

July 26, 2017

Ms. Soraya Correa
Chief Procurement Officer
Directorate for Management
Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

Ms. Correa,

Last year, DHS embarked on an ambitious experiment to transform the often-flawed model of how the government buys software development services. The goal was to attract and select a new breed of companies who bring forward-leaning skills, deliver better software for people, and drive innovation in how DHS executes its mission.

The Flexible Agile Support for the Homeland (FLASH) contract was crafted to support these goals. FLASH was ambitious in scale (\$1.5 billion) and innovative in approach. Early on, vendors submitted 3-minute videos on their process to get initial feedback from the agency. FLASH relied little on written proposal content, in contrast to the reams of written technical approach typical of government proposals. Teams were asked to “show, not tell” in a 4-hour technical challenge demonstrating their process and shipping working code.

We were honored to be among the 11 winning firms selected from 100+ competitors. This award was welcome news, with the potential to transform some of the firms. We were eager to get to work, proving out this high-value approach to software development in government. We were dismayed by the length of the protest process, but awaited the conclusion of this necessary step. When the news of cancellation broke, we were shocked and disappointed, a “punch in the gut.”

But, this is not a letter to blame, second-guess, or complain. This letter is to say “Thank you” to DHS. Thank you for taking a risk in the arena of government procurement that encourages risk-aversion. Thank you for aggressively seeking a new path, instead of resigning to working within the status-quo. Thank you for providing a forum to display our skills. Thank you for the hard work delivering the logistical miracle of conducting 100+ technical challenges. Lastly, thank you for being open regarding the successes, challenges, and missteps as we all seek to learn from this grand experiment.

When we learned of the cancellation, the winning vendors reached out to each other, and ultimately decided to meet up informally. The firms, once prospective competitors, became united in moving the industry discussion forward. We offer whatever help we can in sharing our perspective and advancing agile procurement practices.

Lastly, we encourage DHS and other agencies to continue to push forward. FLASH was an important step forward, and the cancellation is no doubt a setback. One natural inclination is to retreat to “safer” territory, but that is like driving a car via the rear-view mirror. FLASH represents the future, even with a few minor tactical flaws. We encourage DHS to learn from FLASH and push forward.

With sincere thanks,

Paresh Dharia
COO
Navitas Business Consulting

Ben Morris
Partner
STSI

Greg Gershman
CEO
Ad Hoc LLC

Rahul Pandhi
Managing Member
LinkTec LLC

Amit Malhotra
Managing Member
Innovations JV, LLC

Sundar Vaidyanathan
CEO
Karsun Solutions

Patrick McConnell
CTO
SemanticBits LLC

Simon Woo
Vice President
SimonComputing, Inc.