The agency is moving quickly toward a cloud-native model supported by an agile development framework.

Adam Patterson
Mon, 08/24/2020 - 14:33

The Department of Veterans Affairs is aiming to reach a significant cloud migration landmark by 2024, marking an effective halfway point of its transition to full cloud integration.

Speaking at the ACT-IAC Stop Chaotic Cloud Spend summit, VA Executive Director of Infrastructure Operations Reginald Cummings outlined goals the agency intends to reach within the next four years.
In looking at the agency’s extant cloud development, Cummings noted the relatively brief timeframe under which the VA has been focusing on moving away from on-site data management. Much of the VA’s work thus far has been focused on laying the groundwork for future cloud migration, particularly through an emphasis on establishing workflows and accompanying project management.

“AWS and Azure were implemented primarily back in 2015 ... and then in 2017 we went ahead with cloud first initiatives,” Cummings said. “We established a formal program that put a backdrop on our entire cloud strategy, which resulted in us creating a centralized cloud solutions enterprise office. And then we went forward from there by using our VA enterprise cloud as a backdrop.”

Having built this foundation, the VA is now moving directly toward wholesale cloud migration — having set the goal of more than doubling the total number of agency applications running off the public cloud.

“Up to this point, we have 25% of our workload running in the cloud. The expectation is we’ll ramp that up to 30%, or about 400 or so applications running. Our ultimate goal is 50% by the end of 2024. That’s our trajectory at this point, and our portfolio continues to evolve as we’re getting new capabilities ... and we’re going cloud native with those,” Cummings said.

As an intermediary process, the VA appears to be relying on a hybrid-cloud model to establish the necessary infrastructure for a more ambitious cloud migration.

“We’ll be using cloud native SAS models while we work out our technical debt, with about half in the VA enterprise cloud and the other half running on our data centers as we continue to consolidate,” Cummings explained.

Much of this rapid cloud migration appears predicated on empowering the agency to better process and draw insights from its substantial reservoir of proprietary data, as well as enable more advanced AI and RPA processes to better streamline VA services.

“There’s a lot of things we’re looking to do from an AI perspective ... processing of mail or other kinds of things that we’d traditionally have a backend solution for, we’re looking to instead automate those in a robotic way,” Cummings said.
Going forward, the VA appears dedicated to incorporating both a product line management approach and greater agile methodology into its cloud transformation initiative, with both methodologies slated to be more widely adopted across VA IT management as a whole.

“We’re starting to get the sense that [agile] is part of our business taxonomy, and we’ll just continue to iterate that,” Cummings said.