APHIS INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) ACQUISITION APPROVAL REQUEST (AAR) REQUIREMENTS

1. PURPOSE

This Directive communicates APHIS policy and guidelines for IT acquisitions requiring approval from the USDA, Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO). The Acquisition Approval Request (AAR) is the mechanism by which APHIS and the USDA, OCIO monitor and review Agency-level IT spending.

2. REPLACEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

This Directive replaces APHIS 3220.1, dated 5/11/04.

3. BACKGROUND

The AAR process was established to implement a requirement of the USDA-related Agencies Appropriations Act Title VII General Provisions stating that "…none of the funds available to the Department of Agriculture for information technology [IT] shall be obligated for projects over $25,000 prior to receipt of written approval by the Chief Information Officer [OCIO]."

The USDA, OCIO uses the AAR process to improve the management of IT projects; ensure compliance with applicable laws, regulations, directives, and rules; create an opportunity for information exchange between staff at the Department level and at the Agency level; and address Departmentwide redundancies and inefficiencies where possible.

4. SCOPE

This Directive applies to all APHIS employees and contractors.

5. DEFINITION

Information Technology. Any equipment, interconnected system(s), or subsystem(s) of equipment that is used in the automatic acquisition, storage, manipulation, management, movement, control, display, switching, interchange, transmission, or reception of data or information by the Agency. The term "information technology" includes, but is not limited to, computers, network and ancillary equipment, software, firmware, and similar procedures, services (including support services), and related resources.

a. Some examples of “information technology” include:

(1) Specialty desktop machines (e.g., Geographic Information System (GIS) workstations, computers which have a desktop operating system and are part of a laboratory system);

(2) Scanning equipment or services;

(3) Software programs or applications either developed in-house or by contractors, consulting services, or cooperators;

(4) Telephones, cell phones, Smartphones (e.g., Blackberries, iPhones) or Global Positioning System (GPS) equipment; and

(5) Devices with an embedded operating system.

b. The term “information technology” **does not** include any equipment that:

(1) Is acquired by a contractor incidental to a contract that will not be considered APHIS property upon completion of the contract; and

(2) Contains embedded information technology that is used as an integral part of the product, but the principal function of which is not the acquisition, storage, manipulation, management, movement, control, display, switching, interchange, transmission, or reception of data or information. For example, Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) equipment such as thermostats or temperature control devices, and medical equipment where information technology is integral to its operation are not information technology.

6. POLICY

a. It is APHIS policy to comply with USDA IT Capital Planning and Investment Control requirements and guidelines. In addition, the Clinger-Cohen Act of 1996 requires that agencies institute an approach for managing and controlling IT investments.

b. APHIS will comply with the Department’s requirement for submission of AAR requests for IT expenditures above the $25,000 threshold as directed by the Department’s CIO.

c. APHIS will submit AARs to the USDA, OCIO prior to the purchase of IT hardware, software, or services that meet the classifications in Section 7. of this Directive.

d. IT acquisitions will not be split in order to circumvent the $25,000 threshold.

e. No obligation of funds or intergovernmental transfer of funds will be processed for significant IT acquisitions until an approved AAR is obtained from the USDA, OCIO.

f. Proposed IT acquisitions and information resource activities must comply with all requirements established by the OCIO.

g. The AAR process will be managed by the Marketing and Regulatory Programs Business Services (MRPBS), Information Technology Division (ITD), Portfolio Management Branch (PMB).

h. Failure to comply with this Directive may result in unnecessary delays in completing proposed IT acquisitions and a failure to have adequate IT resources to meet program strategic initiatives.

7. REQUIREMENTS

a. Any IT investment with acquisitions greater than $25,000 per fiscal year for hardware, software, or support services requires approval from USDA, OCIO. (As indicated above, IT acquisitions must not be split in order to circumvent the $25,000 threshold.)

This requirement applies to:

(1) New contracts;

(2) New blanket purchase agreements (BPAs);

(3) Task orders against existing contracts;

(4) Option years or other extensions of existing contracts;

(5) Orders against General Services Administration (GSA) Multiple Award Schedule contracts;

(6) Inter-governmental payments for services provided by any other Federal agency, including other USDA agencies; and

(7) Cooperative Agreements.

b. IT acquisitions must be associated with an IT investment in the USDA-approved Electronic Capital Planning and Investment Control (eCPIC) system. (https://usda.ecpic.gov)

c. For all contracts that span more than one fiscal year, a new AAR is required for each fiscal year in the contract period of performance.

8. EXEMPTIONS

The following activities are exempt from the USDA AAR process:

a. The renewal of existing contracts for maintenance and leases, as long as optional enhancements and/or upgrades are not greater than $25,000 for the fiscal year threshold.

b. IT acquisitions funded by USDA grants to organizations other than USDA agencies.

c. Cooperative agreements, if they are legislatively directed with the specific intent of passing money through to the States or their instrumentalities, (for example State universities/colleges) directly with no additional acquisition control by APHIS. In addition, they would need to be documented that the IT assets (including hardware, software, and data) purchased/developed with these funds are solely operated and managed by the States, and that APHIS has been relieved of its asset management responsibility, including hardware, software, and data.

9. EXCEPTIONS

Except as noted in Section 8. above, each APHIS Program/Business Unit will meet the requirements of this Directive.

10. INQUIRIES

a. Inquiries regarding this Directive may be directed to:

Information Technology Division
Portfolio Management Branch
4700 River Road, Unit 103
Riverdale, MD 20737
301-851-2900

b. This Directive can be accessed at www.aphis.usda.gov/library.

/s/
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