Chapter 44
eHealth Saskatchewan—Buying IT Services Follow Up

1.0 MAIN POINTS

Beginning in 2011, eHealth is responsible for the procurement of health-related information technology (IT) services. This was previously handled by the Ministry of Health.

In 2010, we assessed the adequacy of the Ministry of Health's processes to buy IT services (including IT consultation, oversight, and development and testing of programs and processes). We concluded that the Ministry did not have adequate processes to buy IT services and made eight recommendations to help the Ministry of Health strengthen its processes.

Since 2010, the Ministry of Health, through eHealth Saskatchewan, has made significant improvements and fully addressed six of the eight recommendations. It needs to continue its current work in implementing a system to assess and track the performance of IT service vendors.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

In 2010-11, the Saskatchewan Health Information Network (SHIN), a Treasury Board Crown Corporation responsible for the implementation of electronic health record systems (EHR), was renamed eHealth Saskatchewan (eHealth). eHealth's mandate is similar to SHIN's: leading the planning and implementation of Saskatchewan's EHR. eHealth is also responsible for the procurement of health-related IT services. We therefore direct our work and outstanding recommendations to eHealth.

In 2010, we assessed the Ministry of Health's processes to buy IT services including IT consultation, oversight, development, and testing of programs and processes. Our 2010 Report – Volume 1, Chapter 6, concluded that the Ministry of Health did not have adequate processes to buy IT services. We made eight recommendations to help improve the Ministry's processes.

3.0 STATUS OF OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out the recommendations and the actions that eHealth has taken to address our recommendations up to September 19, 2012. We found that six of these recommendations have been implemented and more work needs to be done on the remaining two recommendations.

3.1   Debriefing Vendors on Decisions

We recommended that the Ministry of Health establish a process to debrief unsuccessful vendors on their information technology proposals. (2010 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement December 8, 2010)

Status – Implemented.

eHealth's request for proposals (RFP) is completed once every three years. eHealth's 2012 RFP includes a process to debrief any vendors who wanted additional information on why their proposals were not successful. Unsuccessful vendors can request debriefing in writing within seven days of receiving eHealth's decision. Vendors can attend such debriefing sessions in person at eHealth's Regina office or via teleconference.

3.2   Appeal Mechanism in Place

We recommended that the Ministry of Health establish an appeal mechanism to deal with vendors' complaints/disagreements. (2010 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement December 8, 2010)

Status – Implemented.

In its 2012 RFP, eHealth included a process for unsuccessful vendors to submit complaints about the selection process. Unsuccessful vendors can submit complaint notices within 14 days of receiving eHealth's decision, or within 7 days of taking part in a debriefing session with eHealth. Complainants are responsible for outlining the nature of their complaints and providing factual grounds to support why the selection process should be reviewed. Upon receipt of the complaint notice, eHealth's senior officials review the process used in the evaluation and selection with the complainant. eHealth ensures that officials who were involved in the original evaluation are not part of the review process.

eHealth clearly communicated this process to all vendors as part of its current RFP that we reviewed during our follow up work.

3.3　Selection Criteria Included in Requests for Proposals

We recommended that the Ministry of Health establish processes to ensure all requests for proposals for specific information technology expertise or services include complete criteria for evaluating those proposals. (2010 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement December 8, 2010)

Status – Implemented.

eHealth has developed processes for consistently requesting all proposals for specific IT expertise or services. The request for resources includes detailed requirements (e.g., timing, duration, and specific skills required) for the successful candidates. We noted that the detailed requirements were clearly communicated in all of the files we reviewed.

3.4　Using Consistent Evaluation Documentation

We recommended that the Ministry of Health use consistent evaluation documentation for selecting vendors for specific information technology expertise or services. (2010 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement December 8, 2010)

Status – Implemented.

eHealth uses a competency-based evaluation process and bases its decisions on selection criteria provided to vendors.

The decision to select a vendor is based on factors such as the hourly rate charged, skill sets and experience related to the work required, and interview results. eHealth maintains documentation to support why vendors were or were not selected.

3.5　Using eHealth Employees to Hire Vendor Employees

We recommended that the Ministry of Health use its employees to hire employees of information technology vendors. (2010 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement December 8, 2010)

Status – Implemented.

One of eHealth's employees is responsible for coordinating the selection process. A member of eHealth senior management approves all requests to obtain contract resources. We noted evidence that eHealth staff were present during the interviews for contract resources and participated in evaluating candidates.

3.6   Obtaining Updates of Projects

> We recommended that the Ministry of Health obtain periodic independent updates of projects that are managed and staffed with vendor employees. (2010 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement December 8, 2010)
>
> **Status** – Implemented.

eHealth expects its project managers to deal with minor issues (e.g., clarification of policies or procedures) arising with their project staff. eHealth management indicated that in cases of major performance issues involving vendor staff, management enters into discussions with the vendor to discuss solutions, such as the termination of the vendor. eHealth has recently hired a director of human resources, who is responsible for the oversight of vendor relationships.

eHealth management receives monthly progress reports from project managers. Project managers must report on the current status of projects and identify any actual or anticipated deficiencies (e.g., budget overruns, scheduling delays). Monthly reports are reviewed by senior management.

3.7   Assessing and Tracking Vendor Performance

> We recommended that the Ministry of Health (eHealth Saskatchewan) establish adequate processes for assessing information technology vendors' performance. (2010 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement December 8, 2010)
>
> **Status** – We continue to make this recommendation.

> We recommended that the Ministry of Health (eHealth Saskatchewan) keep records of vendors' performance to help decide future information technology service contracts. (2010 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement December 8, 2010)
>
> **Status** – We continue to make this recommendation.

A system to assess and track the performance of vendors would assist eHealth in deciding which of their vendors are delivering satisfactory services. This information would be useful in making future vendor selection. Without such a system, eHealth may continue to use vendors who did not perform adequately in the past.

As part of its 2012 RFP, eHealth communicated to vendors that their performance would be subject to review as part of a vendor performance management system. eHealth plans to develop a system for assessing and tracking the performance of its vendors.