

FirstNet contract on track for November award

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FirstNet is [answering hundreds of questions](#) around its massive Request for Proposals for the network it released in February. "None sent us running," said James Mitchell director of program management at the organization in a March 10 industry day presentation. "There were no red flags [and] we're not changing anything significantly."

FirstNet initially extended its deadline for final RFP proposals by two weeks, from April 29 to May 13, to deal with the 402 questions it received about the RFP.

According to the RFP's statement of objectives, the winning bidder will build and operate the system with 20 MHz of 700 MHz broadband spectrum under a lease agreement. In return, the company can monetize any unused network capacity.

Mitchell said there wouldn't be any further delays for the final May 13 proposal deadline. FirstNet officials, he said, have answered 334 of the RFP questions, and the remaining 68 should be completed by the week of March 14.

Those questions, he said, primarily dealt with administrative issues.

Mitchell and other FirstNet officials said the next important deadline is March 31, when capability statements from potential bidders are due. The voluntary statement, said Terrie Callahan, the contracting officer supporting FirstNet, should detail how bidders would implement their plan, not paint in broad strokes.

The Reston, Va., industry day drew about 300 registered attendees. Many of them are likely bidders, but representatives from states and public safety groups attended as well.

Although the network is aimed at state and local emergency responders, there is also interest from federal agencies, according to FirstNet President T.J. Kennedy. The organization, said Kennedy, has full-time staff "reaching out" to top IT managers and CIOs at federal agencies.

At least one federal agency has expressed interest in using the network in the past. Department of Homeland Security Deputy CIO Margie Graves and Customs and Border Protection CTO Wolf Tombe both said in January 2015 that FirstNet is just one of the emerging mobile communications technologies DHS is seeking to exploit.