



GTSI Delivers Alternate Advantage for AWIPS Program

The National Weather Service (NWS), as the forecasting agency of the Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, depends on a complex IT infrastructure to meet its mission of accurately predicting the weather to save lives, protect property, and promote commerce.

A key infrastructure component critical to the NWS' success is the Advanced Weather Interactive Processing System (AWIPS). The system was designed to greatly facilitate the delivery of weather and flood-related information, giving local weather forecasters access to satellite imagery, Doppler radar data, automated weather observations, and computer-generated numerical forecasts, all in one workstation.

Raytheon, as the AWIPS prime contract holder, has the responsibility for the operations and maintenance of the mission-critical system. GTSI, as a pivotal member of the team, works closely with the AWIPS Evolution Group to provide the preliminary engineering, acquisition, integration, staging, and deployment of the replacement hardware technology. The infrastructure encompasses both COTS hardware and custom software running on 170 AWIPS systems, all linked by a terrestrial WAN and satellite broadcast of environmental information.

As a parallel effort to the technical and engineering efforts, GTSI Financial Services and the AWIPS Program Team explored a number of financing options that could deliver the needed technology while conforming to the

AWIPS Performance Based contract requirements. Leasing with an Option to Own (LWOO) was considered but rejected because, although it allowed for bulk purchasing of equipment to maintain a consistent platform at a predictable price, the varying contract funding and lack of control over long-term costs including maintenance, spares management, and disposition made the arrangement untenable.

Creating a Unique Plan for Mission-Critical IT Financing

What was finally crafted was a milestone-based Alternative Payment Plan (APP) that essentially gave the AWIPS Program Team the ability to provide the hardware to the NWS with flexible terms that met the available funding within a given year while still allowing a bulk purchasing approach. The arrangement allowed the prime contractor to remain cash positive.

Under the plan, agreed upon milestones are set for the receipt of equipment, commencement of deployment, and final acceptance – guaranteeing that the government agency has a reliable IT partner until the end of the project. What's more, the APP facilitates the early transfer of ownership, thus reducing carrying costs along with providing consolidated co-terminus maintenance.

These factors can be very significant on a multi-million dollar project. Additionally, the financial solution developed by GTSI allowed strict platform consistency to be maintained, acquiring all the equipment, support, and services needed at once.

The milestones set by GTSI and the AWIPS Program Team were not only successfully met, but in many cases exceeded the specified performance-base deliverables. However, the benefits accrued by the AWIPS Program Team through the APP approach to financing extended far beyond the simple acquisition of technology. Both financial and technical risks were reduced by the single bulk purchase. Long-term care and maintenance is made co-terminus across the system, thus eliminating complex re-refresh scheduling. Plus, the APP allowed for even greater savings by accelerating the transfer of ownership.

Through its combined, collective expertise, the partnerships of NWS, the AWIPS Program Team, and GTSI gained the significant advantage of a fully integrated, highly skilled team that could bring to the forefront the most difficult challenges — and create a financial plan that address each successfully.