

Improving Your Technology ROI



Why Independent Verification and Validation Services are Essential for HHS Modernization Projects



In this Governing Q&A, Robin Dufresne, Director of Healthcare and Human Services for CSG Government Solutions, a national leader in planning, managing and supporting complex modernization projects, shares why independent oversight is vital for large-scale IT projects and how HHS agencies can best leverage independent verification and validation (IV&V) services to improve the success of these initiatives.

Why have IV&V services become increasingly important in HHS?

With the move to modular Medicaid Management Information Systems (MMIS), HHS systems have become more complex. With multiple overlapping projects and vendors, addressing integration points and the exchange of data across modules is increasingly challenging.

All these moving parts create risks across the program that can mushroom into bigger downstream issues. An independent, objective partner who is focused on uncovering such risks is extremely valuable. Proactive, unbiased identification and reporting of looming issues to project leadership helps pinpoint challenges that could lead to project delays, add unnecessary costs or otherwise impact the project.

IV&V services can also help monitor a project's progress toward satisfying federal certification requirements which can lead to enhanced federal match dollars.

Are IV&V services mandated for MMIS or other systems under federal or state rules?

IV&V requirements vary by state and are often tied to the federal funding source for the project.

Even when IV&V services aren't required, agencies should strongly consider engaging an IV&V vendor for any large IT investment. IV&V services help assure a system implementation remains on track and the agency is receiving a quality product that meets its business needs and is within its budget.

Often, if an agency begins a project without IV&V, they soon realize they should

engage an IV&V vendor right away when they run into significant project issues or delays. It's best to move quickly if the systems vendor isn't starting or finishing major tasks on time, project deliverables aren't meeting standards, there is a lack of understanding of business needs or processes, or there are early contract disputes or requests to change the contract scope. IV&V can help mitigate these issues before they have a major impact on the project.

How do you work with states and their vendors to navigate the complexities of projects?

Transparency and open communication with the IV&V vendor are essential to an effective IV&V function. An IV&V partner is independent, but needs meaningful access to information to assess the health of the project. This includes sitting in on project meetings, reviewing deliverables, and communicating directly with stakeholders at the state level and their technology partners.

With a clear line of sight and full access to relevant project information, an IV&V partner can help an agency assure the modernization project is completed on time, safeguards taxpayer dollars and enhances service delivery.

How does an IV&V partner help an agency mitigate project risks?

In cases where a systems vendor is underperforming on a project, we look for the root cause of the problem and make recommendations that will help get the project back on track. For example, if a vendor is continuously late in hitting project milestones and completion dates,

it could be they're understaffed or don't have the right expertise on the project. It also could be that task dependencies and/or critical path items weren't identified early enough in the project schedule.

Once we identify the cause of a problem, we then recommend steps to solve the issue. Often, the issues aren't simple. We may do "deep-dive" assessments into a particular area of a project, such as a code review or financial or security assessment, if there's a particular risk area that warrants additional review.

What is the ultimate value of IV&V for a state agency?

As a former state Medicaid operations director who managed a large MMIS implementation, I understand firsthand the complexity of these systems. State agencies have serious responsibilities and face scrutiny for publicly funded projects. IV&V is a valuable tool — an extra set of eyes — to keep projects on schedule and on budget, and assure systems support the delivery of quality public services to vulnerable populations.



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