A Conversation with Jen Leasure

The Quilt's President and CEO discusses how her organization's members — state research and education networks — are helping colleges and universities build and maintain new learning environments

You have a partnership with Carahsoft. Can you talk about what that partnership is all about and how it serves higher education?

Jen Leasure: Individual higher ed institutions turn to their regional networks to be their technical advisors, and in the case of smaller institutions to also be an extension of their technical staff, in understanding the solutions that are out there and helping them navigate their procurement and implementations for their institutions. VMware was one of those solutions everyone was interested in. We selected Carahsoft out of an RFP, to serve as our partner for VMware, and then the program really accelerated.

New solutions were coming to market, often created with the purpose of being bundled with VMware for maximum impact. Some of our member institutions helped us define those unique bundlings specifically of interest to higher ed.

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So, we did another subsequent RFP for VMware and related services in 2019. And out of that Carahsoft was selected again as our partner.

As a result, we provide a pre-competed contract vehicle for VMware and the related services, which is really important to higher education institutions – especially public institutions that have strict state procurement or institution procurement guidelines that they have to follow. This removes a lot of that administrative burden in having to conduct their own RFP for the same services. So, it really is an efficient way to purchase solutions of common interest.

Carahsoft has been an amazing partner to us in this process, giving individual institutions access to solutions and discounts that they may not necessarily get if they're purchasing on their own. Plus, they get access to the expertise that Carahsoft brings on its own and with its solution partners, answering questions, offering solutions and finding ways to make sure that they're meeting all the requirements.

In the big shift to remote work and remote teaching and learning, have you seen pickup among the institutional members of your members taking advantage of this community of vendors?

Absolutely. As everything went online and was done with technology, institutions needed to invest in new solutions to support their researchers, their faculty, their students, their administration, in conducting their business – and with limited budgets. We know that everyone's been having particular budget constraints, and they're looking to maximize the benefits of these types of programs and their discounts. This type of program has been especially important during COVID.

And remote and hybrid learning isn't going away, as we know. It's difficult to foresee a world where hybrid becomes an option instead of a requirement. Folks don't like options taken away once they're there. And so, the investment in these types of solutions is going to continue to support future directions.

Cloud access especially has become important for institutions to support their students. That's one area where we have seen a lot of growth in the last year.

Are there other aspects of the Carahsoft contract that really stand out?

The answer is Martin Gavin, who serves as our program manager from Carahsoft. He absolutely has invested himself in understanding and supporting our community. It feels much different from a typical kind of vendor relationship. It's really a partner relationship. He has made an enormous difference in terms of building the trust and being a reliable partner for all of our Quilt members.

Here's an example: one of our members' members, a

higher ed institution, was having a really difficult time with procuring a particular solution. They had spent probably six or eight months trying to work through a contract directly with the service provider. By talking with Martin, our Quilt member was able to work out the issues within a couple of weeks.

Because Martin knew all the parties involved, he could understand and translate where those friction points were

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and help connect the dots to an agreeable solution for everyone. So, this member of ours sings the praises of Carahsoft, in terms of the type of support and partnership that we have with them.

A lot of purchases go through the program, but for some

of them, it just comes down to that relationship.

Are there any community projects going on right now that will help institutions adapt to this current environment they're facing?

A few of our members are working on some wireless projects involving Citizens Broadband Radio Service. CBRS is being brought in to provide for connectivity in hard-to-reach and rural communities, to get those students the internet connectivity needed to access their online learning. These are projects that are really important and are in the early stages. This is an area that we're working on with Carahsoft, which is building out its portfolio of private LTE (pLTE) spectrum solutions.

How do interested institutions take advantage of The Quilt's benefits?

Any institution that's interested needs to get in touch with their statewide research and education network, the Quilt member. Those regional network partners will know exactly how to support them and take advantage of the program.

Learn more on The Quilt's website.

The Quilt & Carahsoft
Supporting Higher Education IT Requirements

The Quilt is a non-profit coalition of 38 regional research and education networks across the U.S. that leverages the collective purchasing power of its members to cost-effectively purchase advanced networking technology and services.

Members who leverage The Quilt's Master Service Agreement benefit from Carahsoft and our reseller partners' decades of experience providing products and services to meet the technology needs of Public Sector and Education institutions. This publicly sourced contract provides exclusive pricing for Education institutions on a complete portfolio of pre-competed and awarded solutions, including Cloud, SaaS, PaaS, Software, Hardware, Support, and Managed Service Offerings from Carahsoft's technology and reseller partners.

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DELL Technologies	DocuSign	f5	FORESCOUT	FORTINET	GENESYS
Google Cloud	Infoblox	INSTRUCTURE	liquidware	Microsoft	mobilemind
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To learn more, call **(703) 673-3518,** email **TheQuilt@carahsoft.com**
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