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Bulletin

Title: Information Technology (IT) Acquisition Approval Requests (AAR)
ARS ONLY

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This bulletin identifies the requirements and procedures for requesting an Information Technology (IT) Acquisition Approval Request (AAR) as required by the USDA Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO). It also includes a template and instructions for preparing the AAR memorandum.

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Purpose

This Bulletin identifies the requirements and procedures for requesting an Information Technology (IT) Acquisition Approval Request (AAR) as required by the USDA Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO).

Background

The USDA OCIO is responsible for establishing, maintaining, and supporting an evolving Department-wide Enterprise Architecture (EA). The EA is the combination of objectives, principles and standards, processes, data, systems, and technology that enable the efficient delivery of effective products and services to USDA's customers and stakeholders. The USDA OCIO uses the AAR process as an important tool for accomplishing its EA responsibilities. The purpose of this process is to better ensure that:

- agencies are spending their IT resources on their highest priorities;
- significant IT projects are being properly managed;
- acquisitions are in compliance with applicable laws, rules, and standards; and
- acquisitions do not duplicate any systems included in the Departmental administrative and financial portfolio or eGovernment initiatives.

To meet the requirements of this Departmental mandate, the OCIO implemented an IT AAR process as described in this Bulletin.

Policy

An AAR must be submitted for all proposed acquisitions of IT hardware, software, support services, and supplies totaling \$25,000 or more. This requirement applies to:

- IT hardware acquisitions including, but not limited to, desktop, laptop, handheld, and other computers; file servers and other network equipment; printers, scanners, and other peripheral equipment;
- IT software including, but not limited to, business application software, operating system software, database management software, tools and utilities, and other computer and network software;
- Telecommunications equipment including, but not limited to, circuits, switches, routers, hubs, cabling, wide-area network access, analog/digital/wireless data transmission equipment (switched data, ISDN, frame relay, DTS, ATM, microwave, satellite), video technology, and voice transmission technology (PBXs, key systems, and voice circuits);
- Support services including, but not limited to, system development contracts, maintenance and support contracts, and consulting services. Support services contracts may be in development and support of research, program management, and administrative systems; network and infrastructure support; and other related areas.

A new AAR is required for each fiscal year in the contract period of performance. This includes the annual renewal of maintenance and software license agreements, support services contracts, vendor and manufacturer premium support contracts, and other similar acquisitions.

An AAR is not required for the following acquisitions:

- If an acquisition is funded exclusively by a USDA agency other than the ARS, the funding agency is responsible for submitting the AAR. If the acquisition is funded jointly by ARS and other USDA agencies, the table in the *Budget Information, subsection B. Agency Partnerships* of Exhibit 2 should be completed.
- Storage devices, processors, and other IT components which exclusively support scientific and research equipment, instruments, and systems (such as DNA sequencers, mass spectrometers, and electron microscopes).
- Scientific and research support software such as modeling software, bioinformatics software, statistical analysis software, and other similar products.
- Building and facility systems (such heating and air conditioning systems) which may have an associated IT processor or other related IT component.

The procedure to request an AAR follows a well-defined series of actions (see Exhibit 1 – IT Acquisition Approval Request Procedure).

To obtain an approved AAR, the requesting office must prepare a draft AAR memorandum. The format and specific information required in the AAR are included in Exhibit 2, Format for IT Acquisition Approval Request (AAR) Memorandum.

Once a decision has been reached regarding the approval of an AAR, the USDA OCIO will issue a decision memorandum to the requesting office indicating that it may proceed with the procurement action.

Each requisition over \$25,000 forwarded to the Agency Contracting Office must have the USDA OCIO's approved AAR decision memorandum attached. Requirements should not be split in order to circumvent the \$25,000 threshold.

Contracting Officers should not award a contract/order for an IT acquisition costing over \$25,000 without an approved AAR decision memorandum from USDA unless the acquisition meets the exceptions previously listed.

It normally takes a minimum of 6 to 8 weeks from the time a draft AAR is submitted by the requesting office before the USDA OCIO makes a final decision on the request. This time frame should be considered during your acquisition planning process.

Responsibilities

The requesting office submits a draft AAR and supporting documents to Gary Rich, the ARS AAR Coordinator, via email (gary.rich@ars.usda.gov). The AAR Coordinator distributes the draft AAR to subject matter specialists within the ARS OCIO for technical review. Once the review has been completed, the AAR Coordinator prepares the AAR memorandum and supporting documentation for the ARS Chief Information Officer's (CIO) signature.

Once signed by the CIO, the AAR memorandum and supporting documents are returned to the AAR Coordinator who then posts an electronic copy of the IT AAR to the USDA OCIO AAR SharePoint site.

The USDA OCIO will conduct a technical review of the AAR prior to approval to ensure it complies with applicable standards and requirements (including cybersecurity, hardware/software standards, network and telecommunications, enterprise architecture, eGovernment, etc.). Once the technical review is completed, the USDA OCIO will issue a decision memorandum to the requesting official(s) cited on the AAR memorandum as well as the ARS AAR Coordinator.

AARs that include all of the requested information and indicate the intent to comply with applicable USDA standards and Federal directions will normally be approved by the USDA OCIO. The approval memorandum may include several conditions or follow-up actions with which the requesting office must comply in conjunction with the procurement action. Compliance with these conditions will be tracked by the USDA OCIO. More specific information will be provided in the AAR approval memorandum.

Any questions regarding the AAR process, AAR information requirements, or any other subjects relating to this Bulletin should be directed to Gary Rich via email at gary.rich@ars.usda.gov or by telephone at (301) 504-1052.

Authorities

The USDA OCIO has the responsibility to review and approve all IT acquisitions over \$25,000 in order to maximize the value the Department and agencies obtain from these IT expenditures. This responsibility is authorized by Departmental policy, regulation, and related public law as follows:

1. AGRICULTURE ACQUISITION REGULATION (AGAR) 439.1 – GENERAL. 439.101 Policy. This states, in part, “Specific thresholds at which USDA Office of the Chief Information Officer Information Technology Acquisition Approval is required have been established”;
2. AGAR ADVISORY NO. 53 – USDA Information Technology Acquisition Approval Process. This outlines the OCIO Acquisition Approval Request process;

3. PUBLIC LAW. This is an annual legislative mandate that first appeared in the USDA 1998 appropriation (P.L. 105-86) and later refined the \$25,000 threshold in the 2005 appropriation (P.L. 108-447); most recently, it appears in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008 (HR 2764; Division A; Title VII, General Provisions, section 712) and passed as P.L. 110-497. Section 712 of P.L. 110-497 states, in part, *“none of the funds available to the Department of Agriculture for information technology shall be obligated for projects over \$25,000 prior to receipt of written approval by the Chief Information Officer.”*
4. PUBLIC LAW. P.L. 104-106. DIVISION E – INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT REFORM (CLINGER-COHEN ACT), SECTION 5125. AGENCY CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER.
 - a. GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES – The Chief Information Officer of an executive agency shall be responsible for –
 - i. *Providing advice and other assistance to the head of the executive agency and other senior management personnel of the executive agency to ensure that information technology is acquired and information resources are managed for the executive agency in a manner that implements the policies and procedures of this division, consistent with chapter 35 of title 44, United States Code, and the priorities established by the head of the executive agency;*
 - b. DUTIES AND QUALIFICATIONS – The Chief Information Officer of an agency that is listed in section 901(b) of title 31, United States Code, shall –
 - i. *Monitor the performance of information technology programs of the agency, evaluate the performance of those programs on the basis of the applicable performance measurements, and advise the head of the agency regarding whether to continue, modify, or terminate and program or project.*

Definitions

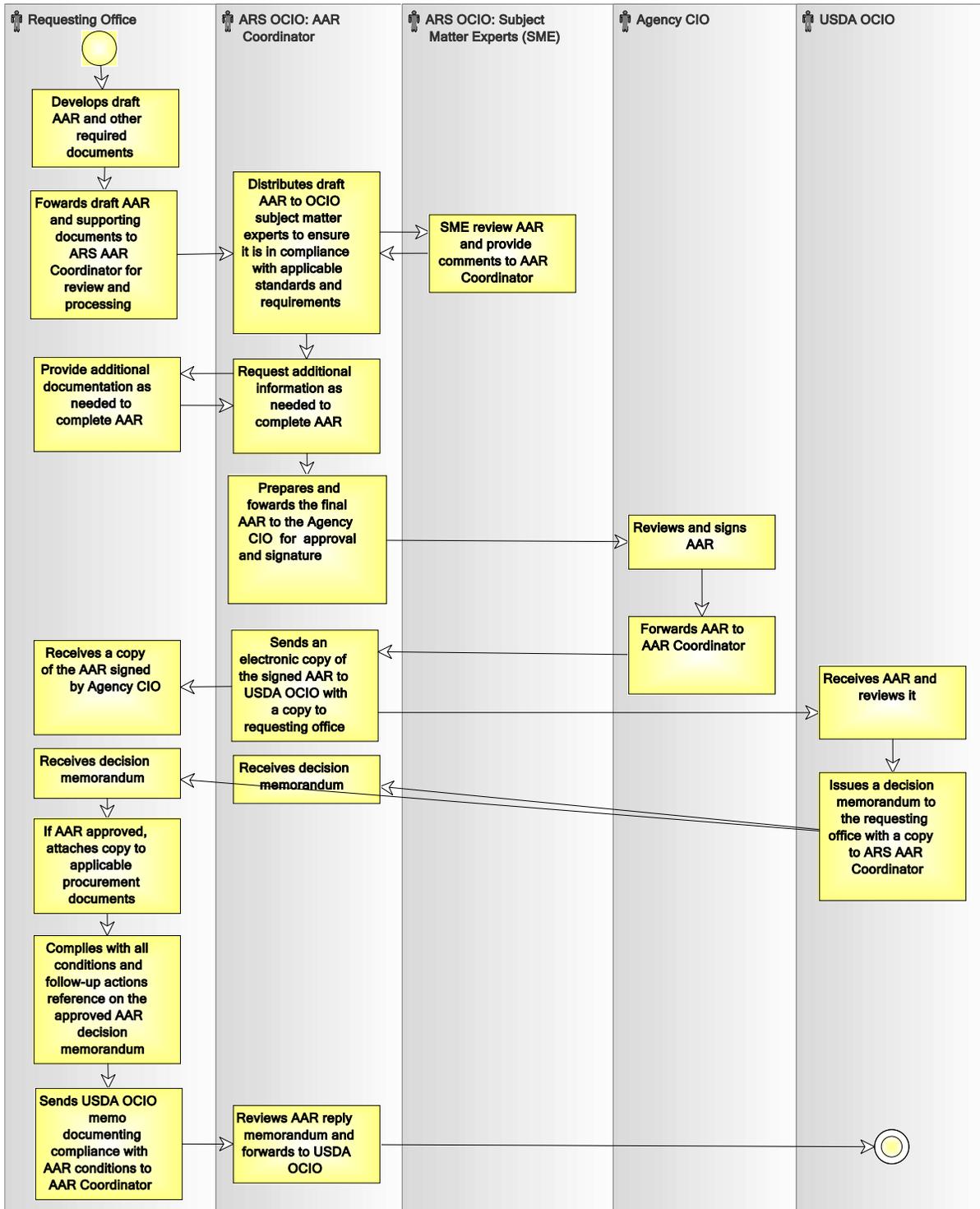
- **IT Hardware** - Includes, but not limited to, desktop, laptop, handheld, and other computers; file servers and other network equipment; printers, scanners, and other peripheral equipment.
- **IT Software** – Includes, but limited to, business application software, operating system software, database management software, tools and utilities, and other computer and network software.

- **Telecommunications Equipment** – Includes, but not limited to, circuits, switches, routers, hubs, cabling, wide-area network access, analog/digital/wireless data transmission equipment (switched data, ISDN, frame relay, DTS, ATM, microwave, satellite), video technology, and voice transmission technology (PBXs, key systems, and voice circuits).
- **Support Services** – Includes, but not limited to, development contracts, maintenance and support contracts, and consulting services. Support services contracts may be in development and support of research, program management, and administrative systems; network and infrastructure support; and other related areas.

Paul Gibson
Chief Information Officer, ARS

Date

Exhibit 1 - Acquisition Approval Request (AAR) Procedure



Note: Obtaining an approved waiver from the USDA OCIO does not replace or circumvent the necessary procurement, budgetary, or managerial approvals normally required for a procurement actor

Exhibit 2 - Format for IT Acquisition Approval Request (AAR) Decision Memorandum

NOTE: All sections described below must be included in the AAR memorandum. If any of the following sections are not applicable, indicate "Not Applicable." If the information required is not yet known or will be developed at a later time, include a brief statement explaining the circumstances. Also, make sure all acronyms are spelled out the first time they are referenced in this memorandum.

DECISION MEMORANDUM FOR THE OFFICE OF THE CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER

TO: Yvonne T. Jackson
Associate Chief Information Officer for Technology Planning,
Architectuer and Electronic Government

FROM: Paul Gibson
Chief Information Officer

SUBJECT: Information Technology Acquisition Approval Request

Executive Summary

NOTE: Other than providing the estimated total cost of the proposed acquisition and the applicable fiscal year, the text of the "Executive Summary" section of the AAR memorandum should be submitted exactly as indicated below. The ARS AAR Coordinator will provide the applicable Investment Name/Acronym and coordinate the preparataion and submission of the checklists indicated below.

This document provides acquisition information for the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), [Investment name (acronym for investment)]. The estimated expenditure for this investment is [\$999,999] for fiscal year (FY) [20XX].

The Acquisition Approval Request (AAR) is supported by checklist information in the following areas:

- Enterprise Architecture
- Enterprise Network Services
- Capital Planning Division
- Cyber Policy and Oversight
- International Technology Service
- National Information Technology Center
- Electronic Government
- Innovations and Emerging Technologies
- Agriculture Security Operations Center
- Information Management Division

This document is intended to provide key decision data to the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) for purposes of acquisition approval. Agency AARs will use investment information and existing, Departmental contract vehicles to support Information Technology (IT) acquisitions whenever possible. Additional information may be found within the USDA Capital Planning Investment Repository (CIMR) system or requested, as needed, through the [Agency investment name].

Each AAR will be evaluated to determine the level of approval.

I. Background and Business Context

Briefly describe the purpose and objectives of the proposed acquisition so that the Department (USDA/OCIO) will understand how it supports and relates to the broader business and technology environment of ARS.

II. Mission and Program Support

Describe the agency programs and activities that will be supported by the proposed acquisition. This description should include:

- The name, location, and mission programs(s) and/or business function(s) of requesting office;
- major inputs, outputs and customers, as applicable, relating to the program or function; and
- the existing hardware and software environment relating to the proposed acquisition.

III. Technical Support

NOTE: Complete this section only if the AAR is requesting contractor support services, otherwise indicate "Not Applicable."

Describe the requirements of the contractor support team and their service expectations including:

- Identify the range of services to be provided;
- describe the knowleges, skills, and abilities the contractor staff should possess; and
- include the number of contractor staff requested (onsite and offsite)

IV. Partnership Agreements

NOTE: Complete this section only if the AAR supports a collaborative project with other USDA agencies or external organizations, otherwise indicate "Not Applicable."

- Identify the USDA agencies or external organizations involved in the partnership;
- summarize the roles and responsibilities of each partner; and
- explain how the proposed acquisition supports the overall effort.

V. Implementation Progress

If an AAR was submitted in a previous year for the same acquisition, system, or project (such as the renewal of a support services contract or the continuation of a multi-year system development effort), cite the previous AAR approval number and describe the purpose of the new AAR. If the AAR is for a multi-year project, also describe the progress since the approval of the previous AAR including:

- Current progress made, such as major milestones completed or deliverables produced;
- improvements in business processes;
- new regulatory requirements or other events that caused changes in the overall approach or direction;
- changes in funding availability, original schedule or project scope; and
- if any significant delays have occurred, describe the cause.

VI. Justification and Benefits

Provide a justification and a description of how the acquisition will benefit the Agency, and address the consequences or impact if the system or acquisition is not approved. The justification and benefits statement could include the following:

- Performance improvement, business process efficiencies, or cost reductions expected from the proposed acquisition;
- meets Departmental, Legislative, Presidential directives;
- support of the Agency Strategic Plan;
- legacy system retirement;
- replacement of hardware or software which has reached the end-of-life or no longer supported by the manufacturer;
- migration to enterprise architecture solution;
- technology modernization; and
- improved security.

VII. Acquisition Description

Provide a list of all proposed acquisitions including the following information, as applicable. *(Note: if any or all the information requested below is available from an attached vendor quote, you may reference the quote document (e.g., Hardware – see attached quote) in this section in lieu of re-entering the information.)*

- A. Hardware
 - Type (e.g., server, desktop computers, routers, etc.)
 - Manufacturer
 - Item name or model
 - Supplier

- Technical description
- Quantity
- Cost
- Location of installation

B. Software

- Product or application name
 - Manufacturer
 - Source (e.g., commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS), custom development, etc.)
 - Version and release
 - Type (e.g., business or administrative product or application, program delivery, database management, tools and utilities, etc.)
 - Number and type of licenses
 - Cost
 - Location of installation
 - Name of any planned or existing software application that is related to or affected by the proposed acquisition.

C. Services

- Description of the work to be performed (reference attached Statement of Work, if applicable)
- Schedule of target completion dates of major tasks or deliverables
- When the service includes application software development or modification, provide the name of any existing or planned application that is related to or affected by the services to be performed.
- Contract Cost

VIII. Enterprise Architecture

NOTE: The information provided in this section will help OCIO complete the required enterprise architecture template that will accompany this request.

Describe how the system or acquisition relates to and supports the USDA and ARS architectures. Specifically, please describe the following:

- Business Layer: How the acquisition directly or indirectly impacts or supports the mission of ARS.
- Application Layer: How the acquisition relates to or interfaces with existing applications, systems, or network.

- Data Layer: What general types of information will be stored or processed by the acquisition? Is any of the information considered sensitive (i.e., social security number, personally identifiable information PII)?
- Technical Layer: How the investment physically relates to or interfaces with the existing technical infrastructure and where the acquisition is physically located. Does the system replace/retire any other systems/technology?

Investment Contact Information

Sponsor:	Office Phone:	E-mail:
Project Manager:	Office Phone:	E-mail:
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