

appian



## **Government Acquisition Outlook: Experts Weigh In on the Future of Procurement**

Six industry leaders describe the most pressing technology needs of government contracting professionals.

# Contents

---

**3**

---

Smart advice on  
modernizing acquisitions.

**4**

---

Communication is key.  
Q&A with Gail Guseman,  
Deloitte Consulting LLP

**7**

---

Opening the mind to  
new possibilities.  
Q&A with Brittany Hungate,  
Ignyte Group

**10**

---

Meeting the expectations of  
a new generation.  
Q&A with Meg Guckenberger and  
Sean Wybenga, Groundswell

**13**

---

Don't forget the human factor.  
Q&A with Ben Bassett,  
Horizon Industries, Ltd.

**16**

---

Keep the users at the forefront.  
Q&A with Randall Mora,  
Ellsworth Grayson, and  
Hidehisa Tsutsumi, Avum

**19**

---

Combining technology  
and soft skills.  
Q&A with Anthony Dizon,  
KPMG

**22**

---

The future of acquisition.



## Smart advice on modernizing acquisitions.

Government agencies are under pressure to modernize their IT systems to increase efficiency and better deliver on their missions. One area of government that's ripe for modernization is procurement.

Many acquisition teams still rely on outdated systems that do not meet the needs of modern government. These systems make it difficult to communicate with contracting teams and add time and frustration to every stage of the acquisitions process, from requirements planning to contract closeout. Not what you'd expect from a system that processes billions of dollars a year in mission-critical government spending.

Compounding this challenge is the fact that the procurement process often involves data spread across multiple systems. It is difficult to maintain data integrity when syncing systems requires manual re-keying. Lack of centralized data and transparency also hampers communications among stakeholders and lengthens the acquisition lifecycle.

We talked to six industry-leading companies with vast experience implementing advanced acquisition solutions at government agencies to get their insight into the acquisition technologies you need to be paying attention to right now.



## Communication is key.



### **Gail Guseman, Specialist Leader, Deloitte**

Gail Guseman is a Specialist Leader in Deloitte's Supply Chain and Network Operations group, focusing on digital transformation for sourcing and procurement. She has been delivering process, strategy, and technology back-office solutions to public sector clients for over 30 years, with particular focus on acquisition solutions supporting contracting professionals. Over the course of her career, she has been a functional architect for numerous procurement technical solutions, including three federal full contract writing solutions. Her public sector experience includes clients in the defense, federal civilian, health, intelligence, and state sectors. Gail holds a BS in general physical science with a minor in technical writing from Penn State University and an MS in technology management from the University of Maryland.

## Q&A with Gail Guseman.

### **Q: You've talked about the importance of communication among stakeholders. What are some acquisition challenges related to communications?**

I can think of three pain points regarding federal acquisition communication. The first is that it's difficult for a customer and their contracting organization to get a complete understanding of actionable requirements and write them in such a way that contracts can proceed with the procurement.

The long back and forth in these conversations leads to the second pain point: the perception that the contracting process takes too long. The procurement action lead time (PALT) starts once the requirements have been accepted, but that additional back and forth up front makes it feel even longer.

A third issue is lack of transparency. Customers often feel like they submit their contractual requirements into contracts, and they go into a black hole. Customers don't have a lot of transparency into the procurement status of their requirements.

The Appian Government Acquisition solutions address those issues well. They make the conversation between the customer and the contracting organization more consistent by providing templates to ensure the requirements package—when it's developed—is complete and checklists to ensure all actions needed to proceed have been taken. That hopefully reduces the lead time and the perception of how long it takes to get programs under contract. It also provides a place where customers can see the requirements going through the different contracting phases, whether in solicitation, offer evaluation, or negotiations for final award. It also gives the customer a heads up for when they might be asked to contribute during the offer evaluation period.

### **Q: How can we improve communication between finance and acquisition systems?**

I think the big shift that I found significant—one which I hope will permeate across other parts of the federal government—is the joint decision by the defense acquisition workforce and the comptroller workforce to define a data standard. The purchase request data standard (PRDS) and the procurement data standard (PDS), in my mind, serve as the Rosetta Stone for the different vocabulary the different functions use.

It's almost like the financial, program, and contracting folks are speaking different languages. They may use a similar term, but they use it to mean something completely different. Connecting those dots has been important.

---

**“A significant shift at the DoD that I hope will permeate across other parts of government is defining a data standard so financial, program, and contracting folks speak the same language.”**

---

### **Q: How does system modernization affect talent attraction and retention?**

There's the age spread, what we call the bathtub curve, where on one side we have a lot of junior folks coming in, and on the other side, folks getting ready to retire. The older workforce probably struggles a little bit with some of these technical advances because they're not as adapted to them. The more junior staff adapt to the technology more quickly but do not have the necessary depth of contract domain knowledge and experience.

A lot of our federal clients are having a hard time recruiting a younger workforce and, even more importantly, retaining resources. For the people entering the workforce today, it's no longer a question of whether they will embrace new technology. It's an expectation that new technology and modern ways of doing things are going to be there. From a Millennial standpoint, it's not worth their time to learn tons of archaic technology that will likely soon be replaced. They want to come in using something modern and intuitive. Having modern acquisition tools also makes the onboarding process easier. It means that having to learn the FAR in depth is not a necessary qualification. You're looking for a more attainable skill set so it's easier to attract and retain talent.

**Q: What have been the most transformative technologies for acquisition and where do you think they're headed?**

When I first started working with Appian 10 years ago, it was all about workflow and the ability to do process management, process refinement, and process mining to increase efficiencies. A solution like Appian was extremely helpful because it gave transparency and auditability for everything that occurred so users could reflect and do business process re-engineering right within the solution.

This concept of a data fabric is going to have an enormous impact. It gives the ability for front-ends and back-ends to more easily interact with each others' data, while keeping data intact where it belongs in the system of record and managing the security around that data.

Robotic process automation (RPA) was the focus maybe two years ago, where we looked for predominantly administrative tasks like contract closeout with very little deviation in them. Much of the routine aspects of the process can be completed by a bot with human validation or final check, with the possibility of significant time and accuracy improvements.

Obviously today, a day doesn't go by without hearing the term ChatGPT or artificial intelligence. While artificial intelligence in and of itself is not new, this new perspective on how to tap into artificial intelligence is the big focus now, and how to improve things from a contracting officer's point of view.

**Q: How can technology reduce training requirement and get resources to be productive faster?**

The use of a more modern user interface is critical. The beauty of using low-code platforms is that, in general, the user interface tends to look more familiar and is more intuitive.

Embedding learning tools within a capability is also important, whether it's the ability to access a knowledge base or link to a video showing how to do something right in the middle of the process. One of the things I was most impressed with when I first worked with Appian was how quick the training exercise was. It wasn't hard for folks to get up to speed quickly, whether they were new contracting folks who had just entered the workforce or even the more experienced ones using a new tool for the first time.

**Q: If you could give one piece of advice for a successful go-live, what would it be?**

It's important to be aware there's no such thing as perfect requirements. When you're contracting for the work, you're going to lay out a foundation of an initial go-live, and you'll have pieces of work associated with that going into production. The reality is, once the solution is rolled into production, priorities shift.

I highly recommend a two-phased go-live: an initial operating capability and later a full operating capability. The lag gives organizations sufficient time to gather and incorporate real-world experiences. Even after post-go-live, I recommend budgeting for that expectation. If users don't see you continuing to adjust the application because you haven't budgeted for it, you're going to lose some of the goodwill you've accrued by involving them early and often in the planning process. Plus, you won't get the best application in the long run. How many of us have ever hired a contractor to do a piece of home renovation and implemented the initial plan without changing anything? I don't believe that happens very often.



## Opening the mind to new possibilities.



### **Brittany Hungate, Product Manager, Ignyte**

Brittany leads Government Acquisition and eProcurement solutions at Ignyte and has more than 7 years' experience in all aspects of business and technology modernization projects in both the public and private sectors. She brings hands-on technology and management consulting experience in business transformation, low-code implementation, project management, strategic and future state planning, product management, and architecture and design, and she has a wealth of experience delivering large-scale technology modernization projects. As a technologist, she bridges the gap between business needs and technology for her clients to implement technical solutions using agile methodologies. As a product manager, she oversees all aspects of implementation, ensuring timely delivery of high-quality low-code solutions and emphasizing human-centered design principles for high-quality, intuitive user experiences.

## Q&A with Brittany Hungate.

### **Q: How are attitudes shifting regarding acquisition technology?**

There is an expectation that applications be deployed faster and offer a good user interface. But as anyone who has worked in government acquisition knows, the technology environment can be challenging and confusing—so much so that people don't even realize what's possible. When we demo something that's low-code, modular, prebuilt, and easily tailored like the Appian Government Acquisition solutions, it really opens minds. They never imagined they could get something that quickly and with that much emphasis on end users.

Another big wave of change I've noticed in the past five years or so is the desire for more customization. Acquisition processes are mostly similar, but there are always special flavors, even within an agency. They find that COTS tools, which were very prevalent in government 10–15 years ago, are far too rigid and don't allow for some of the customization and configuration that everyone wants to do. Instead, they prefer to purchase configurable tools, where they can start with a base and configure it a bit. For example, an agency might have a unique pre-requirements gathering phase that they want to rename "pre-solicitation." Offering the flexibility to quickly and easily make those changes at no cost is a real differentiator from a COTS tool. I've noticed that Appian plays nicely in that space.

COTS tools can often add a lot of cost and complexity to the already large and aging IT footprint prevalent at many agencies. Today in modernization projects—not just in acquisition but across the board, such as in case management and grants management—the trend is to move toward a more modern application that reduces the technology footprint and doesn't require costly version upgrades or customizations.

---

**“It's a mind-shift for some clients that acquisition software can provide a nice user experience.”**

---

---

**“A good UI helps stakeholders across the board. It helps with the mission, it helps the people who are supporting government work, and it helps the folks who are doing the job.”**

---

### **Q: As older employees retire, how can the industry attract new employees?**

Government agencies are struggling to attract a younger workforce. Having a modern technology stack with automation and process improvements will help bring younger people in. In procurement, you need to know so much about regulations and rules and how things work. It's a steep learning curve. Having it all in one place will make it easier for people to learn and empower them to focus on the more impactful work. It also helps with collaboration because you don't have to track down the one person who has the spreadsheet you think can help. The right technology gets people up to speed faster and makes them more collaborative.

### **Q: The government has consolidated several systems into SAM.gov. What additional systems would you like to see incorporated?**

It would be interesting to integrate CPARS into SAM.gov to view vendor performance scores in one place. It would make it easier to reference when evaluating vendors to help federal buyers make informed decisions. The GSA has multiple award schedules and many folks have long-term government contracts where they've negotiated pricing. Being able to see common pricing for goods and services in one place can be powerful in understanding market rates, what things are worth, and how folks are delivering the service. SAM.gov has been great in making that information accessible. Having the rates on one side and CPARS on the other would be super valuable if readily available.



---

“It’s really eye-opening if you can think beyond your current processes and how technology can enable your desired future-state process.”

---

**Q: What role do you expect AI to play in federal acquisition?**

I don’t see AI completely replacing existing procurement jobs. Procurement is such a strategy-driven role and determines so much for our clients that replacing human decision makers with AI is not something I foresee. However, AI is very powerful for further automating manual processes such as data synthesis and burdensome tasks like evaluation panel reports, where you have to write up your factors and consolidate it all. It’s a mostly manual process right now and is something that a large language model could do quickly, much faster than a person could. It can automate time-consuming work like writing solicitations and preparing packages. I can see AI serving as a sort of encyclopedia to take the burden off folks so they won’t need the same depth of knowledge about regulations and clauses, such as asking it, “Help me really quickly. What was that FAR I was thinking of?”

**Q: What strategies should agencies use to increase adoption of new technologies and applications?**

Bringing folks in early in the process is so important. Involve them in pilots and user acceptance testing. And be sure to explain the solution in their language, not from a technical or implementation point of view. Some people aren’t ready for a new system and don’t want to have to learn something new, so understanding their needs is key. You have to really know the stakeholder group to bring them in at the right time: not too late that they won’t have a say in the direction and not too early that they don’t see the value and are turned off.

When rolling out the product, be intentional about the release strategy and roadmap. You want to provide the product to each group at the inflection point where it is going to positively impact them. If you get them on the system too early and it doesn’t improve their day to day, you’re just adding complexity—it’s just another system they have to log onto. You want to make sure you’re providing value. You can get them onboarded sooner by prioritizing those enablers on your roadmap, such as data migrations and integrations, and providing a seamless UX in one solution as opposed to adding another solution to their portfolio.



## Meeting the expectations of a new generation.



### **Meg Guckenber, Director of Product, Groundswell**

Currently serving as the Director of Product at Groundswell, Meg Guckenber is responsible for driving the company's Appian product/solution vision, strategy, and roadmap, ensuring that Groundswell remains at the forefront of technological advancements. With a strong foundation in the federal solutions space, Meg brings valuable insights and expertise gained during her tenure at Appian, where she held positions in both Public Sector Solutions Consulting and Professional Services. During her 9+ years working with the Appian Platform, Meg worked closely with government agencies to analyze complex systems and develop comprehensive solutions that helped her customers achieve their desired outcomes, exceeding expectations and driving customer satisfaction.



### **Sean Wybenga, Senior Program Manager, Groundswell**

Sean Wybenga is a distinguished Product Strategist specializing in Appian solutions at Groundswell. Sean's professional journey commenced as a Federal Civil Servant, where he made significant contributions at the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). His expertise originated in the realm of government acquisitions, particularly as a Contracting Officer focusing on large-scale scientific research and technology contracts. As Program Manager for the Office of New Drug Informatics Department at the FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research (CDER), he acquired a profound understanding of Appian by leading the design and development of solutions for evaluating and assessing drugs in clinical trials and going to market. With a rich career spanning government and now private sector, Sean brings a wealth of knowledge and experience. His unique vision is to coalesce the collaborative features of the multi-disciplinary review systems he innovated to revolutionize the field of federal acquisition. His combined insights gained from having served as both a Contracting Officer and Program Manager give him a unique perspective for supporting public sector missions.

## Q&A with Meg Guckenberg and Sean Wybenga.

### **Q: Describe agencies' top pain point in government acquisition.**

The biggest pain point, first and foremost, is siloed systems and data. The various offices throughout an agency aren't seamlessly connected to establish clearlines of communication.

Technology is a way to bridge that gap and create a centralized collaborative space. That should be at the forefront of any technology discussion related to government acquisition.

---

**“Technology needs to be configured and designed in a way that’s conducive to helping a new person coming on for the first time.”**

---

### **Q: Have you noticed any new expectations regarding acquisition technology?**

People expect implementation to be quick. Nowadays, where there are new apps coming out daily, people don't want to wait years for a new system. And systems should be intuitive from the start. You should be able to pick up any new application or website and automatically be able to use it, especially with a younger, less experienced workforce coming onboard. Acquisitions should work that way as well, with all the information at your fingertips. Any information someone needs for a contract should be available to them. The whole siloed, swivel chair approach is no longer acceptable.

People are accustomed to technology evolving and the organization evolving at the same time, and very quickly. It used to be that a contracting officer could use the same system for 10 years and never see a change. It's unbelievable to think about that now. If a new policy comes in and the system cannot accept a new language or a new field name, that's a problem.

### **Q: What recent technology do you envision having the biggest impact on acquisition systems?**

The Appian data fabric allows you to bring related data from different systems together into one seamless experience for users without complicated development or a long development period. Data fabric bridges the gaps between the program office and contracting staff and other offices. This alleviates that key pain point of having siloed systems and data. The ability to change a view, change security permissions, and allow navigation across functional areas is really impressive.

### **Q: What advice would you give agency leaders trying to modernize their acquisition ecosystem?**

First, you really need to modernize to attract talent into this line of work. You're not going to do it with current legacy systems. There is an expectation for new, modernized technology when you're using an application for the first time. In government acquisition, too, you need to stay up to speed and be agile.

Second, I wouldn't look at that upfront price tag, but how it will affect you later down the line. Contract specialists save the government millions of dollars every year by making good decisions for the best quality goods and services at the best cost. On a large deal they can save the government millions with a single decision. New technology can save federal employees tons of hours of work—especially at the end of the fiscal year when they're buried in paperwork. Freeing contract specialists to make better decisions will inevitably multiply the amount of savings. So ultimately, the investment in a good acquisition system pays for itself.

Finally, don't just rebuild your old system, which is what many agencies end up doing. Listen to the contract specialists and understand which system improvements will actually help them. More collaborative features and functionality are available, but they buck the existing trend of siloed systems and don't align with existing processes. Agencies should take advantage of the more inclusive data-driven features out there and take the time to rethink standard operating procedures.

---

“The beauty of low-code is that you can replace one part of your workflow and integrate it with the existing system.”

---

**Q: What is one of the most common misconceptions about implementing new technology for acquisitions?**

People think you have to rip and replace full systems, but that's not the case. You can swap out systems incrementally to get benefits quickly. The beauty of low-code is that you can replace one part of your workflow and integrate it with the existing system. For example, with Appian Government Acquisition solutions, you can implement just the Requirements Management solution or just the Source Selection solution and continue to chip away at other pieces in a modular fashion.

Your mandate might be to modernize your legacy systems into a cloud-based, compliant infrastructure. But decommissioning everything all at once is a tough pill to swallow. The incremental approach helps with change management and adoption. It lets people get used to the new UI without biting off too much right away. It actually lets you move a lot faster when rolling these things out.

**Q: What are effective strategies for driving end-user adoption?**

Include the stakeholders from the very beginning. Make sure everyone feels their voice is being heard as requirements are gathered and the system is being designed. They will feel responsible for how it's being developed and will champion the system to others in the organization.

To help with change management, we've found it's really important to get mid-level managers involved. They have the most sway in the organization. Many people initially avoid change and want to continue to do what they've been doing. They want to just send a document via email; they don't want to go through the system. Getting a direct supervisor to support and influence change is what really moves the needle.

**Q: How can technology address the challenge of a younger, less experienced workforce?**

There's a new generation coming in. Unless someone has a lot of time on their hands to sit with and mentor new people the first couple of years, it's going to be tough for them to get up to speed in this line of work. Instead, people are learning on the fly. The system should be intuitive to navigate and provide the information on-screen that people need, when they need it. It needs to be configured and designed in a way that's conducive to helping a new person coming on for the first time. With a less experienced workforce, make sure the system enforces the business rules instead of relying on individuals who have the knowledge of how things need to work. Let the system automate the parts that don't require human intervention.



**Don't forget the human factor.**



**Ben Bassett, Product Manager, Horizon**

Ben Bassett is an experienced certified Appian Senior Developer and Project Manager with over 10 years of experience in the IT/software development field. He is currently working at Horizon Industries, Ltd. and has successfully led and contributed to multiple US Department of Defense (DoD) Appian acquisition applications. Ben is an Appian Government Acquisition solutions subject matter expert.

## Q&A with Ben Bassett.

### **Q: What is the biggest pain point in government acquisition today and how can technology solve it?**

A huge pain point in government acquisition is the disorganization of files and processes throughout the organization. We often see in government agencies that they have multiple documents and spreadsheets stored in different places in a shared drive. It really causes issues when it comes to lining things up the way they're supposed to and causes a lot of duplication of effort.

For example, one customer we're working with had multiple spreadsheets showing different pre-planned purchase requests (PRs) that needed to have requirements started. Because they were in multiple different places, the customer had multiple different teams working on the same PR. They weren't aware of it because they were working on two different spreadsheets.

Technology enables us to provide a single source of truth stored in the cloud where everyone can access it. It brings all the different docs and data points into one place. It gives everyone a single place to go and makes sure they're following the compliance regulations and processes they should be.

### **Q: What impact do you think AI will have on acquisitions?**

AI and process automation are leading to huge changes in the acquisition lifecycle. Typically, toward the end of fiscal year when there's a lot of work to be done, our clients look to bring on contractors who are former contract specialists and contracting officers, just to be able to complete the work faster and meet their deadlines. I think technologies like AI and robotic process automation (RPA) are going to change the way the acquisition lifecycle is completed. Instead of throwing more bodies at the work, we'll turn to applications that incorporate AI to complete the work faster and improve ROI.

In the near future, we'll have the option of using new technologies to help complete documents, automate reviews, and even assist with source selection. The biggest thing I've seen recently in automation has to do with clause selection. I was very impressed at how wonderfully Appian's Clause Automation solution has been built out. A lot of automation was put into the solution to help you determine what clauses are going to be the most beneficial for the contract.

### **Q: What is one of the most common misconceptions about technological advancements and acquisitions?**

The biggest misconception is that technology is going to solve every problem. When looking to see if technology can help, the answer is often, "It depends." One shouldn't expect to implement new technology and have all issues resolved. Sometimes technology isn't the best solution.

Don't ignore the importance of the human factor, such as in reviewing documents for correctness. AI can take in data points and produce acquisition documents, but there can be a lot of things that are wrong. For example, AI may create a requirements document for an air conditioning system. But because the human worker is familiar with the requirements, they'll know they're actually contracting for air conditioning services and AI didn't write a paragraph correctly or added items that are incorrect. AI can be used to assist in the task, but it shouldn't take over the task. Relying too much on AI can also lead to complacency, which is something we want to avoid.

---

**“AI can be used to assist in the task, but it shouldn't take over the task.”**

---

---

“For a successful rollout, it’s important not to keep people in the dark. Really invite them into the process.”

---

**Q: What are the must-have skills for a product owner to successfully implement a new application?**

If you’re going to implement a new product to change the way acquisition is performed, you have to understand that people are very often resistant to change the way they’re working. The product owner should be excited about the changes, excited about the software, and be that cheerleader for change.

On top of that, having a good understanding of the business processes is extremely important. Appian’s government acquisition products have been designed to work out of the box. However, most organizations have some type of customization they want to make to more closely match their organization. The product owner needs an understanding of how things work to be able to relay that information.

It’s very beneficial to have a good team of SMEs with different areas of expertise who understand what the finish line looks like and can assist in the product rollout. And it’s vital to have an executive team that has their back and supports the change to the acquisition lifecycle. For a product owner to take this on and have an executive team questioning it can kill the project before it begins.

To drive adoption, the best thing you can do is to invite all users into the process early and often. Give them a sense of ownership. In one project I worked on, users who weren’t brought into the process were naysayers, while the ones who were involved in the process couldn’t wait for the new system to be in production so they could start using it. Take advantage of any previously established meetings with the end users to introduce them to the new technology. For example, use your existing bi-weekly meetings to gather requirements and to present proofs of concept and demos.

---

“The product owner should be excited about the software and be that cheerleader for change.”

---



## Keep the users at the forefront.



### **Randall Mora, CEO, Avum**

As President and CEO of Avum, Randall Mora has led Avum as it's gone from a relatively unknown startup in 1991 to a highly respected firm that garners business from government and commercial organizations nationwide. Randall has worked tirelessly to assemble teams of highly skilled and specialized professionals who work together to provide the quality of work that convinces customers to stay with Avum for repeat contracts. Under his leadership, Avum teams adhere to the highest standards of ethical conduct and professional integrity. Randall provides Avum's strategic and management direction and actively participates in multiple US Navy, US Army, US Air Force, and the Fourth Estate (Department of Defense) Procure-to-Pay (P2P) initiatives. He is passionate about leading Avum's research and development efforts to rapidly build solutions that serve customers.



### **Brandon Ellsworth Grayson, Principal Analyst, Avum**

As Principal Analyst of Avum, Inc., Brandon Grayson provides strategic guidance for Avum's most critical acquisition projects and initiatives. Brandon has a background in research, graduating from UCLA summa cum laude with departmental honors for his thesis on employing structural topic modeling to identify latent topics in historical business data. At Avum, Brandon spearheaded the company's initiatives to prototype new acquisition solutions for customers. As a certified ScrumMaster and Appian Associate Developer, Brandon enjoys finding and understanding the "devil in the details."



### **Hidehisa Tsutsumi, Chief Scientist, Avum**

Hidehisa (HiDe) Tsutsumi has worked for Avum as Chief Scientist, Architect Consultant, and Solution Architect for more than 20 years and brings over 30 years' experience in enterprise system architecture, development, deployment, and large-scale cloud migrations in support of Avum's mission to solve complex technological problems for government and commercial customers. HiDe's experience with tools such as Java, SQL, Oracle, XML, AWS, and Appian, among many others, has made him an invaluable part of Avum's development and leadership team. HiDe is exceedingly proud of the work done at Avum and thankful for all the people—employees and customers—he collaborates with every day.



## Q&A with Randall Mora, Brandon Ellsworth, and Hidehisa Tsutsumi.

### **Q: What are the greatest pain points in government acquisition today? How can technology solve these issues?**

The sheer prevalence of manual processes and other unorganized workflows where there's no standardization is the biggest problem we've seen.

For example, at the DoD they'd like everyone to use the same contract writing system because it would save so much money. But each agency and contracting office does things differently. There are so many little twists in the requirements—for instance, between building a ship or satellite or airplane. There are different manual processes that happen behind the scenes, and they're not tracked. And it's even worse when you start crossing these interdepartmental and Head of the Contracting Activity (HCA) organizations.

The goal is to use technology to modularize and customize for each agency and share base functionality and significant changes across agencies.

The Appian Platform provides the technology to deploy these modular workflows, enabling cross-agency collaboration and sharing of new and enhanced functionality. This cross-agency collaboration and sharing allows each agency to create its own system and benefit from all the functionality across the DoD.

### **Q: Some government agencies advocate for a single acquisition system under the ERP umbrella. Does such a consolidation make sense?**

No, because an ERP system is something completely different from an acquisition system. Everything associated with a contract is completely different from what you'll get with financial ERP or a system that doesn't incorporate all the procure-to-pay that's specific to government contracting. It's just not there. So if you try to put it under there, you're going to have to write around it and it's going to be the exact same thing as having a separate contract writing system.

Now, the contract writing system and the financial system need information from each other. If you can build a good interface between these systems, which most of them have, then it's unnecessary to have one monolithic system. And that way, you'll have your acquisition and contract procurement systems and you'll have your ERP and financial systems, with respective expertise in each area.

### **Q: How does technology in our daily lives shape expectations for what acquisition systems should be able to do? Does that affect how solutions are deployed?**

Just think about how many things you bought off your iPhone recently. Within minutes you've got your order done. So yes, technology has shaped our daily lives and what we expect to be able to do. People are able to access these beautiful, efficient sites day in, day out, and then at work they have to use a mainframe system that was deployed in 1999 or websites deployed on obsolete technology. They are not going to tolerate it as well. New technology in our daily lives has absolutely shaped what solutions are deployed and the expectations overall. I think there's an expectation among the user communities that they should be able to ask for, very simply, a modern system at its core.

### **Q: What advice would you give agency leaders trying to modernize their acquisition ecosystem?**

Don't forget your users. Consider who's actually doing the work and build a system that accommodates all kinds of users, old and new. It's something you can lose sight of in the vision of a grand new modernization process. Always start with the user feedback and the systems and processes that will best benefit them—this is key to remember.

To modernize your ecosystem, you have to change the way you do things. Based on 30 years' experience re-engineering systems, I think the biggest thing that you need from your leaders is buy-in for the change. And everyone has to have an open mind and understand that sometimes doing it the way you've always done it isn't the right way, and that re-engineering how you did it is sometimes the correct way to go.

---

“Acquisition systems are so old that users don't want to be there anymore. In a lot of regards, users are amenable to change in the case of acquisition modernization.”

---

**Q: What is one of the most common misconceptions about technological advancements and acquisitions?**

We've seen a lot of interesting conversations around acquisition and large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT. LLMs are statistical at their underlying core. They'll produce statistically likely tokens. But when it comes to acquisition, there's a precision of language that's expected. You cannot have made-up information at the end of a contract.

So the biggest misconception is that you're getting accurate data. No matter what, contracting professionals will have to decide what is ultimately used. Agencies should not treat content and output of an LLM as fact. They should treat it as the most statistically likely response based on how the model has been trained. If you view it like that, you can derive value from an integration with an LLM.

**Q: What skills should a government acquisition system product owner have to successfully implement a new application?**

There are two parts to the puzzle. One is the technology side. You have to be smart enough to understand your domain and the technology you're using to build your system. When rolling out the application, you have to be able to do things in an agile fashion and be able to iterate with your users and stakeholders.

The other part of the puzzle is to understand your user community. It's critical to listen to your users, think about your users' concerns, and then creatively solve those problems. You have to be able to work with them as a team, be transparent, and know how to cooperate with the users to get things done.

**Q: A common challenge in implementing a new system is getting the appropriate stakeholders to adopt it. What strategies should an agency use to increase the adoption of the application by end users?**

What we found works really well is quick iteration and functional prototyping. Getting the functionality in the hands of the users early has made a huge difference in getting people to adopt applications. You can get their feedback upfront and quickly adjust and keep iterating. If they had to wait a year to touch the system and see that it's missing essential functionality, that's a lot more painful for everyone.



## Combining technology and soft skills.



### **Anthony Dizon, Director, Technology Strategy & Digital Transformation Leader, KPMG**

Anthony is a Director for KPMG LLP's Federal Advisory Management Consulting practice with more than 15 years of experience focusing on all phases of strategy, design, development, and deployment of digital solutions for federal civilian, defense, and intelligence agencies. Anthony currently leads KPMG's Appian acquisition modernization efforts in addition to supporting clients' mission, finance, and operations-focused digital transformation journeys. He has both managed and performed on various intelligent automation and low-code/no-code solutions development engagements, leading strategy development, opportunity assessment, governance and center of excellence (CoE) design, and development activities.

## Q&A with Anthony Dizon.

### **Q: What would you say are the top three pain points in government acquisition today and how can technology help alleviate them?**

From our interactions with government acquisition clients, the biggest pain point is the shrinking acquisition workforce, which is due to folks leaving, remote work opportunities, COVID impacts, and difficulty attracting new employees. What makes it even more problematic is the growing amount of work that acquisition specialists have due to the increase in federal contracting.

The second pain point is around training. The ability to train new employees on complex acquisition processes has been and will continue to be an issue. Many clients have very detailed and complex standard operating procedures, manuals, and playbooks, but somehow—not surprisingly—new people still have a lot of difficulty learning how to do their jobs effectively.

The third place I've been seeing a lot of pain is leadership visibility into the entire acquisition portfolio. Folks at the director, chief acquisition officer, and C-suite level have limited visibility into what's working and what's not working because of disparate data sources and reports or, in some cases, a complete lack of information.

Technology such as Appian's acquisition solutions is solving these issues in all three areas. It allows contract specialists to perform less manual work and keep track of different things. And they can do all their work within a single platform.

From a training aspect, Appian's solutions provide a seamless experience that should align to a lot of acquisition training curriculums. From a leadership visibility standpoint, the data is all within the technology and the platform, so it's very easy to create dashboards and leadership views.

### **Q: What is one of the most common misconceptions about technological advancements in acquisitions?**

A big misconception is that advancements in acquisition can be done by technologists alone. A common approach most federal agencies take when it comes to developing technology solutions is to develop detailed, customer-centric requirements, turn them over to IT, and have IT build it. I think that paradigm or flow typically doesn't work for acquisition solutions because there's a lot of nuance in terms of regulation, policy, and intersections with, say, the budget cycle. Unlike other technology solution development, acquisition requires a multi-disciplinary, integrated approach to solution development.

Instead, I recommend building the applications together with IT. We've been seeing in several of our acquisition implementations that at times, the acquisition office becomes the product owner, with stakeholders from IT, security, budget accounting, and some other departments. Having the product owner sit in IT with input from an integrated team is what we've seen work well.

---

**“Unlike other technology solution development, acquisition requires a multi-disciplinary, integrated approach.”**

---

**Q: What skills should a government acquisition system product owner have to successfully implement a new application?**

Acquisition system implementations have gone smoothly at our clients when the product owners have been able to effectively communicate the value proposition of these systems to the various audiences. The product owner needs skills beyond product knowledge, such as strategic communications and marketing. The assumption is that there's a good product and system in place. The second part of that is to be able to generate consensus and buy-in from different stakeholders, who may be from IT and different businesses, and their staff, who will be interacting with the system. Those soft skills are important, especially for acquisition systems.

**Q: A common challenge in implementing a new system is getting the appropriate stakeholders to adopt it. What strategies should an agency utilize to increase the adoption of the application by end users?**

A strategy that has worked very well with several of our clients is getting senior leadership energized about the potential of transforming the way that staff works with the new technology. Senior leadership at the CFO, CIO, and chief acquisition level really set the tone for commitment and investment into the system and technology. I think it's no coincidence that you see end users buying into the strategy and adopting these tools once senior leadership is onboard. In parallel, you should perform a bottom-up version by facilitating brown bags, workshops, and town halls to get feedback and pre-requirements from the various stakeholder groups early on to really ensure that leadership is sourcing pain points from end users.



## The future of acquisition.

While each industry leader brought their unique perspective to the conversation, some common themes emerged—chief among them being the need to modernize acquisition to attract and retain a younger workforce and the unsustainability of current legacy systems and manual workflows.

The experts also highlighted the significance of technology and automation. Having the right technology is vital to increasing efficiency and becoming more agile and adaptable.

### The role of AI.

Generating documents and reports, automating reviews, assisting with source selection, and automatically selecting the most appropriate FAR clauses are a few of the ways artificial intelligence (AI) can remove grunt work, reduce risk, and accelerate the procurement lifecycle.

But acquisition experts agree that AI cannot and should not replace the human worker. The human worker is familiar with acquisition requirements, which AI may misconstrue. That's why a real person should be setting the strategy and reviewing all AI-generated work for correctness.

### Importance of a seamless experience and how to achieve it.

Switching between multiple, disjointed systems to complete acquisition work leads to data fragmentation, increased cognitive load, and a poor user experience, making it harder to access, manage, and use information efficiently.

Bringing legacy systems into a single view raises operational efficiency, saves costs, improves data management, and results in a more agile and adaptable technology environment, which supports future growth and innovation.

A seamless experience across applications means happier users and higher adoption rates. You can achieve this with Appian's data fabric—touted by several of our experts for its ability to unify data for secure and easy access and a 360-degree view of your organization.

Many of the experts we spoke to warn that it's crucial to plan and execute integration carefully to avoid pitfalls and ensure a successful implementation. Wholesale system replacement may not be the way to go. Rather than rip and replace entire systems, an incremental approach often works best. Start by swapping out a single system with a modern solution that integrates with your environment, allowing employees time to adjust to a new interface.

### Modern, low-code solutions for federal acquisition.

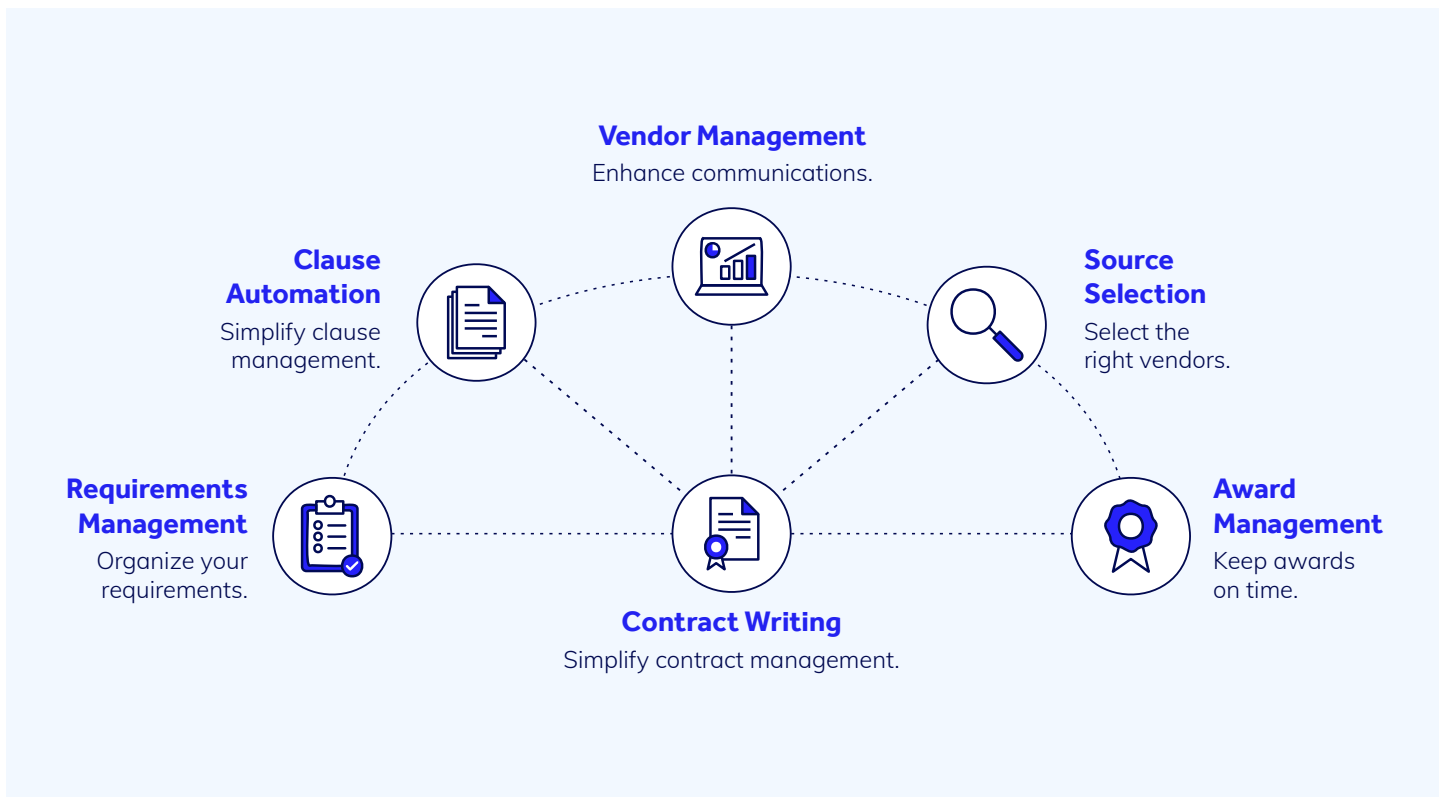
During our conversations, each expert endorsed the Appian Government Acquisition solutions, which they routinely recommend to their government clients. Developed on the Appian Platform for the specific needs of government procurement, the solutions integrate and augment existing systems without costly migration or replacement efforts.

Automating manual processes end to end accelerates workflows, reduces errors and lead time, and frees up employees to focus on more strategic tasks.

Appian Government Acquisition solutions combine the best aspects of commercial off-the-shelf solutions and custom development technologies. They're easy to configure and integrate with legacy systems, and they use technologies such as robotic process automation, intelligent document processing (IDP), and artificial intelligence for secure data storage and seamless data access.

With Appian, federal agencies can deploy secure, scalable, easy-to-use applications in the cloud, on-premises, or in a hybrid environment, with full mobile and offline capabilities. Developed to address each phase of the procurement lifecycle, Appian acquisition solutions fully integrate with one another but can also be implemented incrementally as standalone solutions.

Learn more by visiting [appian.com/acquisition](https://appian.com/acquisition).



# appian

Appian is a software company that automates business processes. The Appian AI Process Platform includes everything you need to design, automate, and optimize even the most complex processes, from start to finish. The world's most innovative organizations trust Appian to improve their workflows, unify data, and optimize operations—resulting in better growth and superior customer experiences. For more information, visit [appian.com](https://www.appian.com). [Nasdaq: APPN]