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Contracting Directorate file room revamped for more efficient, simple service

**By Joan Burns
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Keeping up with 25,000 file folders can be a daunting task not just because that number is overwhelmingly large, but because that's the approximate number of folders typically used to contain the official records of the government contracting process at the Huntsville Center. Like any large-scale process, manual operation can engender error.

A new browser-based RFID system solves the problem for the Center. When a Contracting Officer (CO) or a contract specialist needs an official Contract File, the administrative file support person on the other side of the half-door at the entrance to the file room takes the request.

File room support personnel access the FileTrail software to locate the Contract File, retrieve it from the shelf and use the RFID reader to scan the contract number on the file folder and record the name of the person receiving the file.

The process is simple and efficient — very different from the process formerly used. In the past, contracting officials as well as project managers or even administrative employees could go to the file room and access a Contract File, remove its contents



Photo by Joan Burns

STEP students Christina Hicks, left, Brittany Prater and Nina Hicks provide files room support for the FileTrail contract file library tracking system.

and replace them with a “check-out” card.

“It was an ‘on-your-honor’ system with no librarian present and no security guard at the door,” said Tracey Shaw, program manager for the installation and operation of the new FileTrail file system.

“File information was returned in an erratic manner, if at all; some file information was simply lost. With the FileTrail system, only contracting officers or contract

specialists are allowed to check out Contract Files.”

The official Contract File contains records of such things as purchase requests, funding availability, requests for proposals, government estimates, cost and pricing data, technical analysis, price negotiation information, the signed delivery order or modification, any audit reports required and the notice to proceed.

“Contract Files are the official record of the obligation of

taxpayers' money," said Jordan Miller, secondary project manager for the new process.

Contract Files can be used as a guide for setting up a new contract folder; or to get information to process a variety of tasks. Contracting officials handle contract modifications, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, task orders to provide a service and delivery orders to provide a product.

The length of time a contracting official may keep and use the Contract File varies with the required task. There is no time limit; however, the FileTrail program alerts file room administrative personnel on the selected return date and if the Contract File has not been returned, file room personnel can quickly generate an email reminder to the person using FileTrail.

The FileTrail system, implemented in the fall of 2005, has created a working environment similar to a library.

"We don't have to waste time and effort looking for files. It also gives our customers confidence," said J.R. Richardson, director of Contracting.

The FileTrail implementation team, included employees in the Huntsville Center's student training and employment program, called STEP.

Michael Mathis, a STEP employee, serves as the project manager and Jordan Miller, also a STEP employee, serves as the secondary project manager.

Miller describes the new system as the "rebirth of the Contract File room." Color coded labels printed by FileTrail are on each file folder identifying the procurement number, site name, vendor name and year of the action.

"The FileTrail system provides an easy and more efficient way to fulfill customers' needs. It allows file

room personnel to trace each file outside the area," Miller said.

Contracting Directorate personnel are pleased with the work of the implementation team.

"I am extremely proud of the hard work Mike Mathis and Jordan Miller put into this project. Without their personal dedication to this project, we would not have succeeded in completing the project on time and avoiding change orders," Shaw said.

The STEP employee program at Huntsville Center also has provided administrative file room personnel to support the new process.

"Looking the file up in FileTrail allows us to pinpoint where the file is and who has it or who had it last. This system is beyond helpful, to say the least," said Christina Hicks, who attends Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University.

Brittany Prater, a student at Calhoun Community College, said, "After observing the process of implementing FileTrail and now using the system daily, I believe that it is the most important asset to the overall success of the file room."

Kathy Simmons, Contracting Directorate's Business Management Division team leader applauds the new process.

"The benefit of being able to track a file from setup phase to the closeout phase, showing the complete history throughout, is a great achievement," Simmons said.

The implementation team members also believe in the new process.

"As HNC continues to be a leader in business, it is necessary to find ways to continually improve processes. With the implementation of FileTrail, Huntsville Center will not only improve in this area, but set the standard," Mathis said.

For more information, contact:

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Photo by Joan Burns

FileTrail implementation team members Michael Mathis, left, Jordan Miller and Tracey Shaw review the FileTrail filing system.