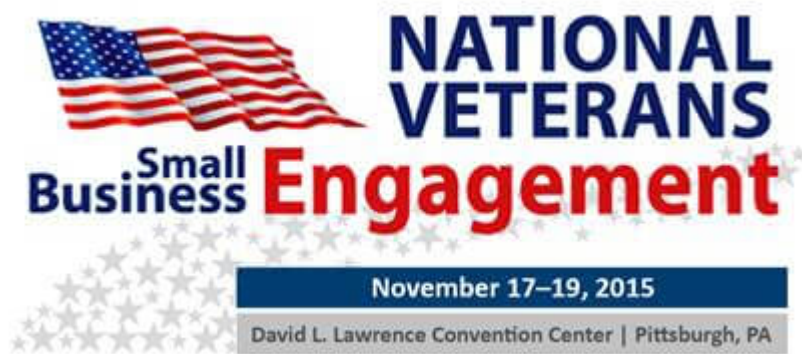


In Pursuit of an IT Evolution at Veterans Affairs

Earlier this week, Steven Schliesman, Assistant Deputy CIO for Product Development at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), gave the keynote address at the [National Veterans Small Business Engagement Conference \(NVSBE\)](#). His speech centered on the “evolution” (not revolution) of the VA’s legacy systems. Schliesman emphasized that the next phase of the Department’s IT solutions should leverage innovations that already exist in the commercial market space in order to better serve the needs of our nations veterans.



One big shift Schliesman also touched on was changing the VA’s internal processes, like implementing DevOps Model for more integrated re-use of common functionality and searching for enterprise solutions wherever possible. However, this change in business approach brings with it many challenges, including funding constraints, [especially in light of recent budget cuts suggested by Congress](#).

For example, any budget changes to IT investments (positive or negative) that are 10% or more be re-approved by Congress. So, let’s say a current project was originally approved at \$10 million but could realize \$2 million in savings by implementing a shared-services solution, it would need to go through the entire congressional approval process all over again. This makes Schliesman’s approach to “evolution”

difficult and even downright daunting.

The question Schliesman posed then to conference attendees was, "How do we get the enterprise development model infused given such constraints?" The VA knows it needs to do it, but it needs to do it effectively and to learn how to navigate very real budget and process roadblocks. The discussion resulted in some interesting ideas, including the use of multiple award BPA's for enterprise support that would:

- * Establish a project management office for all development;
- * Enable consistent, time-measured, organizational change management processes; and
- * Prioritize consideration for proven commercial products versus paying for more developers.

These solutions may pose some additional questions in terms of licensing and support, but at least the VA would be able to leverage best practices in IT enterprise implementation, realize significant, long-term cost savings, and better serve the mission of the Department.

What else could the VA do to address such complex operating issues? Join the conversation by finding us on Twitter [@CNSICorp](https://twitter.com/CNSICorp).



This blog entry was written by Joel Horwitz, CNSI's Vice President of Federal Health. He leads CNSI's Federal health strategic initiatives development efforts in support of the Federal healthcare community. Joel presently serves as the Industry Chair of the America Council for Technology and Industry Advisory Council (ACT-IAC) Federal Healthcare Working Group and is a fellow with the ACT-IAC. He will be writing about current events and topics around federal health including interoperability.