Homeland
Security

IT Program Assessment
OHA- National Biosurveillance Integration System (NBIS) (2010)

Review

The DHS CIO conducted a comprehensive program review of the OHA- Biosurveillance Integration System (NBIS) Program on March 31, 2010 with representatives from DHS OCIO and Policy office, in addition to OHA. The NBIS is a comprehensive national biological surveillance and situational awareness "system" that spans people, process and technology, with the primary mission of enabling decision makers to quickly respond to emergent biological threats and crises. NBIS enables early detection and increased situational awareness to reduce the intensity and duration of a biological event by monitoring information sources in near real-time to detect emerging threats, connecting experts immediately as potential threats are detected, and alerting government officials and the public early of potential events. NBIS was delegated to DHS in Public Law 110-53, and is managed by the DHS Office of Health Affairs (OHA).

The National Biosurveillance Integration Center under OHA is the principal supporting partner for NBIS. NBIS has developed two major capabilities to date;
- the Biosurveillance Common Operations Network (BCON), which is in the O&M phase and has Authorization to Operate (ATO) in the DHS Stennis data center, and
- Biosurveillance Common Operating Picture (BCOP) Version 1, which was stood up and hosted at Texas A&M University to meet emergency deployment in May 2009 to meet HINI response requirements, and is accessible via the Homeland Secure Information Network (HSIN). BCOP Version 2 is staged in a DHS Data Center and is pursuing ATO.

The NBIS program is currently in a mixed lifecycle phase and receives less than $10M in annual funding. However, NBIS is considered a "major program" based on its criticality to DHS mission and its visibility, rather than its funding level. The NBIS Program Management Office (PMO) is located in OHA rather than a major DHS Component, and therefore does not have the organic staff, program resources, or access to significant OCIO resources to prepare required documentation to adhere to the department governance requirements set for major programs. NBIS IT staff consists of one federal employee and 4 contractors.

The NBIS Program Manager requested assistance from the DHS CIO in tailoring governance for the NBIS program, as well as other programs that are similarly situated without large IT or monetary resources necessary to comply with governance and oversight requirements designed for very large programs. OCIO took an action to conduct a follow-up meeting to discuss governance strategies moving forward that lessens the burden on the NBIS program office while maintaining an appropriate and effective level of oversight.

Assessment

NBIS is a fairly mature technical program that provides a critical mission capability at a relatively inexpensive cost. The program conducts integrated biosurveillance across the human, animal, plant, health and environmental domains in coordination with many stakeholders. The NBIS IT Program Review surfaced IT governance issues affecting NBIS, as well as other similarly situated IT programs, regarding tailoring enterprise governance strategies for IT programs developed by smaller DHS organizational units. The DHS OCIO will work with NBIS to examine these issues and explore how to tailor governance processes to remain effective, while also ensuring that program resources remain primarily focused on mission execution.

Score: 4