

FirstNet closes deadline for proposals, moves onto evaluation phase

Fierce Wireless Tech By Monica Allevan

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It's not known how many proposals FirstNet received, but the deadline came and went May 31, and now the focus is on the remaining phases of the evaluation process. FirstNet CEO Mike Poth says the organization is well on its way to achieving its goal of establishing a unique public-private partnership to deploy the nation's first Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network (NPSBN).

"We are moving forward in the evaluation process," a FirstNet spokesperson said in a prepared statement. "We are excited to have met this major RFP milestone and remain on track to award in November."

FirstNet also isn't discussing the names of companies or entities that submitted proposals, and not too many bidders are showing their hands. Earlier this year, AT&T said it planned to aggressively pursue the opportunity, and analysts have pegged Verizon as a likely candidate to win the project, but Verizon has remained mostly mum on the topic.

Another candidate, Rivada Networks, has not been shy about its intentions. Rivada's core technology, Dynamic Spectrum Arbitrage Tiered Priority Access (DSATPA), allows public safety to have priority access with instant (millisecond) pre-emption in the event of an emergency situation, guaranteeing first responders access to the bandwidth when they need it most.

"Rivada Networks, together with our partners and team members, submitted our proposal to FirstNet on Friday," said CEO Declan Ganley in a statement. "It's been an honor to participate in this vital public mission and respond to such a meticulous and well-thought-out RFP. We are confident that the result of this process will be the construction of the nationwide network that our first responders deserve."

In a blog post, CEO Poth said a tremendous amount of work has gone into the effort involving both the public and private sectors, dating back to even before the release of the Special Notice and Draft RFP documents in April 2015. "At the heart of this process was a listening tour that

focused on the future users of the FirstNet network: the law enforcement officers, fire fighters, and paramedics who make our communities safe and secure," he said. "In 2015 – a key period in our efforts – FirstNet connected with tens of thousands of public safety and private companies as we worked to gather information for the RFP, incorporate stakeholder feedback, and answer their questions."

That kind of first responder participation is key because there was a point in FirstNet's history where it was criticized for a lack of enough law enforcement involvement. Poth, a former police captain himself, highlighted the public safety community for its partnership and honest feedback throughout the process. "They brought their 'A' game at each step – particularly with the state consultation meetings and data collection effort – and this in turn enabled us to act as true stewards for public safety in designing an RFP to deploy *their* network," he said.

He also recognized the private sector for its constructive feedback on how to innovatively meet public safety's needs through a public-private partnership with unique concepts and strategies for this acquisition.

"They studied our RFP documents, provided us with key questions, participated in our Industry Days, and shared their expertise on key aspects of the network, such as security," he said. "All of these stakeholder groups should be commended for making public safety a top priority by providing input and feedback to the RFP."

Poth said FirstNet's pace will continue to be swift – it still plans on making an award as early as November of this year.

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