

Government  
Business  
Council

# Modernizing IT in the Federal Government

A Candid Survey of Federal Employees on Trends and Challenges to IT Acquisition in 2018

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Underwritten by

noblis

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# Overview

## Purpose

Outdated systems, towers of paperwork, lengthy approval chains, and lack of coordination between stakeholders: the challenges facing federal IT procurement officers and decision-makers in 2018 are many and monumental.

The creation of a new contract vehicle within the General Services Administration (GSA) – the Enterprise Infrastructure Solutions (EIS) contract – now adds additional pressure, with transition to the new contract required before existing telecommunications agreements expire in 2020. If agencies are to ensure services can continue without disruption, it's critical for stakeholders to act now and leverage all available resources. But are they?

In order to answer this question, Government Business Council (GBC) undertook an in-depth research study of program managers and IT influencers in the federal government.

## Methodology

To assess the perceptions and attitudes that federal officials have regarding their agency's telecommunications plans and pain points in light of recent changes to the contracting landscape, GBC deployed a survey to a random sample of government respondents in March 2018.

372 federal employees responded, with 60% holding positions at the GS/GM-13 level or above (including Senior Executive Service). Respondents hold a variety of job functions, with highest input from program managers, technical specialists, and acquisition/procurement officers. At least 45% have direct oversight or control of IT budgets amounting to \$100,000 or more.

# Executive Summary

## **Existing contract vehicles complicate procurement processes**

Respondents indicate general displeasure with current procurement processes. Acquiring new IT to serve mission demands is essential, but 50% of those surveyed disagree that this process is seamless. Navigating cumbersome contract requirements and processes is a major obstacle, but fragmented decision-making structures and lack of strong advocacy by senior leaders exacerbate these troubles. This inability to acquire new services when they are needed has resulted in IT many find disappointing, with one-third of those surveyed saying they are not very or not at all satisfied with current technology.

## **Limited funding and knowledge skills gaps challenge modernization**

Budget limitations, inadequate training resources, and problems inherent to legacy IT are among the top barriers affecting agencies as they seek to transition over to the EIS contract model. The consensus many share is that staffing and subject matter expertise are currently insufficient to guide agencies through the transition: 36% believe subject matter experts are in short supply, and 31% don't think current personnel are equipped to resolve these problems without seeking additional help. Not surprisingly, a good portion of respondents don't expect their agency to complete full migration of services to EIS in time for the 2020 deadline.

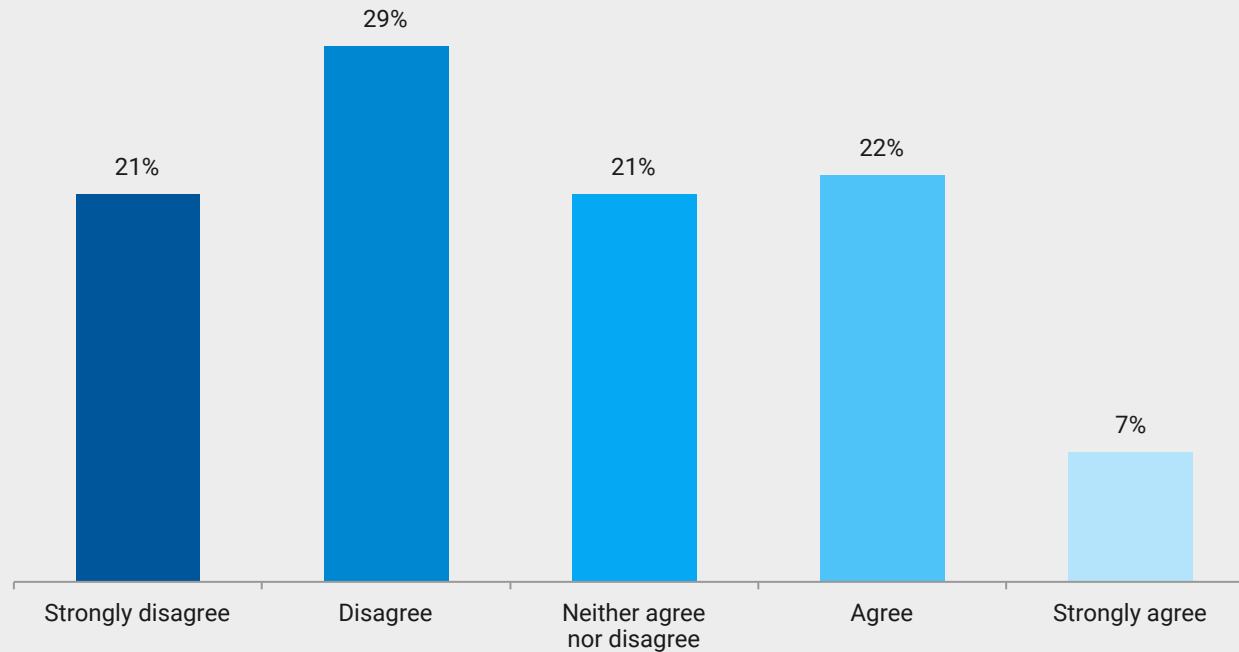
## **Despite low familiarity, respondents favor the benefits EIS can provide**

A significant portion of respondents are unfamiliar with the EIS contract, despite wielding authority over IT programs or procurement decisions. However, when provided a list of benefits that EIS can offer, many support its ability to accelerate the procurement timeline, its provision of a one-stop shop for acquiring common services, and the cost savings it delivers through aggregated volume buying.

# Research Findings

## Half of respondents indicate difficulties that inhibit acquisition of new technology

*"My organization faces minimal resistance when it comes to acquiring new technology that can meet mission demands."*



Percentage of respondents, n=356  
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

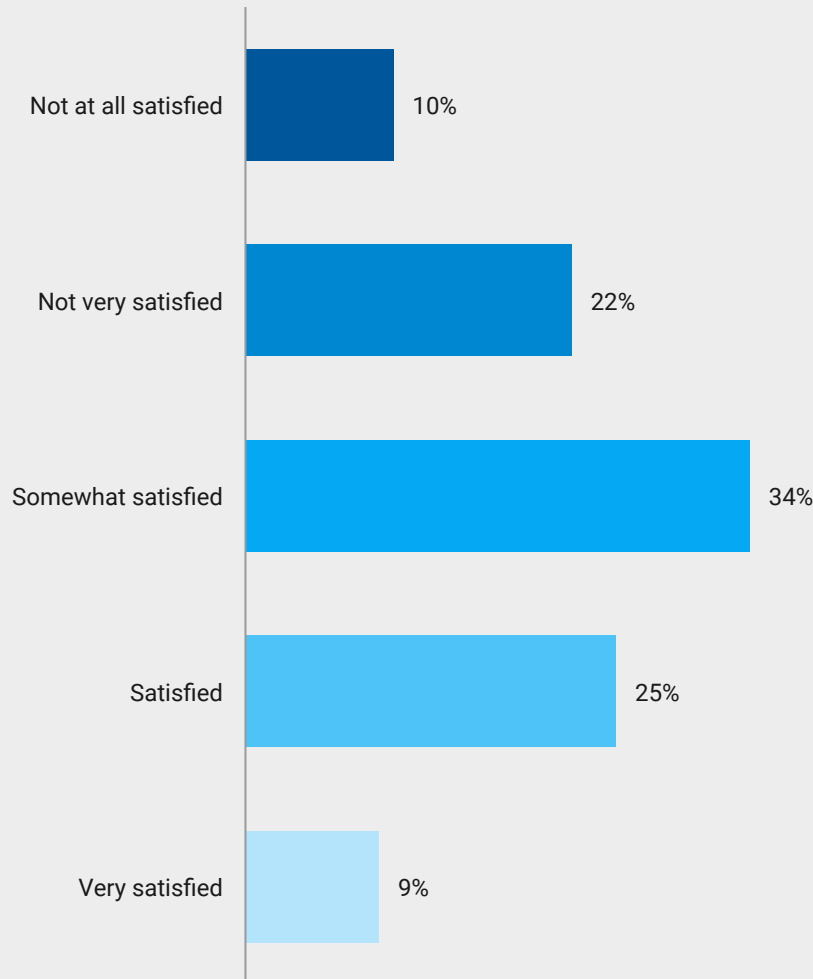
Less than a third of respondents agree that their agency is able to acquire new technology with little resistance. By comparison, 50% indicate difficulties in the acquisition process that prevent new IT from being procured when mission requirements demand it.

**1 in 2**

respondents disagrees or strongly disagrees with the notion their agency faces little resistance when acquiring IT.

1 in 3 respondents finds current IT services lacking in quality at their organization

*How satisfied are you with the overall quality of your organization's IT?*



Percentage of all respondents, n=372  
 Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

32%

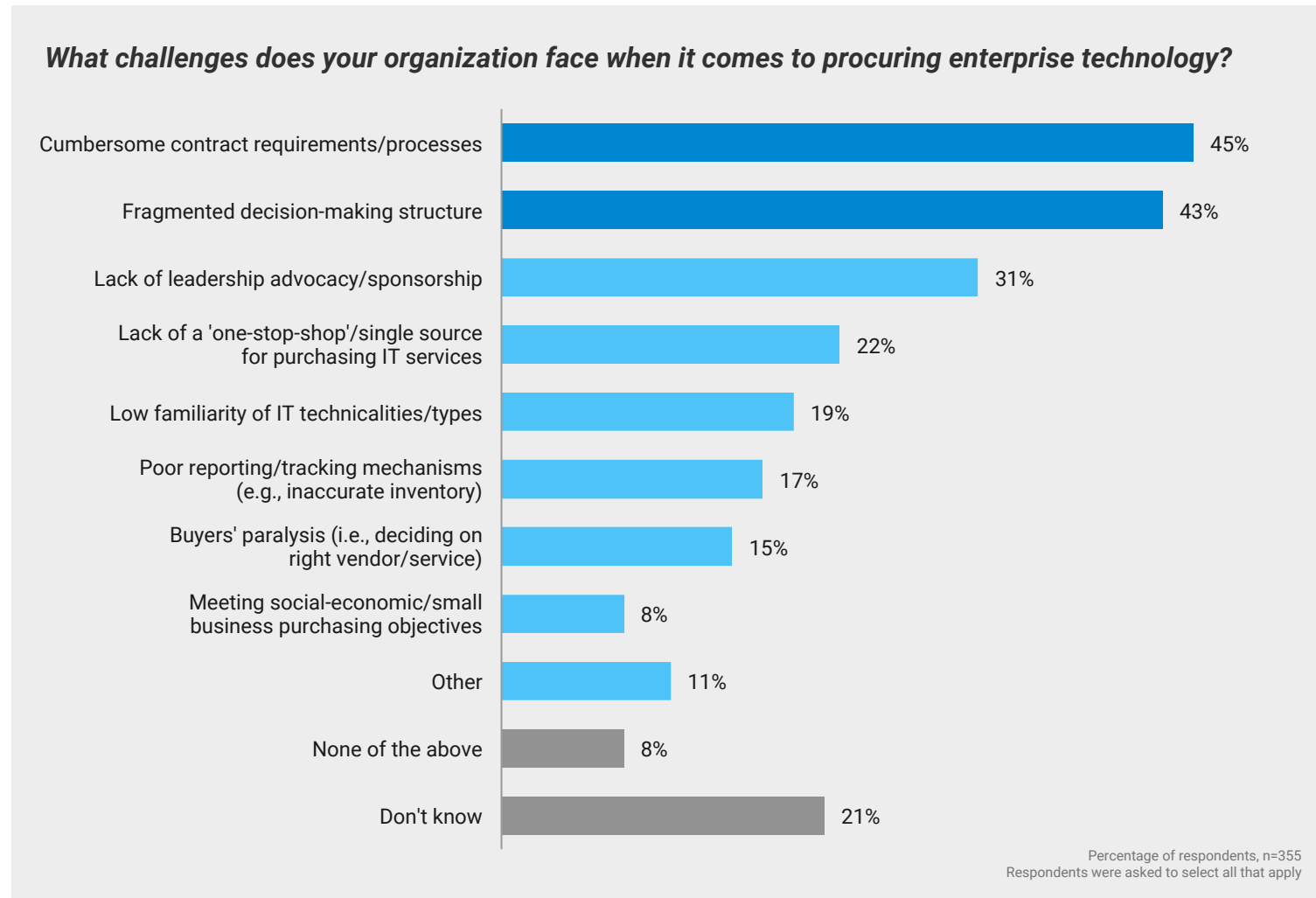
of respondents are **not very** or **not at all satisfied** with the overall quality of their organization's IT.

“

Most if not all access to IT systems on base have been thwarted and degraded to the point **we cannot complete our everyday tasks**. We are also experiencing network problems on a daily basis that prevent employees from important mission accomplishments.

**Anonymous Survey Respondent**

Cumbersome processes and fragmented decision-making are most common pains to IT procurement



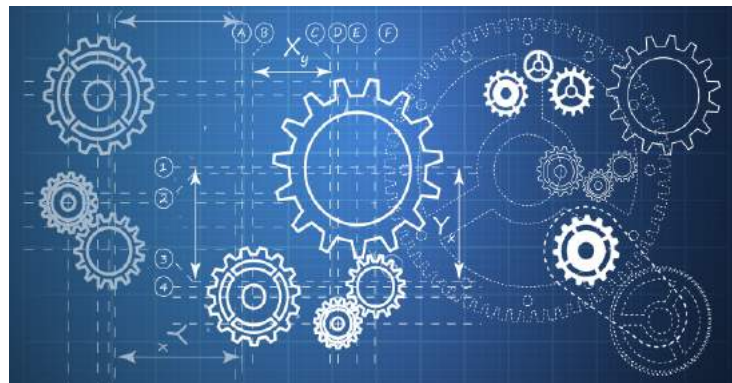
Cumbersome contract requirements and processes rank as respondents' most common challenge to IT procurement, but ineffective leadership structures present major headaches as well. 43% say that fragmented decision-making complicates the procurement process, and 31% cite a lack of leadership advocacy and support for onboarding new IT.

"Other" challenges cited include a lack of funding, lengthy approval process, antiquated systems, poor interoperability, bureaucratic hesitancy, IT support, faulty auditing, and security concerns.

**43%** of respondents believe fragmented decision-making structures challenge their agency's IT procurement.

# Enterprise Infrastructure Solutions for Federal Telecommunications

**Agencies are running out of time to transition over to GSA's massive new telecommunications contract**



The **Enterprise Infrastructure Solutions (EIS)** contract is the main component of GSA's telecommunications portfolio.

Awarded in late 2017 and billed as a 15-year, \$50 billion next-generation contract, EIS will "make it easier for agencies to acquire their enterprise telecommunications and IT infrastructure services *from a single source* versus having to coordinate multiple acquisitions to meet their needs."

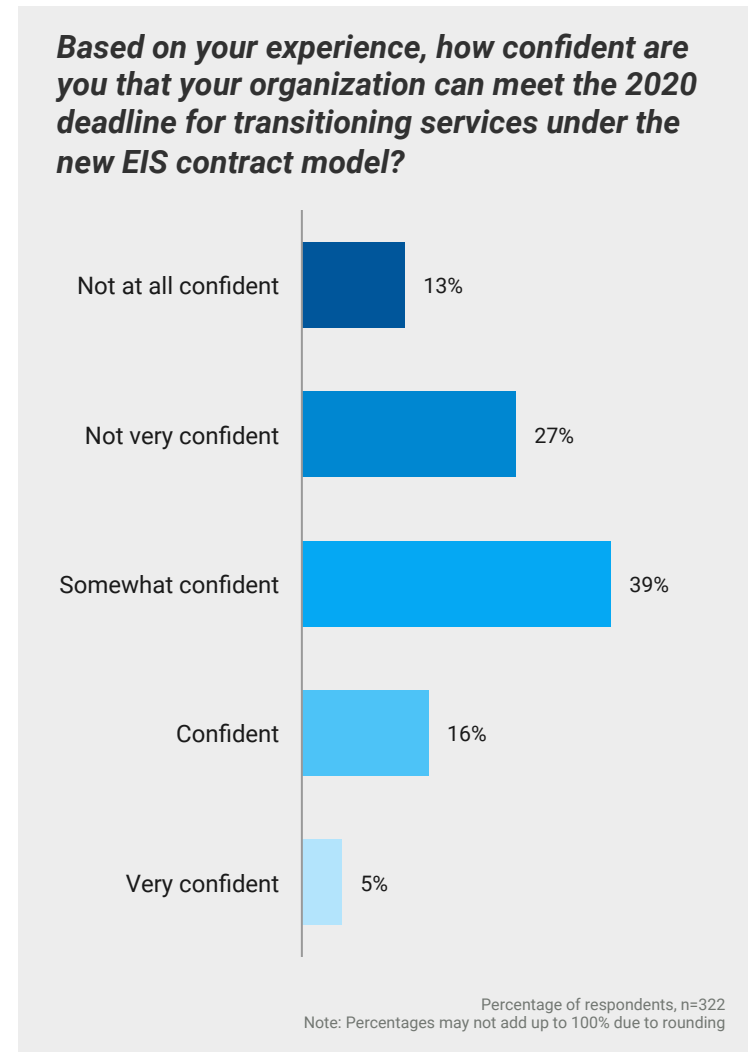
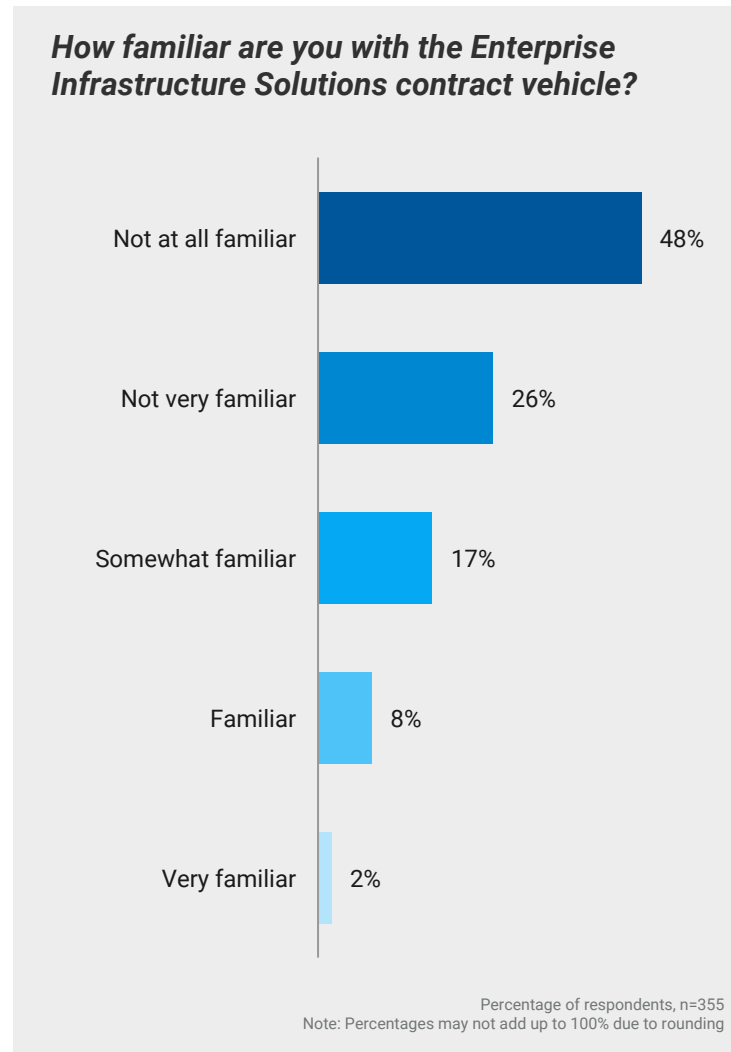
**However, agencies face a deadline to complete their transition.**

In the first half of 2020, legacy contracts (Networx, WITS3, Regional LSAs) are set to expire, so services need to be disconnected. It is therefore critical that agency stakeholders meet EIS milestones so that services can continue without disruption and evolve to gain the benefits of new and emerging transformative technologies.

Source: GSA's Federal Acquisition Service: "Transition Strategy and Management Plan (TSMP) for the Transition to Enterprise Infrastructure Solutions (EIS)." January 20, 2017. <https://www.gsa.gov/cdnstatic/EIS-TSMP.pdf>



Respondents show low familiarity with EIS as well as minimal confidence in a timely transition



**3 in 4**

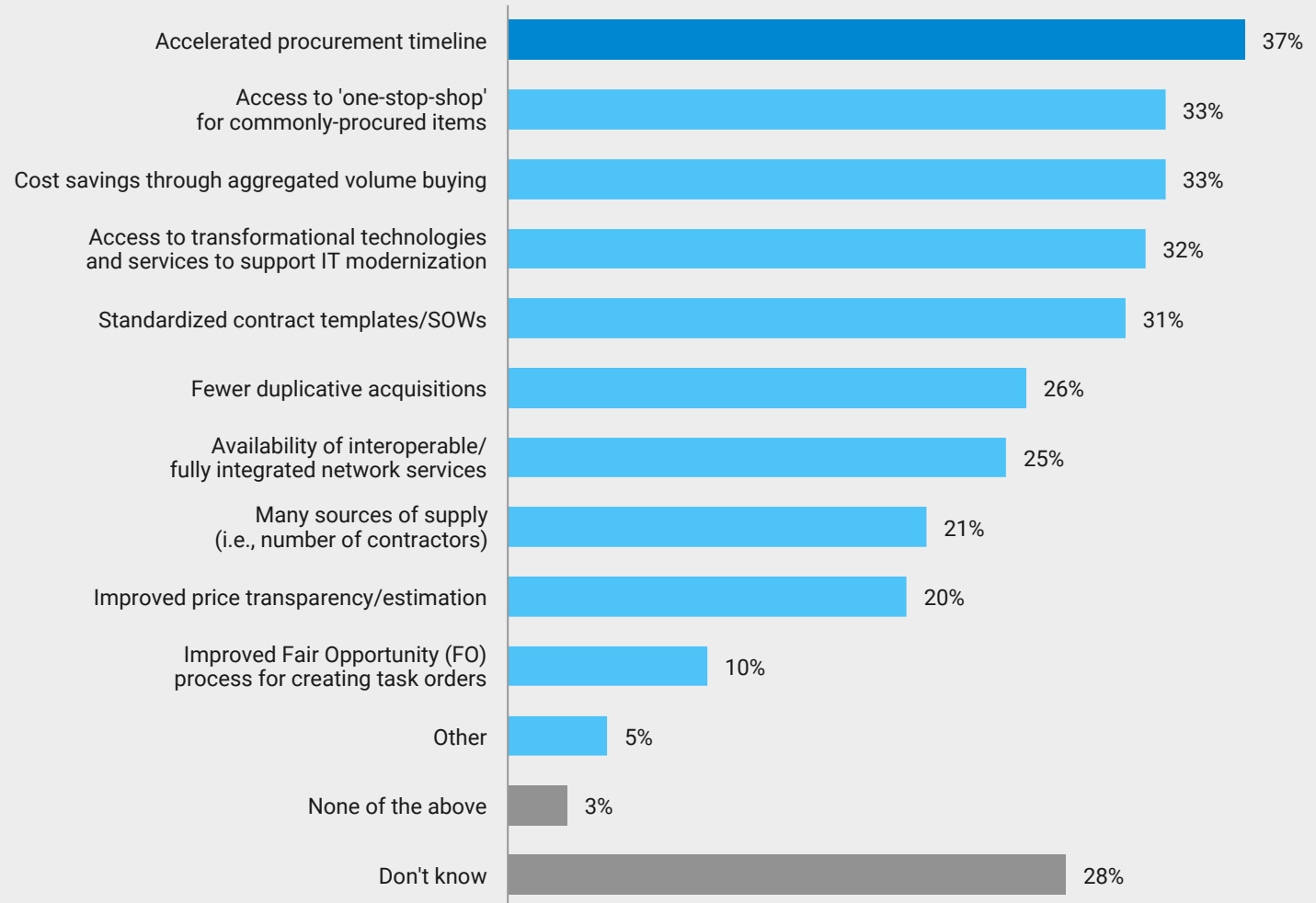
respondents express little to no prior familiarity with the EIS contract, despite all respondents holding some influence or involvement in the IT decision-making process.

**40%**

of respondents are not very or not at all confident that their agency can meet the 2020 deadline for transitioning telecommunications services to the EIS contract.

Respondents favor EIS’s ability to accelerate procurement and provide ‘one-stop shop’ for services

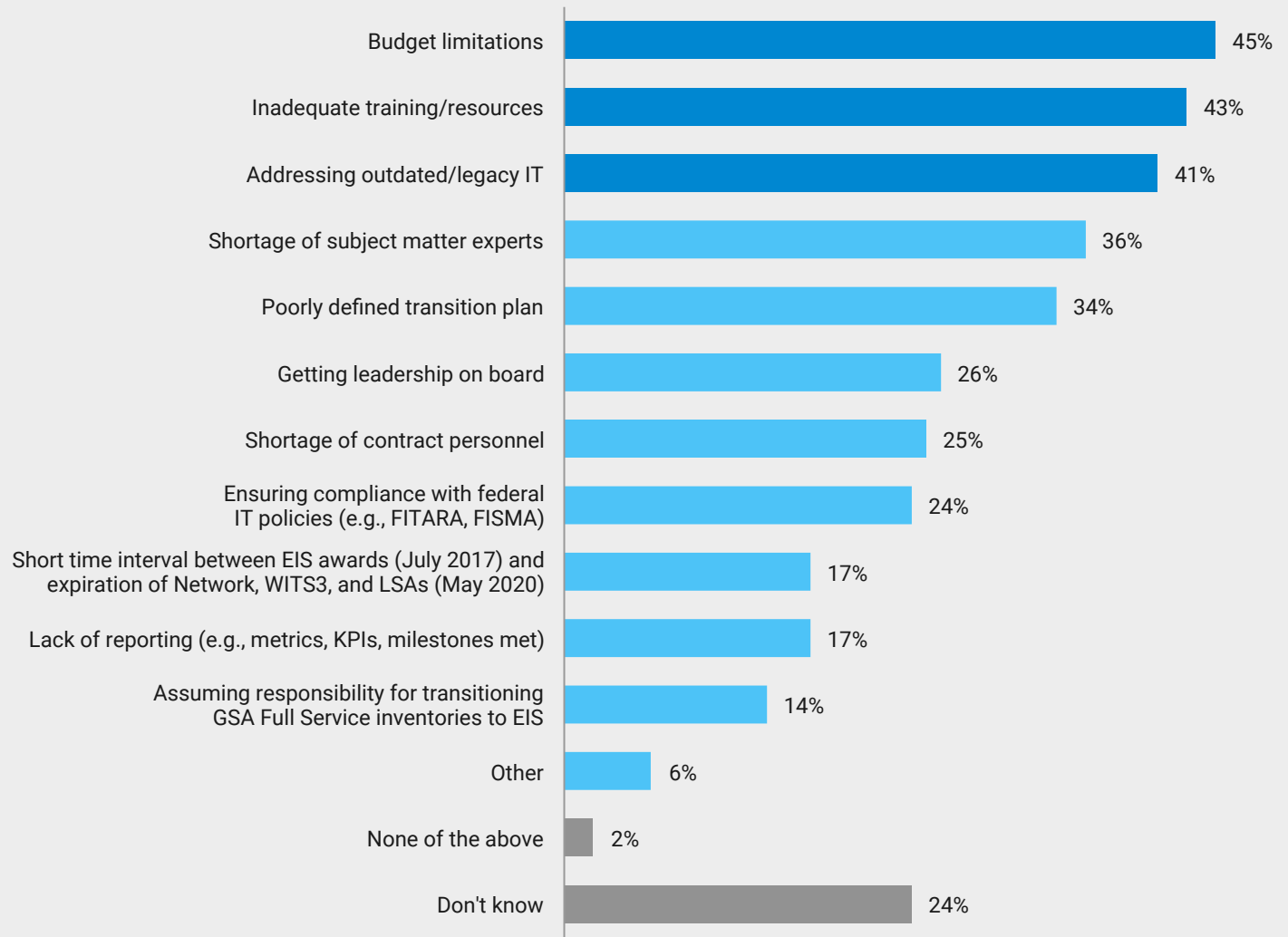
***EIS is poised to deliver many benefits when it comes to procuring telecommunications and IT services for federal agencies. Which of the following benefits do you believe will have the greatest impact on your agency’s operations? Please select all that apply.***



Percentage of respondents, n=308  
 Respondents were asked to select all that apply

Limited funds, inadequate training, and legacy IT lead list of top challenges to EIS service transition

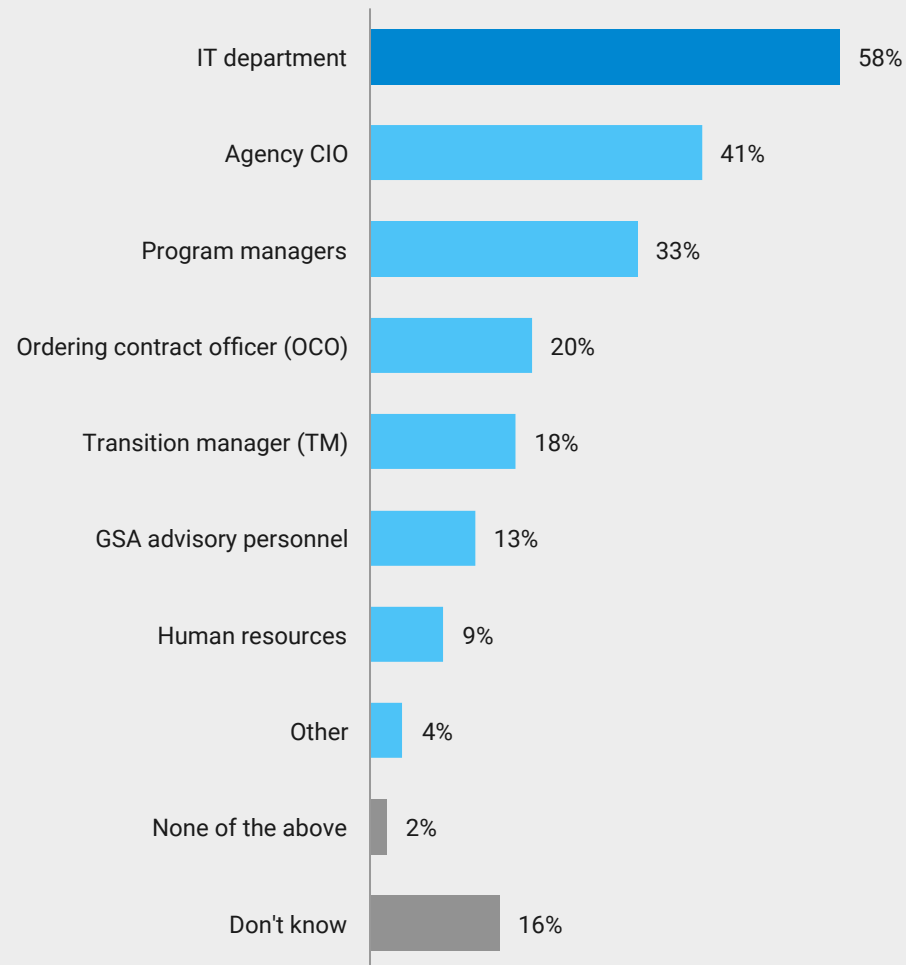
*What do you consider the major challenges facing your agency as it migrates services over to EIS? Please select all that apply.*



Percentage of respondents, n=303  
 Respondents were asked to select all that apply

Majority of respondents look to their IT department for leadership in navigating the EIS transition

*Whom do you consider responsible for ensuring your organization can transition its IT services and infrastructure to EIS? Please select all that apply.*



Percentage of all respondents, n=304  
 Respondents were asked to select all that apply

58%

of respondents place responsibility for the EIS transition on their agency's IT department.

However, 41% also believe CIO advocacy will be necessary in setting the direction.

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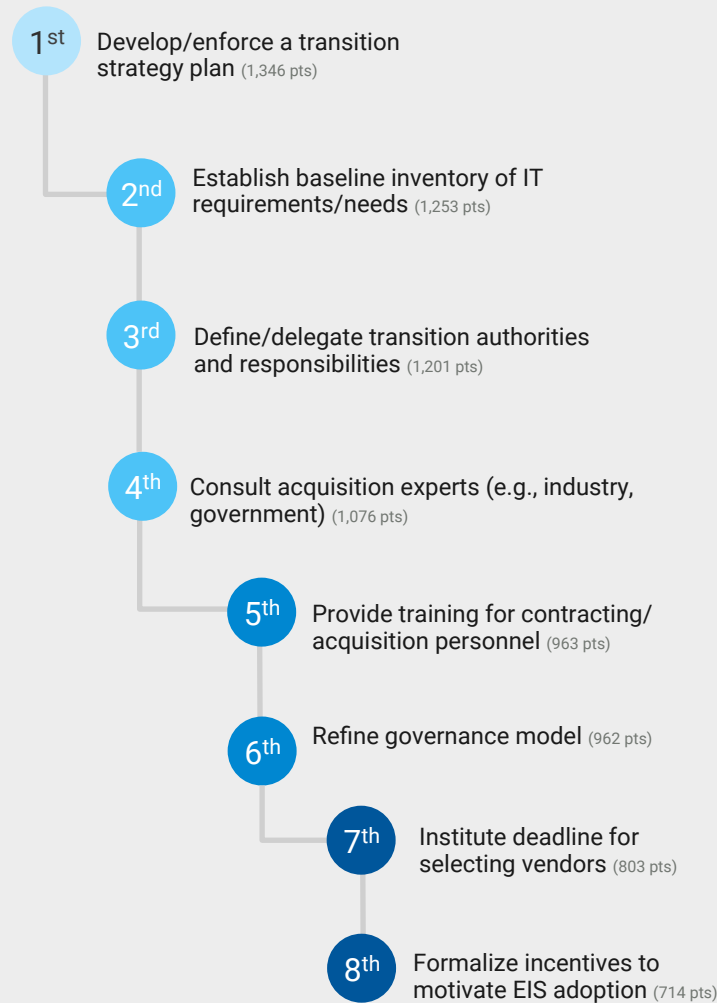
All people are involved [in this transition], those that are qualified for the work and are accountable for both failure or completion. We need **total commitment** at all spectrums.

Anonymous Survey Respondent

To ensure successful transition, respondents say developing/enforcing strategy should be top priority

***In your opinion, what do you consider to be the critical path forward in ensuring a timely transition?***

Ranked by respondents in order of importance to ensuring transition.



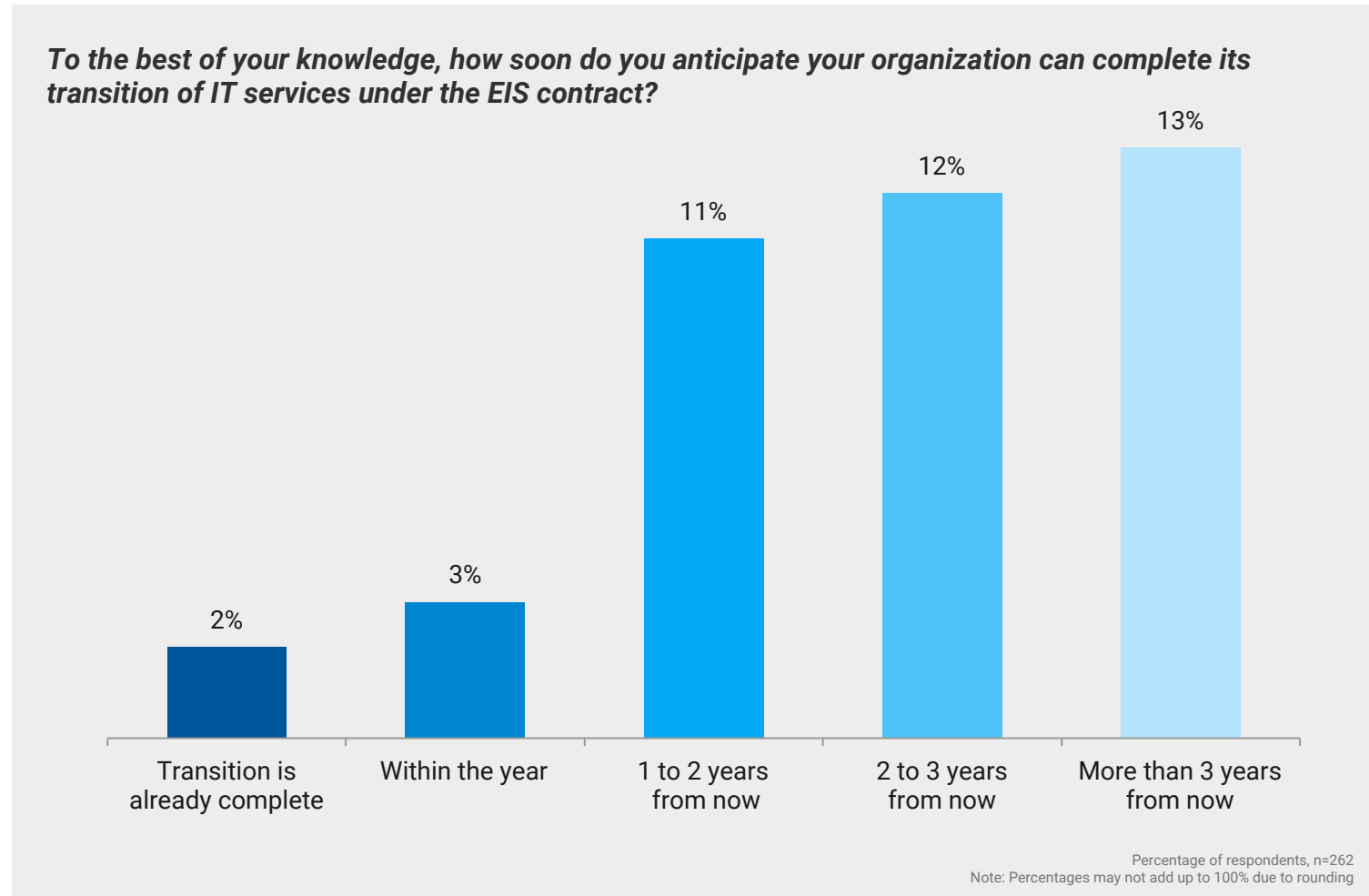
Ranked by Borda count, n=230

When asked to rank what they see as the optimal path forward to a successful EIS transition, most respondents agree that developing and enforcing a strategy will be fundamental.

Many also note the need for establishing a baseline inventory of IT requirements and needs, as well as delegating key transition authorities to oversee the process.

Rankings and total scores are displayed here using the Borda count method, where each answer choice earns points based on the order in which respondents placed them. Each respondent's top answer choice receives the maximum score of n points for that respondent, where n is equal to the total number of options. Each subsequent choice receives 1 less point than the one ranked ahead of it. Unranked answer choices receive zero points. Please see Appendix for further detail.

Many respondents indicate the EIS transition will take 2 years or more for their agency to complete



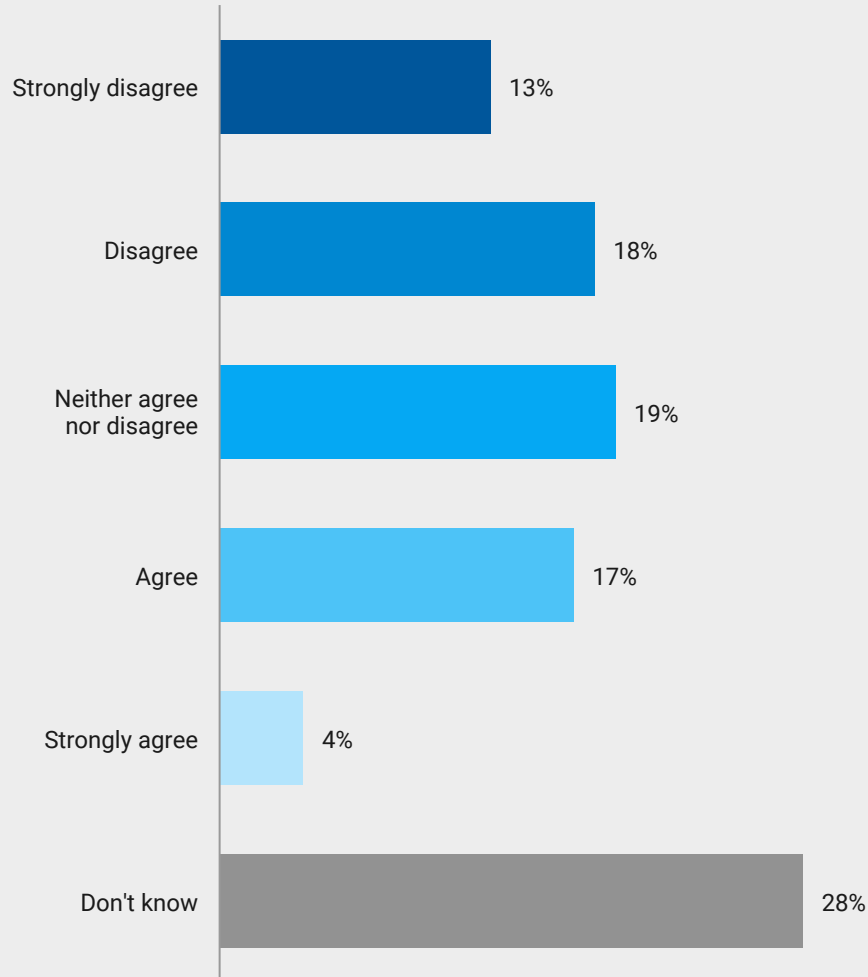
Federal agencies must ensure all existing telecommunications and IT services can be transitioned to the EIS contract by the 2020 deadline. However, a good portion of respondents suggest that meeting this deadline is anything but certain, with 25% indicating it will likely take at least 2 years or more to complete.

**Not shown** are 59% who selected the option: 'I don't feel qualified to speculate on the timing.'

**1 in 4** respondents predicts it will take at least 2 years or longer to fully transition its IT services under the EIS contract.

Close to one-third of respondents feel they lack sufficient personnel to coordinate EIS transition

*“My organization has sufficient personnel to coordinate a successful transition to EIS.”*



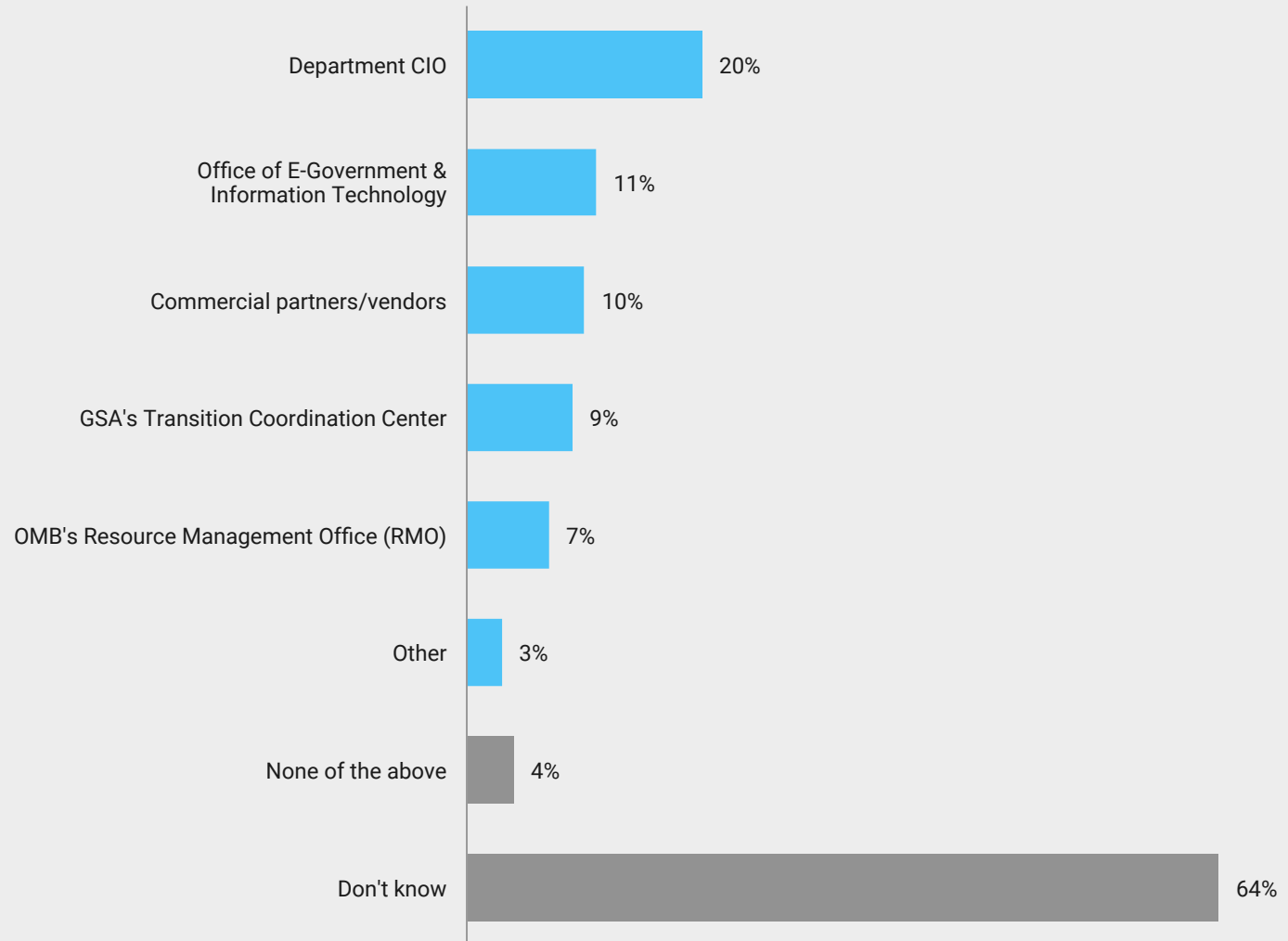
31%

of respondents **disagree** or **strongly disagree** that their agency has sufficient personnel to coordinate a successful transition to EIS.

Percentage of all respondents, n=263  
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Majority of respondents are unsure which stakeholders their agency is involving in EIS transition

*Which of the following stakeholders is your organization engaging for assistance in the EIS transition? Please select all that apply.*



Percentage of respondents, n=263  
Respondents were asked to select all that apply



# What Respondents Say...

*"Can you share any specific challenges you encounter on a day-to-day basis when it comes to procuring or acquiring IT services, as well as concerns you have regarding your agency's EIS transition?"*

- Between a glacially slow hiring process and managers who still see our current services as "just fine," we're facing an uphill battle toward hiring and training tomorrow's acquisition workforce.
- Legacy systems are very sluggish.
- Our main problem is keeping all of the mandatory web-based systems functioning often enough to keep up with workload. We sometimes go days at a time when we're unable to access our contract writing system or financial system.
- I see the budget as the only impediment to progress.
- My agency gets new technology and software, but we lack people who are knowledgeable enough about how to handle these systems.
- If someone is required to perform and they fail, they should not have exclusivity to their role and contract, and they should not be given permission based on political factors but on acumen and ability to complete tasks on time.
- High staff turnover within our acquisitions group and poor managerial oversight prevents efficiency and action.
- Slow processing
- Too many man hours are wasted filling out useless paperwork to procure yearly maintenance on equipment that only get replaced every few years.
- Our biggest challenge is understanding roles and responsibilities. Everyone in the logistics community seems to own IT, which means no one owns IT or is accountable for the decisions that are made, whether bad or good.
- The security hurdles seem insurmountable some days. The agency I work for has very little data that is confidential, but all attempts to make data more readily available seem anathema to IT security officers.
- Contracting for large purchases often takes months and lots of paperwork.
- Culture, legacy products, siloed work, lack of communication and no collaboration.

# Industry Perspective

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## Insights from the Noblis Telecommunications Center of Excellence

The government telecommunications modernization and acquisition landscape is a minefield of challenges, where missions are complex and the networks that support them even more so. With the telecommunications service provider industry spending billions of dollars to retire legacy Time Division Multiplexing (TDM) technologies, and replace them with more modern, agile technologies such as Ethernet and Software Defined Networking (SDN), agencies are at a crossroads. The GSA EIS program offers agencies both near term challenges and long term opportunities. In the near term, the focus is on completing transition before the expiration of legacy contracts. In the long term, the opportunity is to ensure a smooth transformation to new and exciting telecommunications solutions without the need for a second acquisition and transition. With almost three decades of experience serving successfully as telecommunications acquisition experts “on the government side of the table,” Noblis offers proven expertise and unique insights to help agencies face these challenges and benefit from these opportunities.

As the findings in this survey confirm, program office personnel and technical experts are often too busy executing essential functions that support their agency’s mission to focus on the details of acquisition regulations and contracting practices. Likewise, contracting officers have enough to do without becoming technology experts as well. Telecommunications acquisition is unlike other forms of IT acquisition in several ways, driven by technical, operational, pricing and other factors. This adds risks to agency efforts if those involved lack previous experience in telecommunications. Some of these risks include:

- Ambiguous requirements that add time and cost to vendor proposals
- Protests due to real or perceived lack of evaluation rigor, or poorly documented evaluations
- Extended needs to pull employees off their ‘day jobs’ to do an acquisition
- Lock-in of vendors or obsolescent solutions

The impartial, conflict-free Noblis subject matter experts marry government-specific technical and contracting knowledge, backed by powerful tools and automated analytics, to lower these risks. The Noblis Telecommunications Center of Excellence is comprised of a diverse set of experts with deep knowledge in key technical areas crucial to telecommunications and networking program success, such as IP networking, Ethernet, TDM transformation, Software Defined Networking (SDN), NextGen wireless communications, network security, resilience, and more.

As a not-for-profit company, Noblis also pursues independent, corporately-sponsored research and testing in areas such as SDN to separate hype from reality for agencies’ benefit. As a result, Noblis can address both transition and transformation in a way that “future proofs” agency acquisitions. Noblis adds to this an unmatched expertise in government telecommunications pricing specification and evaluation – both critical to best value procurement decisions – and a proven record guiding agencies through complex acquisitions.

**In fact, no telecommunications acquisition award made with Noblis support has ever been successfully protested.** That’s why Noblis is an ideal partner to federal agencies as they migrate to new telecommunications contracts and select and deploy services that serve them most effectively.

# Final Considerations

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## **When considering how to engage stakeholders for the EIS transition:**

### **Training and personnel shortages must be addressed**

Respondents consistently indicate a lack of resources, personnel, and capital to turn their IT modernization plans into action. With the 2020 deadline to transition telecom services just around the corner, agency leadership needs to address lingering vulnerabilities related to training and find skilled workers who can implement this training effectively. With the passing of the Modernizing Government Technology (MGT) Act in late 2017, agencies now have more funding to draw from to make this a reality.

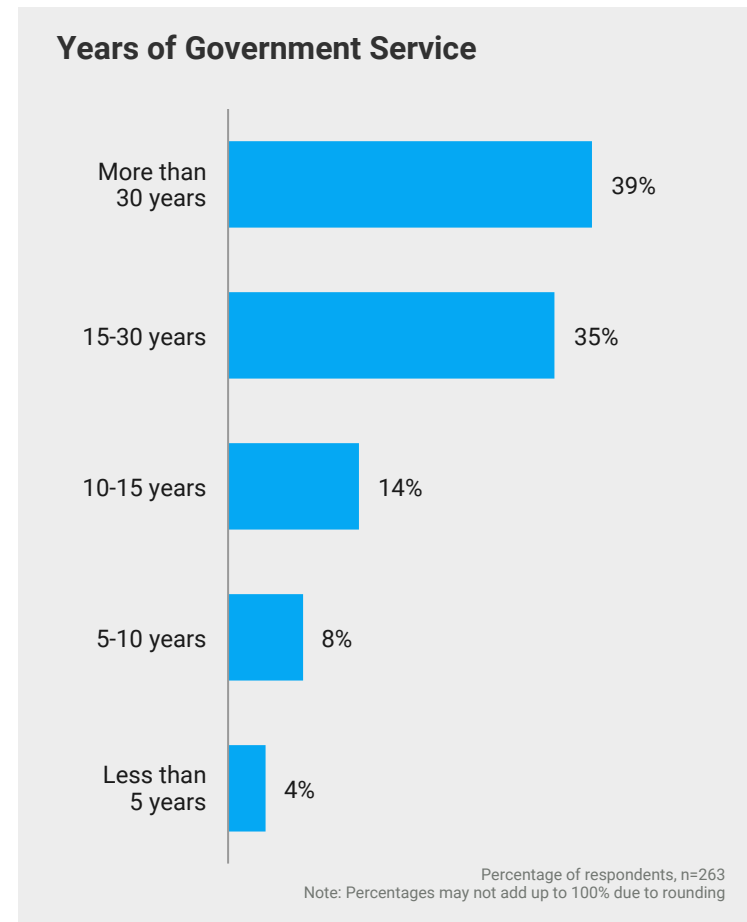
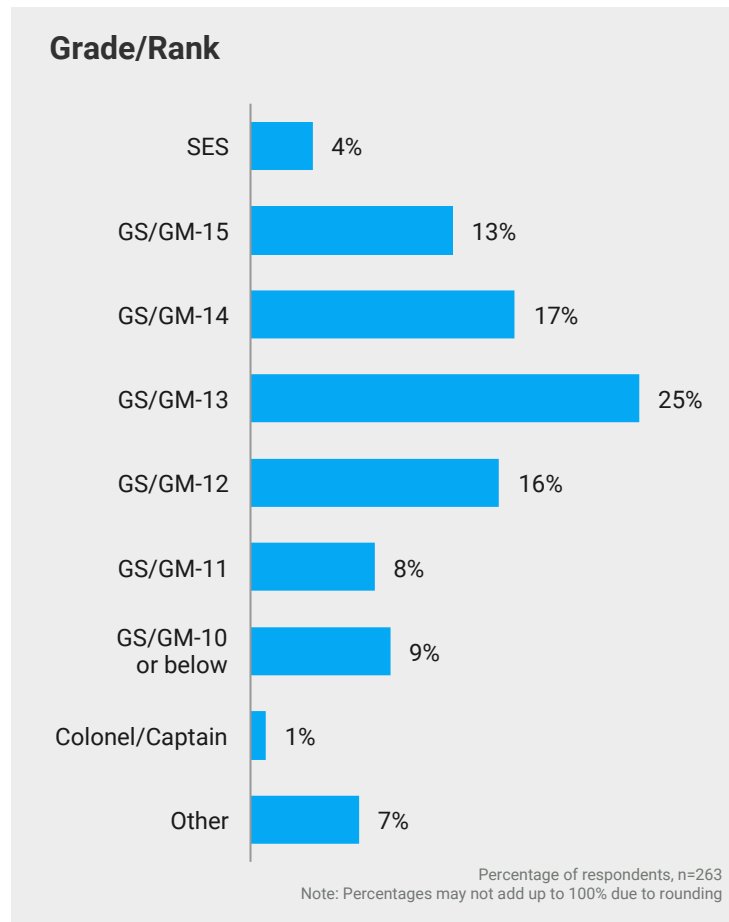
### **Establish and enforce a transition plan**

When considering the challenges ahead, respondents say leadership has a critical role to play in governing the decision-making process. 43% point to fragmented decision-making structures as a challenge to their agency's procurement efforts. Likewise, nearly one-third say acquisitions of new IT can fail to launch due to an absence of leadership advocacy for such investments. Another 34% believe the lack of a transition plan could negatively impact the modernization journey under EIS.

The story here is clear: leaders need to step up and craft transition policies that inform personnel on expected changes to enterprise IT, as well as enforce the responsibilities and decision-making structures which can guide this process more effectively. By using GSA's [EIS Transition Handbook](#) as a springboard and reaching out to experts in both public and private sector for help, leaders can get a grasp on what a successful strategy looks like and how to ensure all employees are invested in the transformation.

# Respondent Profile

A majority of respondents are senior decision-makers with oversight of federal employees



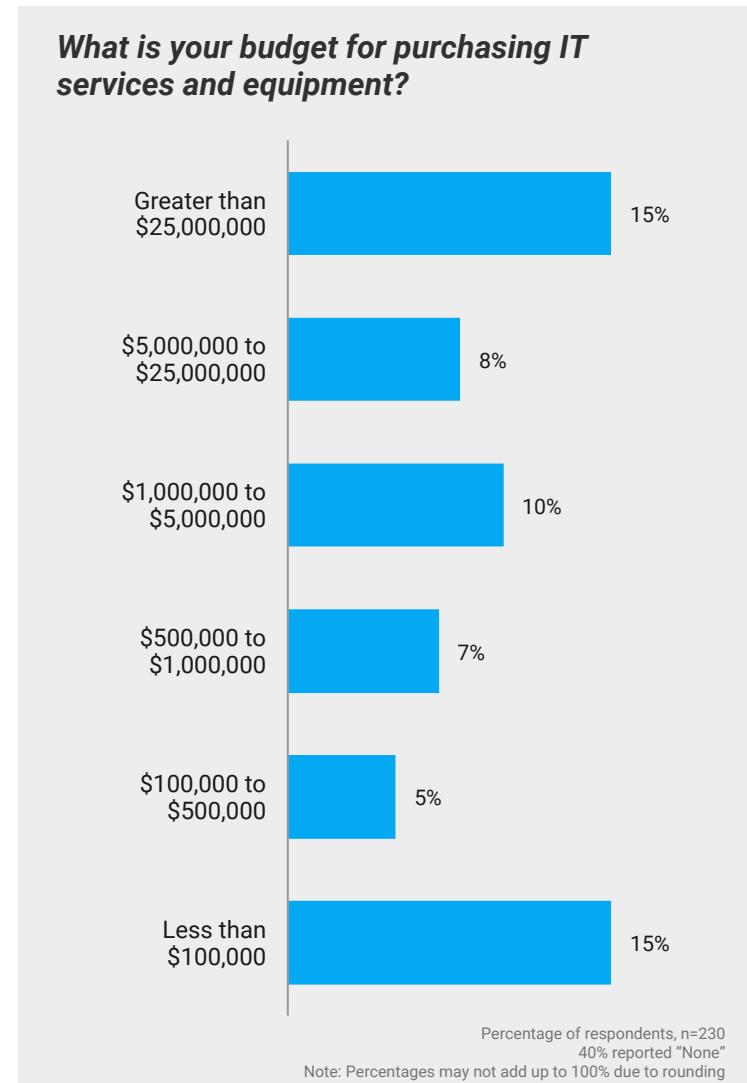
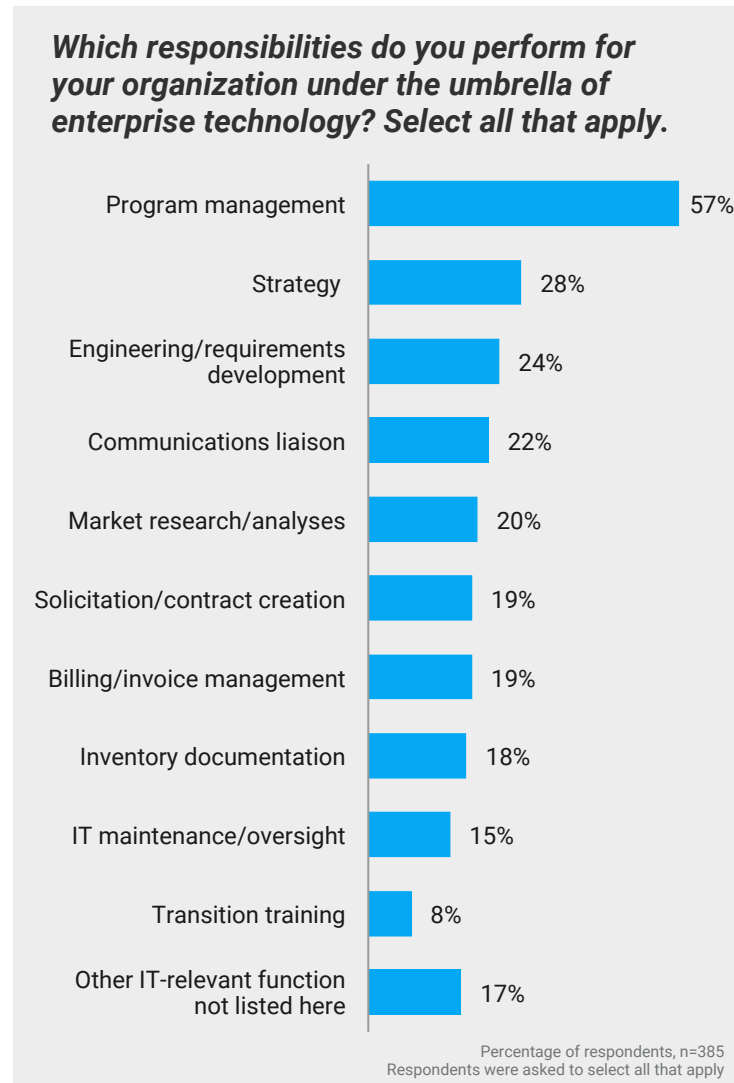
**60%**

of respondents identify as working at the GS/GM-13 level or above, which includes members of the Senior Executive Service (SES) as well as officers of equivalent rank (e.g., Colonel/Captain).

**74%**

of respondents have worked in government for 15 years or more, including creditable military service.

A third of respondents carry IT purchasing authority amounting to \$1 million or more



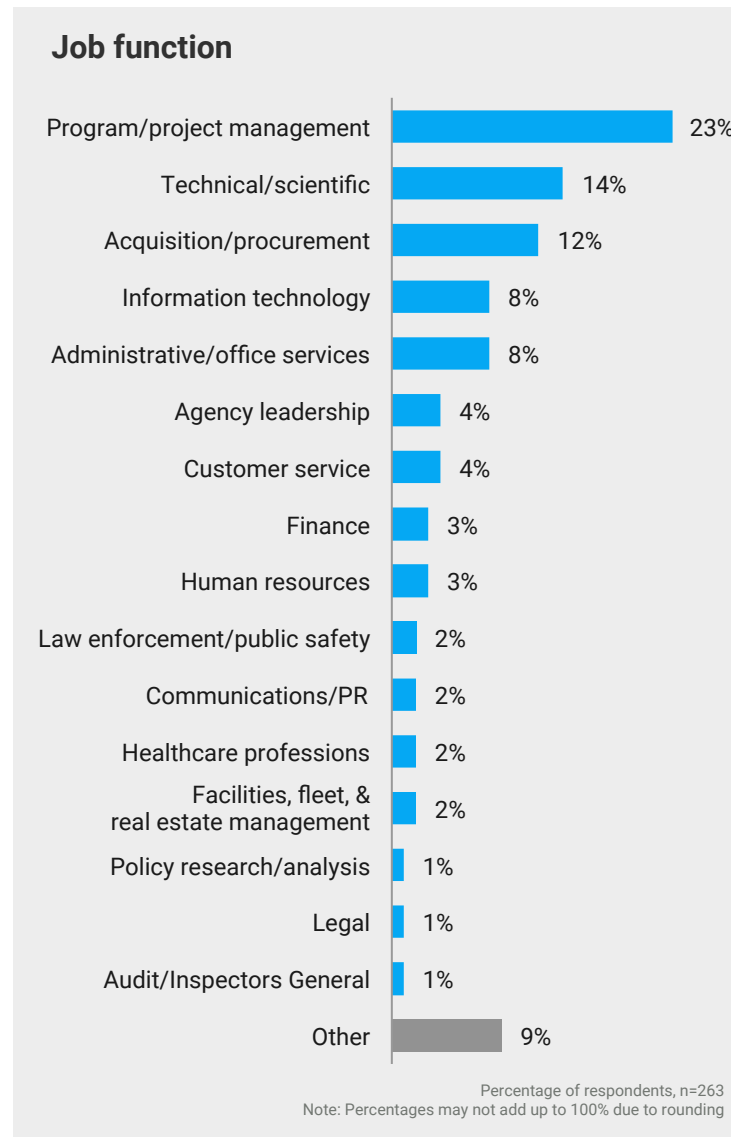
100%

of respondents wield some level of responsibility over their agency's enterprise IT, with project management and strategy (e.g., acquisitions, development) receiving greatest input.

45%

of respondents have direct oversight or control of IT budgets amounting to \$100,000 or more. Not shown are 40% who say they have no direct control over any allocated funds.

Most widely represented are program managers, technical specialists, and acquisition officers



Respondents were asked to choose which single response best describes their primary job function.



Departments and agencies are listed in order of frequency.

# Appendix

The following graphic explains Borda count methodology for the question on Page 13, which asked respondents to rank what they considered priorities in aiding their agency's EIS transition.

	Count per rank								Total	Borda
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
Develop/enforce a transition strategy plan	62	52	34	27	23	9	8	12	227	1,346
Establish baseline inventory of IT requirements/needs	51	38	39	26	32	15	14	14	229	1,253
Define/delegate transition authorities and responsibilities	36	41	28	44	35	19	15	11	229	1,201
Consult acquisition experts (e.g., industry, government)	30	24	34	40	35	22	16	26	227	1,076
Provide training for contracting/acquisition personnel	30	25	20	22	35	29	24	43	228	963
Refine governance model	31	20	28	21	29	27	30	44	230	962
Institute deadline for selecting vendors	10	13	17	30	30	43	47	37	227	803
Formalize incentives to motivate EIS service adoption	8	14	13	15	37	33	48	56	224	714

Rankings and total scores are displayed here using the Borda count method, where each answer choice earns points based on the order in which respondents placed them. For instance, if a respondent's ranked choices were 1) "develop/enforce a transition strategy plan", 2) "establish baseline...", and 3) "define/delegate transition...", those responses would receive 8, 7, and 6 points respectively. These points would then be added to the Borda count of each answer choice.

With 230 respondents and 8 ranking slots available, the maximum score possible for any single answer choice (i.e., if every respondent ranked it as their top outcome) is equal to 1,840 points (230 x 8).

# About

**Government  
Business  
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## Government Business Council

As Government Executive Media Group's research division, Government Business Council (GBC) is dedicated to advancing the business of government through analysis, insight, and analytical independence. An extension of *Government Executive's* 40 years of exemplary editorial standards and commitment to the highest ethical values, GBC studies influential decision makers from across government to produce intelligence-based research and analysis.

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## About Noblis

Noblis is a dynamic science, technology, and strategy organization dedicated to creating forward-thinking technical and advisory solutions in the public interest. We bring the best of scientific thought, management, and engineering expertise together in an environment of independence and objectivity to deliver enduring impact on federal missions. Noblis has consistently been named a top workplace, and was named one of the 2018 "World's Most Ethical Companies" by the Ethisphere Institute.

Noblis works with a wide range of government clients in the defense, intelligence and federal civil sectors. Together with our wholly owned subsidiary, Noblis ESI, we tackle the nation's toughest problems and support our clients' most critical missions.

Learn more at <https://noblis.org>.