Panel Outlines Navy's Push for Accelerated Acquisition

ARLINGTON, Va. – With pressure and support from the Navy's top civilian leaders, key officials in the research, development and acquisition community are pushing an accelerated acquisition process that one key official said was aimed at rapidly moving "those programs we cherish most" to the fleet.

The concept focuses on ensuring that those programs picked as priorities by Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson "meet the milestones" of the path from concept to deployment, Rear Adm. James Kilby, director Warfare Integration, said Jan. 16. Those include the MQ-25 Stingray unmanned carrier-based aerial refueling plane and numerous unmanned undersea systems, Kilby said in a panel discussion at the Surface Navy Association's annual symposium.

That accelerated procurement process is pushed aggressively by James Geurts, the deputy Navy secretary for Research, Development and Acquisition, and supported by Navy Secretary Richard Spencer, panel members said.

William Bray, Geurts' deputy, said his boss champions the four "Ds," with a primary one being "decentralization" – with "differentiate," "digitize" and "develop" as the others. Following that guidance, "we have pushed decisions down to" program executive officers (PEOs) and program managers (PMs), which "allows them to make real-time decisions," Bray said.

Geurts also has put out guidance on the new authorities granted by recent congressional reforms to the cumbersome acquisition process, "making sure we're moving the right things," Bray said. He also has promoted other transactions authorities (OTAs), which give the PEOs and PMs the tools to do things differently than following the traditional

acquisition rules.

“We’re not going to buy an aircraft carrier with OTAs,” but can acquire a lot of other systems that go into a carrier, Bray said.

Rear Adm. Douglas Small, PEO for Integrated Warfare Systems, which now includes unmanned systems, said in the process “from ideation to on ship, we’re setting a land speed record.”

Rear Adm. Ronald Boxall, director of Surface Warfare, said one of the systems that was moved to operational use on a ship was the experimental laser system initially deployed to the Persian Gulf on the USS Ponce.

Members of the audience, including former acquisition officials, questioned how the current procurement leaders were going to change the culture that tends to stay with the familiar, although slow, traditional process.

Bray noted that another of Geurts’ four Ds was developing a workforce that will keep the process going.

And Boxall said that of all his program managers, “none say ‘how can I slow this down?’ What we love about accelerated acquisition is the ability to move forward.”

Members of the panel sought to reassure skeptical members of the audience that the accelerated process did not look at just developing systems quickly but focused on how to get them integrated into ships and ensure they are useable by the warfighters.