term of five years with another five-year option. Each contract has a \$20 billion limit:

- Group A is primarily for large and small OEMs and manufacturers, and was a full and open competition.
- Group B is a set-aside contract for small HUBZone (Historically Underutilized Business Zones) businesses (Group B(1)), and Service Disabled Veteran Small Businesses (Group B(2)).
- Group C is a set-aside contract for small businesses.
- Group D is for both small and large businesses, and was also a full and open competition.

Each of the groups has the same scope.

Missing in the current contract is an open market CLIN (Contract Line Item Number) that had proved popular in previous versions because of the flexibility it provided users to quickly add products to the contracts they had with vendors. However, according to SEWP program manager Joanne Woytek, that didn't mesh with SEWP's new push to provide agencies with the control, insight and tracking of purchases they had requested.

Also, she said, many companies had dropped it during SEWP IV for fear of inadvertently breaking any procurement rules and regulations.

The fee structure is also changed in SEWP V, a part of Woytek's goal to make the fee "as meaningless as

possible" to users, while also providing the program office with the means to continue providing the services it now does. Under the new regimen, it will be incorporated into the whole order price instead of standing alone as an add-on.

"Both from our own experience and from comments from both users and vendors, it was obvious it had become something of a burden," Woytek said. "They weren't sure how to invoice for it and it had become too confusing, so we decided to standardize it."

The SEWP fee is currently a flat 0.39 percent of the order size. That's already one of the lowest for government contracts, but Woytek said the goal is to eventually drive that down to 0.25 percent.

The SEWP program office will also be stepping up its training and outreach efforts for both users and vendors. It will continue to do the one-on-one training and meetings it's always done, but it's also now doing those virtually through WebEx as well as increasing its use of videos to help extend its reach. It has an active training forum in which people can bat ideas and opinions back and forth, which is new, as well as an online chat facility for agency users, which more than doubled its usage in May alone.

The office is trying to plan for the growth that's expected in agencies' use of SEWP, Woytek said. With NASA's own IT budget unlikely to increase much in the coming years, much of that growth will come from other agencies, and the program office needs to be prepared to extend services to them also.

"We'll never be able to meet personally with everyone, so we need to find other ways to get information to them," she said. "To that end, we've totally revamped the way we train and meet with people." •



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# FOR SEWP, CHANGE HAS BEEN THE ONLY CONSTANT

**S**EWV WAS A CONTRACT born of frustration. Even back in 1993, when it began life as the Scientific Engineering Workstation Procurement, the 12-month cycle needed to buy anything IT in government was giving people at NASA fits.

Goaded on by this, a normally contentious bunch of policy, contracting and technical people at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center got together to come up with contracting language they thought would help break this drawn-out process, while complying with procurement regulations.

It eventually got the okay from the Office of Management Budget, and the GSA asked NASA to initially try it out as a governmentwide acquisition contract.

Over the 20-plus years of the contract, there are three definable periods:

**February 1993 to April 2007:** These years span the first three versions of SEWP, when it grew from a fairly simple \$800 million, four-year contract aimed mainly at the purchase of Unix systems to a \$4 billion, five-year vehicle from which users could buy a range of computing and software products. It also tried to expand the number and types of companies who could sell through SEWP with various small business and 8(a) set asides.

**May 2007 to April 2015:** The first version to carry the current Solutions for Enterprise-Wide Procurement designation. By its end, it had produced \$17 billion in total sales, included both IT products and engineering services, and spanned a range of large, medium and small vendors with one set aside devoted specifically to small businesses owned by service-disabled veterans. It was processing some 25,000 orders a year—at an average of \$85,000 per order—for more than \$2.4 billion a year in sales. It had customers at

every federal agency.

**May 2015 to April 2025:** SEWP V starts off with an expectation of doubling the business done on the contract over its 10-year term, following the experience with SEWP IV, which more than doubled the business it did from beginning to end. This will also be the first time SEWP has built in an expectation of increased business from agencies other than NASA, even though that use has been a reality for a large part of its history. To accompany that, the range of products and services has also expanded and now includes technology specifically for cloud-based solutions.

Over time, the technology focus of SEWP has changed as IT itself has changed. When SEWP first started up in 1993 there was a big difference in the various workstations that handled such things as graphics, databases and printing. Now, hardware is more or less the same and it is software that defines the difference.

Putting together any contract that government users will come to for IT over a span of 10 years will always be something of a guess, given the pace of IT innovation these days. But SEWP officials think they have it right.

“We tried to make sure our contract was flexible enough when we put it together that we can grow in the way that technology is going,” said Joanne Woytek, SEWP program manager.

Woytek has been in IT for a long time, and, she said, she doesn't believe they've missed anything; and if it turns out they have, they'll have to try and accommodate that for the future.

“But I think that where technology is going is where SEWP is going also,” she said. •

# SEWP V HAS A VERY BUSINESS-LIKE REPUTATION TO PROTECT

**S**EW P PROGRAM MANAGER Joanne Woytek will continually remind you that she is a NASA employee first, and that the SEWP V contract has to be useful for NASA IT users before other considerations. But the fact is that SEWP has not been seen by government generally as a NASA-only vehicle for many years.

That's driven what many people see as the most innovative aspect of SEWP. Far more than any other government procurement vehicle, SEWP has cemented a reputation for its customer service. It's a matter of faith now that when users or vendors buy or sell through SEWP, they will receive the best hands-on service of any contract, bar none.

It's something Woytek has pushed ever since she became program manager in 1999.

"From day one we've been conscious of the need to provide that kind of service," she said. "It's in our DNA now."

The only thing that's changed in that attitude with SEWP V, she said, is that the program office is actively trying to develop a better platform based on customer feedback. Given that all federal agencies now use SEWP, every agency is affected by what is done with it.

So there's now that element "of thinking that if we change something, how is it going to affect all agency users, not just those in NASA," she said.

An example of that was when Woytek sat down with the NASA chief information officer four years ago and asked if she would be happy if the SEWP office tracked orders for her. The answer was an enthusiastic yes, but Woytek explained that this also had a downside, since it involved more overhead to accomplish, and that the program office would hold user information, something CIOs are normally reluctant to hand over to other agencies.

Other agency CIOs had to sign off on that if they

wanted that service, Woytek said, and it involved the program office working "hand-in-hand" with CIOs and agency-level decision makers to make sure they knew what they wanted of the arrangement, and how eventually to get that tracking information to them.

The program office has ramped up over the past several years to meet the expected increase in business with SEWP V, employing more than 40 people. Even so, it might be hard-pressed to maintain the kinds of standards users have come to expect, which includes close user and vendor relationships along with, for government, a very fast response time to queries.

In SEWP IV, for example, it wasn't unusual for people to call the program office with questions and get a response back in minutes, if not immediately. Likewise, contract holders could get contract modifications approved within an hour, at the most, and technology refresh requests could also get approved in minutes.

The loyalty promoted by that business-like attitude, where the NASA program office saw itself as more of an obstruction-free conduit between vendors and users, served it in good stead when, in 2007, the GSA tried to flex its muscles in its claim to be the premier IT procurement source for government. It tried then to take over the SEWP contract from NASA. However, vendor and user loyalty to a NASA-led SEWP helped to fend off that attempt.

SEWP V has more than double the number of vendors than SEWP IV had, and, with orders starting at the level SEWP IV finished at, the program office will have to handle a much higher level of traffic. Only time will tell if Woytek got it right. •