

FirstNet adjusts RFP timetable by two weeks, award target date still set for fourth quarter

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[FirstNet](#) yesterday released its first set of answers to questions submitted about its request for proposal (RFP) and announced that two key dates—the deadlines for bidders to provide an optional capability statement and to submit final proposals—will be moved delayed by two weeks, meaning final bids are now due on May 13.

Although bids will be due on May 13, FirstNet still hopes to award the massive contract for a nationwide public-safety broadband network by Nov. 1, as cited originally when the RFP was released last month.

“It doesn’t affect our target date for award,” a FirstNet spokesperson said during an interview with [IWCE](#)’s *Urgent Communications*.

FirstNet made the deadline announcements in conjunction with the release of answers to 58 questions submitted as part of the RFP process. One question noted that offerors—bidding teams pursuing the right to build and operate the FirstNet system—would have little chance to incorporate answers from the March 10 pre-proposal conference in their capability statements, which were scheduled to be due on March 17 under the original RFP released last month.

In the revised RFP, the capability statements will be due on March 31, and the deadline for final proposals also will be extended by two weeks, to May 13.

Some questions asked for an extension of as much as two months, so offerors would have more time to alter their bids based on FirstNet input from the more than 400 questions being asked in this proceeding, information shared during the pre-proposal conference, and feedback provided from the capability statements into the final bid. But FirstNet extended the deadlines only two weeks, citing the “critical schedule for award” of a contract for the long-awaited nationwide public-safety broadband network.

After the capability statement is evaluated, each offeror will be advised whether the proposed team is a viable competitor for the award. However, a negative evaluation would not disqualify an offeror from submitting a proposal, according to the RFP.

Some submitted questions indicate that some perceived that submitting a capability statement is a requirement to participate in the RFP process. In its answers, FirstNet noted that offerors do not have to submit a capability statement on March 31.

“The capability statements are optional, but they provide a great strategic opportunity for offerors to meet with FirstNet one on one,” a FirstNet spokesperson told *IWCE’s Urgent Communications*

“They’ll receive feedback directly from FirstNet as they draft a proposal.”

Other changes to the FirstNet RFP made in response to this initial set of 58 released questions were clarifications on page counts associated with submissions and how network coverage proposals will be evaluated.

FirstNet’s RFP includes a “FirstNet Baseline” coverage map, as well as maps reflecting coverage requests from state governments, the federal government and areas where coverage is needed in rare occurrences.

“The FirstNet baseline ... indicates areas where persistent coverage is desired,” the FirstNet RFP states. “On-demand temporary solutions are adequate for the other areas identified.”

[FirstNet](#) holds the spectrum license to 20 MHz of prime 700 MHz spectrum known as Band 14. Although Band 14 is expected to provide the primary spectral foundation for the FirstNet system, offerors also can use other spectrum assets—for instance, many nationwide carriers have additional airwaves in the 700 MHz and 1.9 GHz bands—as long as they are leveraged in a manner that meets FirstNet’s statement of objectives.

Offerors’ coverage and capacity elements will be evaluated based on a quantitative approach for the following elements: non-Band 14 area coverage, non-Band 14 population coverage,

Band 14 area coverage, Band 14 population coverage and Band 14 network capacity. These elements were identified in the original RFP released last month, but FirstNet yesterday amended the RFP to clarify that these elements “will be weighted equally” in the evaluation process, according to FirstNet’s answer to a question.

In response to other questions, some of the other items that FirstNet clarifies in its first set of answers include:

- FirstNet will be responsible for clearing the Band 14 spectrum of incumbent users;
- FirstNet will not have any input regarding pricing, negotiations and agreements between the selected contractor and non-public-safety entities accessing the network on a secondary basis, as long as the FirstNet statement of objectives for public safety are fulfilled;
- FirstNet will not have any input on the contractor’s negotiations with rural partners, which are required to provide at least 15% of the total rural coverage nationwide;
- There are no limits on the type of customers that the selected contractor can service on a secondary basis utilizing the FirstNet system; and
- FirstNet did not provide a firm timeline for viability assessments to offerors submitting a capability statement, but it did vow to provide this feedback “as soon as practicable upon completion of evaluation of the submissions.”

FirstNet is committed to answering each of the more than 400 submitted questions about the RFP. FirstNet will release answers to groups of questions, but there is not a defined timetable for executing this task.

FirstNet released [this infographic](#) to summarize the RFP questions it has received. In a prepared statement, FirstNet CEO Mike Poth said he is encouraged by the response to the RFP.

“We are pleased with the interest and questions we received from industry, states, and public safety regarding the FirstNet RFP,” said FirstNet Chief Executive Officer Mike Poth. “This is a vital next step in the iterative process as potential offerors work to craft their proposed solutions to deploy the first-of-its-kind wireless network dedicated to first responders, and FirstNet staff are diligently working to answer each question.”

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