As Workforce Rebalances, Views on 'Inherently Governmental' Jobs Vary

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HOT SPRINGS, Va. - "Inherently governmental" is a matter of perspective, said participants at a May 16 session at the ACT-IAC Management of Change Conference.

A draft policy letter on the subject and a request for comment were issued back in April 2010 by the White House's Office of Federal Procurement Policy, but little guidance has been provided since. Last December, the Office of Management and Budget asked agencies "rebalance" their contractor-civil service workforce ratios, as part of its 25-point plan for Federal IT restructuring.

The confusion around when agencies should insource or outsource was evident at the session--so much so that Secret Service Chief Information Officer Scott Cragg said he was "troubled" by what he was hearing from agencies and contractors.

"It rarely ever comes into my stream of consciousness that because I can't hire a government employee, therefore I'm hiring a contractor. I hold it in two different places at all times, and if I can't fill the government slot, then I suck it up until I can. There are two different slots," said Cragg.

But, "some things that an agency thinks are core competencies may not be core competencies to the mission," said Karen Evans, partner at KE&T Partners and former eGov administrator at OMB.

Attendees also said looking at contractor and civil servant jobs vacancies doesn't always translate as "one-to-one." Sometimes replacing one contractor could take two civil servants, said an unconference attendee.

Agency executives should also consider the total value of an employee--much as they would consider a product's total cost of ownership (considering purchase price, training and

maintenance). Some civil servants "would kill to have a little bit of training" to close a skill gap that would allow him to fill a vacant role that might otherwise be given to a contractor, said an MOC attendee.