

## Another Chief at the Table

Paul W. Taylor | April 13, 2008

Peggy Feldmann is Virginia's first - and likely the nation's first - chief application officer (CAO). Her ambitious agenda includes defining shared applications standards and shepherding more than 70 state agencies toward a common view of state government as a whole. The new role is rooted in the state's elongated ERP modernization effort, but business intelligence, content management, supply chain, customer relationship and almost all commonly used software are in play.

"My office facilitates interaction among agencies anywhere enterprise licensing is the right business move," Feldmann said, adding that the consolidation of enterprise applications also lets "citizen-facing secretariats focus on their functions" and the back-end applications that are unique to them.

Feldmann is no stranger to mission-critical enterprise applications. She became CAO after more than 25 years in the U.S. Navy as an engineering duty officer and building big systems. She says her new mission is about results, now and later: "We're at the beginning of a long-term process of bringing a disciplined view of the whole commonwealth to deciding on new applications." In the end, it's about maturing the planning and management of the state's application portfolio and seeking the next opportunity to elevate an application type to the enterprise level.

"Tell me how this doesn't make sense," said Aneesh Chopra, Virginia's secretary of technology and advocate of application sharing among public agencies. "It focuses them on what should be done in common, and begins shifting their focus to the platform choices that come with applications."

Under the plan, the CAO helps domesticate the last large set of investments overseen by the state oversight board. State CIO Lem Stewart, who reports to the Information Technology Investment Board along with the state technology agency, sees the governor-appointed CAO as bringing needed "technology and business strategy for applications to Virginia's management of IT investments." In Stewart's view, the resulting common data standards, records formats and tool sets will help confront the complexity of identity management and set "the foundation for a sustainable center of excellence."

The CAO appointment continues a trend toward surrounding the CIO with "mini C's" - chief technology officers, chief information security officers and chief architects - and recognizing that technology, security, architecture and now applications are sufficiently important to warrant a well named and well positioned (although not always well compensated) executive officer to mind them.

"With the slow evolution of the state CIO position to one of the business leader of IT and strategic visionary, we'll see more 'chiefs' around the table," said NASCIO Executive

Director Doug Robinson about the CAO's debut. "It would be good to have a true enterprise view of the IT ... applications portfolio."

State officials are the first to add some asterisks to the discussion of its appointment of a CAO. Virginia is different\* (its unique structure and partnership with Northrop Grumman allowed Virginia to move and mature quickly on IT investments and infrastructure, but less so on applications), and the position is, in some ways, nothing new\*\* (it aggregates responsibilities that are likely the CIO's or are handled piecemeal within the lead technology agency in other states).

Those caveats notwithstanding, the CAO appointment brings focus to an arena where the public-sector IT community's well rehearsed insistence about an enterprise approach collapses amid dozens of line agencies acting autonomously at the application level. The results, much lamented by practitioners and pundits, are unnecessary duplication, suboptimal return on investment and, saddest of all, the continued inability to see to the edges of the government operations and programs because of operational silos that are reinforced by multiple instances of the very software that should have flattened them.

Most C-level executives are measured by their ability to get things done. As importantly for the CAO, operating among fiercely independent agencies with a tendency toward proliferation, success may ultimately rest on having the authority to say no.

<http://www.govtech.com/pcio/Another-Chief-at-the-Table.html>