Request for Proposal (RFP) Best Practices for Land Mobile Radio (LMR) Subscriber Units Procurement

Joint SAFECOM and National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (NCSWIC) Technology Policy Committee

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RFP Planning and Development

Request for proposal (RFP) planning and development is a long and involved process with many variables and considerations. RFP planners should take time to consider the people, resources, and user requirements needed to develop an RFP. The following "do's and don'ts" can help public safety users understand best practices in developing and preparing for RFP release and subscriber unit procurement.

People:

- Designate a project manager to coordinate the RFP development process
- Gather input from your most valuable resources—public safety end users ("front-line users")—on the user needs, usability, and functions required for successful equipment operations
- Educate public safety procurement officers and financial decision makers (e.g., elected officials) within your agency on land mobile radio prior to the procurement
- Consider hiring third-party support (e.g., consultants) to develop the RFP if in-house expertise is unavailable

- Develop an RFP without having a designated project manager to coordinate the process
- Develop an RFP without consulting public safety end users who will operate the equipment in the field on day-to-day operations
- Start planning and developing an RFP without input from procurement and legal officials, contract administrators, financial officers, technical leads, grant writers/managers, public safety agency leadership, and financial decision makers

Resources:

- Build external relationships with neighboring public safety agencies, and federal, state, local, and tribal government officials, to understand their communications capabilities and needs
- Use all available federal, state, local, tribal, and regional resources:
  - ✓ Statewide Interoperability Coordinators
  - ✓ Regional Coordinators
  - ✓ Previously developed RFPs
  - ✓ Templates
  - ✓ Contract administrators (federal, state, local, tribal, territorial)
  - ✓ Contract vehicles and agreements
  - ✓ Procurement guidance and systems (federal, state, local, territorial)
  - ✓ Approved vendor lists
  - ✓ Working groups
  - ✓ Grant guidance (e.g., SAFECOM, State Homeland Security, Department of Justice, tribal)
  - ✓ Compliance assessment guidance (e.g., Project 25 [P25] Compliance Assessment Program [CAP] Advisory Panel guidance)

- Miss the opportunity to coordinate with neighboring public safety agencies and government officials to ensure the equipment purchased will meet both your departmental needs, as well as support operable and interoperable communications with those neighboring jurisdictions
- Fail to make use of national, state, regional, and/or local resources that will help simplify the RFP development process and ensure the equipment purchased will meet the requirements of the procurement process, grant funding source, or technical compliance specifications
- Wait until the last minute to start the RFP planning and development process—experienced procurement officials recommend starting the RFP planning and development process at least 9 months before the RFP release date, if not more (the RFP process can take up to 3 years or more, depending on approval processes)

Requirements:

- Coordinate with public safety department leadership and public safety end users to conduct a thorough self-assessment of agency communications capabilities, needs, and gaps (e.g., frequency bands, form factor, encryption, budget projections)
- Ensure that proper spectrum licensing has been obtained from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) by the procuring agency or entity (if using third-party contractors, make sure the agency is involved in this process)
- Determine the most appropriate RFP/Business Model to procure subscriber units (e.g., buy versus rent, maintenance and upgrade schedules, and costs)


- Hesitate to contact other jurisdictions with similar compositions and technical needs to validate your requirements and learn about the devices they are using
- Wait until the RFP is released to secure spectrum licensing through the FCC

People:

- Coordinate with neighboring jurisdictions to explore opportunities to purchase equipment in bulk to support cost savings and ensure operability and interoperability
- Consider all available funding sources to help reduce purchasing costs (e.g., federal and state grant programs, federal and state procurement systems)
- Factor in all lifecycle maintenance and replacement costs
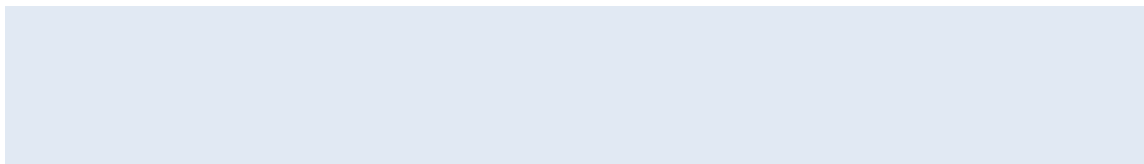
Developing and Reviewing the RFP

During the RFP development and review process, the RFP development team should be able to demonstrate a full understanding of system/device requirements and the justification for those requirements. The RFP development team should also be able to demonstrate an understanding of the selection criteria to be used during the vendor selection process.

All participants in the RFP development process should also follow established best practices when addressing administrative, technical, and cost considerations.

Administrative and Legal Considerations:

- Consider first releasing a Request for Information (RFI) to vendors to gauge costs and capabilities ("see what's out there")—obtaining information about available technologies from manufacturers in written form
- Write specific and descriptive requirements—provide vendors with explicit details on equipment, pricing, services, expectations
- Maintain a professional relationship with vendors and impartially review each vendor submission
- Carefully review product and service reviews from previous clients
- When using a federal or state purchasing program, ensure the RFP is compliant with all applicable program requirements, policies, and regulations

- Use an RFP template from a vendor because the RFP language could be misinterpreted and negatively impact the procurement

Technical Considerations:

Do
- Determine if your agency needs encrypted communications
- Determine if the vendor's equipment and features are P25-compliant and support operability/interoperability, as opposed to proprietary (resources include the P25 CAP, P25 Technology Interest Group, and SAFECOM/NCSWIC)

Don't
- Purchase non-standards based encryption if your agency plans to interoperate with agencies using Advanced Encryption Standard 256 encryption, which is P25-approved
- Select proprietary features and add-on features without fully understanding their impact on operability and/or interoperability
- Copy and paste features from industry standards unless intending to use all of those features

Do
- Fully evaluate the functional needs of the equipment from both a technical, as well as a usability standpoint
- Select equipment to meet the operable and interoperable needs of the public safety end user and department

Don't
- Select equipment with difficult to use features
- Select equipment not specifically designed for the challenging, all-weather/all-condition public safety environment
- Purchase equipment based on perceived affordability since the most economical solution is not always the optimum solution in terms of operability and interoperability and the safety of the public safety end user and the public

Cost Considerations:

- Properly weigh "cost" in RFP scoring, and provide justification for more expensive communications equipment, if needed
- Take into account the total lifecycle costs (including maintenance, replacement, and disposal), as opposed to just the initial purchase costs
- Consider compatibility with federal and state grant program requirements
- Understand that procurement and maintenance costs will likely be impacted by the quality and technical capabilities of equipment, particularly equipment designed to perform and undergo the rigors of 24/7 public safety use and equipment engineered for standards-based interoperability

- Acquire cheaper equipment or features without first understanding the impacts on operability, interoperability, and/or usability
- Miss funding, budget, or grant application deadlines