

AFSO21 process gets weapons to warfighters faster

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When the AIM-120D production program manager was asked to be team leader on an Air Force Smart Operations for the 21st century rapid improvement event, he was a little skeptical.

"We had a very sound and fundamentally strong (acquisition) process going and I really pushed back at the idea," said Maj. Charles Seidel. "I wasn't sure it was the best use of our time, but I said I would do my best."

But after cutting their "very sound" acquisition process by more than half, 48 weeks to 20 weeks, the major is now sold on the possibilities of AFSO21.

"The process was absolutely eye opening," he said. "We went in trying to eliminate waste and that's what we did."

And that is exactly the goal of AFSO21 when it was implemented by the secretary of the Air Force in March. The program is designed for commanders and supervisors at all levels to look at their processes from beginning to end. It's a dedicated effort to maximize value and minimize waste in our operations and push unnecessary work out the door forever.

When Major Seidel's contract proposal and award process rapid improvement event began in July, it was originally designed solely for the Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile program. But no sooner than he was tasked to lead this effort, he was informed that two other squadrons from the 328th Armament Systems Wing, to include the Harm Targeting System and Miniature Air Launched Decoy, and one squadron from the 308th ARSW, the Small Diameter Bomb II, wanted to participate as well.

"We have many common processes we share with other organizations, whether we work in a weapons program office or on the flightline," said Emily Jay, 328th ARSW chief of contracts. "When we identify common processes across organizations, we can rid ourselves of a lot of the little aggravations that bog us down and are non-value added. The common link between these programs is that each team works with Raytheon."

To pull off this huge undertaking, Major Seidel brought together two pools of key players.

"We had about 22 people from the government and Raytheon spanning all functional specialties such as program managers, engineers, manufacturing experts, contracting officers, finance or pricing officers and auditors represented," he said.

At first both teams worked together to accurately map out their entire contracting "value stream." Basically the govern- process as the Raytheon team did theirs. This exercise accomplished two critical actions: first it ensured the process was accurately depicted; second, it educated the government and industry partners of each other's internal actions when putting things on contract.

The second stage was to split into two teams, mixed with both government and industry personnel, to develop a better process using what is called "clean sheet thinking" to come up with a combined process.

"We reviewed both team's ideas, discussed each one and then color-coded them," Major Seidel said. "Green indicated that we had the authority to change it and we wanted to change it. Blue indicated a good idea, but we weren't sure if we had the authority to do it or we weren't sure the investment was really worth the change. And finally, red indicated that we either didn't have the authority to make the change, or we simply did not want to do it."

Next the two groups came together to build a whole new process, based on the ideas they came up with through their two groups.

"We took the key themes out of those clean sheet thoughts and we implemented the ones we could," Major Seidel said. "The good thing was, all the 'green – implement now' items, all got put into the new strategy."

Both teams were amazed at how changing just a few small things could eliminate time and waste and improve their contract proposal and award process. The goal for both teams was to buy weapons more quickly and get them out in the warfighters' hands faster.

"We walked away with a complete understanding of everything that must be accomplished internally for the government and Raytheon," Major Seidel said. "It was educating for both of us. We now have a thorough understanding of what our existing process is, and the 'care abouts' for the contractors and the government."

Programs across the base have already started using the new system and the program managers are

excited to see the results.

"Time is money and getting the missiles to the warfighters six months earlier is an immediate plus," Major Seidel said. "Everyone would agree with that."

"We will be able to reinvest the projected savings - whether manpower or dollars - in other activities," Ms. Jay said. "The key will be to maintain good metrics as we use the improved process over the next several months to see if we are realizing the projected efficiencies."