

A Series on Access to Acquisition Information in the Department of Defense Considerations for Managing Program Data in the Emerging Acquisition Environment: Summary



Acquisition program data help drive effective and efficient policy formulation, decisionmaking, and program execution across the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD). Despite recent statutory changes to organizational structures, as well as to roles, responsibilities, and authorities (RRAs) of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and military departments, OSD still needs key program data to inform policymaking and enable analysis critical for understanding acquisition processes and performance. For example, program data are still needed to conduct portfolio analyses and understand the performance of individual acquisition pathways and the overall acquisition system in order to improve acquisition policy design and outcomes.

The report summarized here outlines issues and opportunities in data requirements, governance, and management to strive for more efficient, effective, and informed acquisition while reducing burden and ad hoc data requests. We address general data governance and management challenges, as well as specific challenges associated with the Middle Tier of Acquisition (MTA) for rapid prototyping and rapid fielding, the Selected Acquisition Report (SAR), and the Defense Acquisition Executive Summary (DAES) process and data. A rich set of information currently supports the acquisition community. While there is no agreement on all data needs and definitions, the underlying data used for program management, oversight/insight, decisionmaking, and analysis are similar across DoD. Drawing on prior and ongoing research, we make several recommendations for using data to improve acquisition system performance:

- **Let decisionmaking drive data requirements.** Data must not be generated for their own sake but must support important decisionmaking about policy, process, programs, and integrated capability outcomes. As a starting point, we recommend that the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment (USD[A&S]) identify data requirements by specifying important acquisition use cases that must be supported across the Department. Those use cases could be formalized along with data governance roles in an enterprise-wide acquisition data strategy.
- **Minimize reporting requirements and costs more generally.** For a given use case, we recommend that information and documentation requirements should be austere, with minimal data reporting. Historically, successful rapid prototyping and fielding activities have had austere information requirements. Guidance appears to recognize this by emphasizing tailoring.
- **Align and standardize where possible.** We recommend that emerging strategic, policy, and process for acquisition be supported by a common acquisition data framework. Ultimately, the data should align with the goals of the use cases that determine data requirements, promulgated in the enterprise-wide acquisition data strategy discussed above. USD(A&S) should leverage the existing acquisition visibility data framework (AVDF) that reflects the legacy SAR and DAES data operations, provides a strong foundation from which to evolve, and has enabled rapid implementation of the MTA pathway. Similarly, we recommend that DoD work with Congress to withdraw termination of the SAR until an appropriate substitute is developed.
- **Capitalize on existing structures.** One way to minimize costs and burdens (including ad hoc data calls) is by leveraging existing data frameworks, information systems, and organizations to the maximum extent practical, especially when such data are shared automatically between the OUSD(A&S) and Component systems.

Consistent with A&S being an organization “with data-driven analysis linked to National Defense Strategy objectives,”¹ we recommend continued USD(A&S) attention to these and other acquisition data–related issues. Data enable improved policy formulation and decisionmaking across DoD, ultimately accelerating delivery of operational capabilities to the warfighter.

¹ Ellen Lord, USD(A&S), press briefing on DoD acquisition reforms and major programs, May 10, 2019.

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