

## Acquisition Resource Center (ARC) Portal

Aquilent's knowledge management and collaboration web portal provides secure and timely access, search capabilities, collaboration tools, and efficient Federal Acquisition Certification (FAC) processes to enterprise-wide acquisition staff.

### the objective\_

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) required a web portal that could serve as a central repository for acquisition-related information such as policies, procedures, instructions, guidelines, reports, and templates. This portal would be integrated with VA's web-based Electronic Contract Management System (eCMS) and support the dissemination of policy information, as well as providing capabilities for collaboration between contracting staff and their customers. The acquisition portal was required to provide the means to search documents, content, and even other repositories, as well as providing workflow processes, e-mail notifications, and collaboration tools such as questions and answers, threaded discussions, and message boards.

### the solution\_

Aquilent implemented the Epic Collaboration Portal (ECP) software suite for the VA as a system called the Acquisition Resource Center (ARC). The ARC provides policy guidance,

tools, and templates for the proper use of eCMS and facilitates collaboration among VA acquisition personnel. The ARC is an important tool for enterprise-wide communication, change management, and training, in that it provides easy access to user manuals, training materials, quick reference guides, calendars of upcoming events, agency-wide announcements, references to other websites, FAQs, and multimedia online tutorials. But most importantly, the ARC provides the VA acquisition community an online, collaborative environment for discussions, document sharing, communication of best practices, and searching of repositories for acquisition-related information.

The ECP suite seamlessly integrates into the VA IT environment and requires no additional COTS software licenses. In addition, use of this ubiquitous technology provides easy integration with eCMS and smooth integration with VA's standard use of Microsoft Office applications. Aquilent implemented the

ARC as an open environment available to any staff within the VA Intranet environment, but can also limit access to specific communities, through authenticated login with standard VA network user accounts. Security also applies to searches: in response to search requests, users are only presented with information they are authorized to see.

One of the most important elements of the ARC is the ability to create Communities, which, in the style of popular social network technology, are authenticated sections of the ARC that are available to specific user groups. This allows geographically distributed group members to establish a central “workspace” for topical collaboration and communication, as well as for storing and sharing documentation and work products.

The ARC also goes well beyond the typical use of Intranet sites for document sharing and even collaboration. The ARC utilizes forms and workflow capabilities for online process automation. For example, the ARC includes an online application process for Federal Acquisition Certification (FAC) of contracting officers (FAC-C), COTRs (FAC-COTR), and Program Managers (FAC-PPM). Users requesting certification simply complete an online form and provide their education and training history and supporting documentation. The request is automatically processed through an automated workflow review and approval process.

## the payoff\_

This solution has innumerable benefits. The largest challenge with implementation of an enterprise acquisition system like eCMS is communication—of standards and policies to the field, of new system features and training events, and of best

practices among the user community. The ARC offers a central, web-based location for this communication, and does so in an extremely cost-effective manner. It enables self-service for the user community, including full text searching to locate information of interest, and an environment where users can “help themselves” rather than contacting a help desk for support. In addition, the central, managed repository ensures accurate and consistent information; tracking of acquisition workforce certification, training, and education; and ubiquitous availability of information.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- > Online environment for acquisition-related information and end-user collaboration.
- > A central repository for acquisition-related information.
- > Secure access to sensitive information.
- > Easy access to training materials and support information promoting proper use of VA’s enterprise contracting system.
- > Collaboration of the acquisition community, through discussion and document sharing.
- > Full-text searching of acquisition-related information.
- > Web-based forms and workflow applications, such as FAC certifications.

