

FirstNet highlights opportunities to communicate with potential offerors during conference

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March 11, 2016

[FirstNet](#) yesterday hosted its final public meeting to address questions about its request for proposal (RFP) process for the deployment and operation of a nationwide public-safety broadband network (NPSBN), but bidders will have opportunities to continue asking questions and receive feedback until the contract is awarded, according to FirstNet officials.

FirstNet Contracting Officer Terrie Callahan provided additional details about how communications would be conducted with offerors that could result revised bids after initial proposals are submitted by the May 13 deadline, citing a clause in the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR).

“If you look at the FAR clauses, 52.215-1, reserves the right to have them or not have them,” Callahan said during the Pre-Proposal Conference, which was webcast. “And we would have them, if I feel that it’s meaningful and that it will help [bidders]—if I need to identify any deficiencies, significant weaknesses, any adverse past-performance information and to help you ensure that you’re bring the best solutions forward in your proposals.

“We’ll make those determinations as we go along throughout the process.”

While these conversations would not happen for months, the next opportunity for potential offerors to get government feedback about their proposals is to submit capability statements by March 31. Although not required to submit a bid, offerors submitting a capability statement will get early feedback about their that should be helpful as they prepare their final bid, Callahan said.

“We encourage you to submit the capability statements,” she said. “It’s a great opportunity for you, and it’s a great opportunity for us to ensure that the proposals that come in as a result are very strong, sound, nationwide solutions to meet public-safety needs.”

Callahan provided an update on progress in the question-and-answer proceeding for the FirstNet RFP, noting that 334 of the 402 questions submitted by the Feb. 12 deadline have been addressed.

“We have 68 left to go,” Callahan said. “We’re going to work around the clock, as hard as we can, to get these out as fast as we can to you. That way, it will give you good information to put into your capability statements and to help you start formulating your proposals.”

James Mitchell, director of FirstNet’s program-management office, said FirstNet officials hope to release the remaining answers to questions by the middle of next week. All questions have been answered internally, but the answers that have not been released are still going through a review process, he said.

Although the question-and-answer process has resulted in numerous changes to the [FirstNet](#) RFP, most of them have been administrative in nature or have involved clarifying concepts, Callahan said.

“We have not changed our strategy,” she said.

Mitchell emphasized that potential bidders are invited to be as creative as possible in their proposals and can “make as much [money] as you want” from the broadband capacity in the FirstNet system, as long as FirstNet’s public-safety objective are met.

“There are no hidden requirements,” Mitchell said. “It’s not like we’re trying to pull one over on you guys.”

“It’s very simple. We have 16 objectives, and in those objectives, we ask for a lot of things for public safety that we think are important. And far be it for us to hem you into a position where you can’t be creative and innovative in how you respond to that.”

FirstNet CEO Mike Poth echoed this sentiment during his presentation to potential bidders.

“The only way that public safety and FirstNet will be successful is if you are,” Poth said.

Poth said he is “cautiously optimistic” that FirstNet will get “some great offerings” during the RFP process and thanked interested parties for their efforts. However, Poth said it is important that industry, FirstNet and states/territories not get so involved in the “art of the deal” that they lose focus on the primary goal of providing first responders with important communications.

“Everything we do—and by ‘we,’ I mean FirstNet, public safety, the states and industry—should be [viewed through] the lens of what’s in the best interest of public safety,” he said.

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