NEW QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS HAVE BEEN POSTED EACH WEEK. THE MAY 28, 1999 POSTING IS THE FINAL POSTING OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS IN RESPONSE TO THIS PROJECT AGREEMENT

May 28, 1999
Posting of Questions and Answers in Response to the Project Agreement for NLRB Solicitation Number 00-IT-SBA-0001

1) **Page 2, the Project Objective Section, What is the "optimal level?" Does the contractor define optimal level in its proposal to NLRB?**

Answer:

Optimal typically means "most desirable or satisfactory". The Project Team is looking for the "most" desirable approach(es) to maintain our technical environment at the "best possible level". There may be approaches or innovations that are proposed by you (the offerors) that are based on certain assumptions or interpretations, and these considerations may not be obvious to the Project Team. If it will clarify or assist the Project Team in better understanding your recommendations, we would encourage any explanations that would allow the Team to understand why your proposed method would be the most desirable.

2) **On Page 4, the Help Desk Section, it states "...on-call support may be needed " Define on-call support outside of standard hours of operation.**

Answer:

The word "on-call" inaccurately describes the intent of this requirement. The intent of this statement is to inform you that there may be circumstances in which the Help Desk hours may need to be extended. In the past year, this has not been necessary. However, if the need should arise for the Help Desk to operate past 6:00 p.m., or even on a weekend, the need would have to be compelling enough for the Government to make the request, and the expectation would be that the Help Desk would accommodate the request. If at such time that a request for working outside of the standard hours of operation is determined to be a change in the scope of the contract, the Government will either cease the request for work outside of the standard hours of operation, will modify the contract to change the standard hours of operation, or will have to exercise an option and negotiate a task order to cover the time period of the circumstantial requirement.

3) **On Page 5, End-User Support Section, it states that "The contractor is required to immediately notify the government in writing of any significant discrepancies found in the technical environment." What is a "significant discrepancy?"**

Answer:

One objective of the Government's Information Technology Branch is to modernize and maintain the technical environment. The lack of standardization jeopardizes the ability to maintain that environment. Efforts are underway to develop system baselines, and to better structure our use of optional applications approved for use at the NLRB. Even in the best of environments, changes will occur. Our intent is to have the technical support staffs in the best position to be proactive rather than reactive to our technical and customer needs. Examples of "significant discrepancies" include, but are not limited to: installations of unauthorized or personal software on the computers (including screensavers), changes made to configurations that could result in loss of productivity or extend the troubleshooting and resolution time of a problem, as well as errors or inconsistency issues that could have been inadvertently caused by a contractor or by the Government technical staff. Any technical issue that has the potential to impact users work, cause outages, or impede the support process must be reported to the appropriate Government manager(s) to review and determine the necessary action(s) to be taken.

Does this mean that we do not put personal software on a customer's PC and we notify the COTR if we observe this?

Answer:

Correct. Personal software is not to be loaded on any PC. The COTR is responsible for making sure that the technical aspects of the contract occur within the terms and conditions of the contract. The COTR should be informed and involved in resolving any issue that contains conflict, or causes questions regarding the scope or terms of the contract. The Contractor's staff will be required to take day-to-day instruction necessary to execute the specific contract requirements from the appropriate task managers for the specific work areas. As an example, network and desktop configuration issues are under the purview of the Chief for Information Infrastructure, but "ALL" support issues are the responsibility of the Chief for Customer Support. The roles and responsibilities associated with this requirement will be defined in orientations following the award of any resulting contract.

4) Is there a rating system for evaluation of the offers? What is it?

Answer:

For the current phase, Phase I., Step 3. Review Vendors' Submissions, Identify Viable Approaches, and Conduct Initial Down-Selection states: "The Purpose of this initial down-selection is to determine a manageable number of vendors with the greatest opportunity for award. The criteria that will be utilized for down-selection is:

(1) experience and past performance
(2) capability in providing similar services
(3) resources required to support a contract award
(4) viability of the approach
(5) overall cost.

The first four elements are of approximate equal weight and together are significantly more important than cost. However, in order to be down-selected, there must be a reasonable expectation that Project Objectives can be achieved within the budget forecast.

At this point offerors who rated unfavorably will be encouraged to voluntarily withdraw from the selection process..." (p.9)

Section XI. lists the five specific submissions required to demonstrate the offerors' abilities, and in Section XII., more specific instruction is provided regarding the content, format, and length of the submissions (p.11).

In Phase I of the initiative, the Project Team will be determining "a manageable number" of vendors "with the greatest opportunity" for award. The down-selection at this phase is voluntary. Those offerors that the Project Team rate unfavorably will be encouraged to voluntarily withdraw from the process.

This does not mean that the offeror must withdraw, just that the Project Team did not determine that they had the greatest opportunity for award, and withdrawing at this point could save the offeror from further expense associated with the competition. It also does not mean that the offeror has no opportunity for award, but that there was a manageable number that was determined to have a greater opportunity for award.

As conveyed in Phases II and III of the Project Agreement, the Statement of Need will contain the appropriate evaluation criteria for the mandatory down-selection.

5) **On Page 11 of the Project Agreement, Section XII.A., sentence 3 states "The Capability Statement shall be comprised of the five (5) sections listed below", However, only four (4) sections are listed. Should the number of sections really be four rather than five or is there a section missing from the Project Agreement?**

Answer:

The items listed under A. Capability Statement represent this submission requirement in its entirety. There is no omission in this section of the Project Agreement. The correct number is four (4). "Five (5)" is an error.

6) **Who is the incumbent of the subject contract? If the information cannot be provided in response to a question, how can the information be obtained?**

Rationale: Solicitation Number 00-IT-SBA-0001 is using the streamlined acquisition process known as ReMAP developed by the United States Patent and Trademark Office. When using this process, the United States Patent and Trademark Office has provided the name and address of the incumbent when asked. Therefore, it is unclear why this information was not provided when previously requested.

Answer:

While the Project Team is using the ReMAP process, the omission of the name and address of the incumbent was a decision made by this Project Team, and has nothing to do with any decisions made by other teams on other ReMAP initiatives. The intent of the Team was to send the message to all offerors that our only interest is on each offeror's merit and approach in responding to this Project Agreement. The Project Team is interested only in what each offeror can do for us and our requirement, and not on business strategies. The Project Team put a great deal of effort in developing the Project Agreement, and in providing information deemed critical for all offerors to compete in this effort. The identity of the incumbent does not offer any information that would impact offerors' ability to respond to the Project Agreement. The Project Team encourages all offerors to focus on truly understanding the requirement and presenting solutions that should be clear to us that you offer the best value to the Government.

7) **(Ref: Section III.A.2, page 4 of 18) Regarding the requirement to provide support to "All NLRB Sites from 8:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.,...," Does the Government require 8:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m. local time coverage for each location?**

Answer:

Yes. Every office location must have support available during their hours of operation. All office locations, and addresses can be found at the www.nlrb.gov web-site under "organization". Attachment #6 provides a (quantity) staffing summary for all offices.

8) **(Ref: Section XII.B.p, page 12 of 18) The Monthly Reports requested in this item may, for several of our customers, include information that they do not want released. This offeror requests that the Government accept samples of these reports that demonstrate format and general content.**

Answer:

Each offeror will need to use their best judgement for fulfilling this requirement. Obviously, we do not expect you to provide information that your customer does not want provided. However, the information typically found in a monthly report for similar scope of work as this requirement, usually does not represent proprietary or sensitive data. This submission is each offeror's opportunity to provide the Project Team with actual samples that represent the work they have performed that is similar, and assists the Team in determining the overall quality of the offeror's performance. The Project Team encourages each offeror to submit the most relevant information available.

9) **(Ref: Paragraph following Section XII.E, page 13 of 18) Regarding the font size requirements identified in the third sentence of this paragraph, will the Government permit text within "charts and graphs" to be smaller than 12 point, provided it is clearly readable?**

Answer:

The Project Team is interested in the content of each offer. It may be difficult to comfortably review any information that is presented in a font smaller than twelve (12) point; therefore, the Project Team requires all submissions to be in accordance with the Project Agreement.

10) **(Ref: Section XII.A.4, page 11 of 18) The Capability Statement is limited to twenty pages, however, the contractor is required to submit audited financial statements; which can be twenty pages. Therefore, it is requested that the financial statements not be included in the page count.**

Answer:

Agreed. An amendment will be made to exclude the financial statements from the Capability Statement page count.

11) Section XII.A.4 requires financial statements for year-end 1998 and interim statements for 1999 certified by an independent auditor. Pursuant to 13 CFR 124.602(c), certain 8(a) Participants are permitted to prepare statements in-house and therefore would not incur the cost of certified financials. Are non-certified financials acceptable where the prime's mentor would participate as a team member and guarantee performance?

Answer:

This particular competition is offered to those 8(a) firms in the "transitional phase" of the 8(a) Program, in accordance with CFR 13 Part 124.311(g). As such, the Project Team is requiring the certified audit as stated in the Project Agreement.

12) In Section XII.B, Past Performance, the second paragraph states "Offeror shall list five current/previous support contracts of similar nature to this proposed contract". In a Mentor/Protege Teaming relationship, will the combined past performance submissions of all team members suffice or must past performance submissions come from Prime only?

Answer:

Again, this competition is opened to those 8(a) firms in the "transitional phase" of the 8(a) Program. Any offeror competing must do so as a participant of that program, and the requirements of the Project Agreement. The Project Team does not recognize nor consider any issues associated with the Mentor/Protégé Teaming relationship for this initiative.

13) What is the current Network Monitoring System?

Answer:

The NLRB currently uses HP Openview for Netware and Cabletron Systems Remote Lanview for network monitoring. In addition, Compaq Insight Manager is being installed to monitor the Compaq Servers.

14) Is it possible to locate the Help Desk off-site?

Answer:

The Project Team is looking for your recommendation regarding the best configuration for handling Help Desk Operations.

One of the benefits of the Project Agreement Phase of the ReMAP process is the ability to have the vendor community review the Project Objective, review the

attachments which provide relevant information regarding the Agency's demographics, technical and customer environments, and allows the Government to hear from Industry regarding their recommendations for innovative approaches and solutions that would best meet and exceed our objectives. The Project Team will give due consideration to every recommendation received, and where appropriate, will incorporate the best of the best in the Statement of Need.

15) Can a site visit be arranged at Headquarters?

Answer:

The Project Team is not offering any site visits as part of this phase of the process.

16) What is the current staffing levels for all the 3 areas (Network Operations, Helpdesk and End-User Support)? Where is the current staff located?

Answer:

At this phase of the competition, the Project Team is looking for the vendor community to review Project Agreement and all attachments to determine and recommend approaches to best meet the project objectives.

May 21, 1999
Posting of Questions and Answers in Response to the Project Agreement for NLRB Solicitation Number 00-IT-SBA-0001

1) How many copies of the package are we to submit?

Answer:

Thank you for catching our oversight. Please submit seven (7) copies of your total package.

2) Network Operations - Will the contractor be responsible for obtaining updates to network drivers, operating systems, and applications or will the NLRB provide the necessary update files and inform the contractor when to perform such activities?

Answer:

Contractor personnel assigned to the Information Infrastructure Section will be responsible for obtaining updates, however, there may times when the workload dictates that updates be obtained by NLRB staff. All decisions regarding applying the updates will be the decision of the NLRB. The decision to apply the updates will be based on the need to fix an existing problem and ensuring minimal interruption in service to the users.

3) Help Desk - Page 4, second paragraph states that "The Help Desk will provide certified analysts for the standard suite of office automation applications." Will every analyst have to be certified in all office automation applications?

Answer:

No. However, it is strongly recommended that at least one person be certified in all applications. Keep in mind that if there is only one certified person at the Help Desk, there could be an issue of coverage if that individual is on leave or otherwise out of the office. The objective is to have a Help Desk staffed with individuals with high proficiency in working with the applications used by the NLRB. Having certification increases the likelihood that the analyst(s) really understand how these applications function in a professional desktop configuration and in a networked environment. This is required for the Help Desk to be able to answer questions and resolve problems at the initial call, without having to escalate to a second or third tier support staff member.

4) **End-User Support - Will the NLRB provide space for storage of microcomputer assets? Does the NLRB have a security policy manual and if yes will the contractor be provided a copy of the manual? Will the contractor be required to provide "physical security for all NLRB microcomputer assets (i.e at Washington Headquarters and the Regional Offices)?**

Answer:

Space is a problem at the NLRB. We will provide limited space for some storage, and that space would be secured.

The NLRB currently follows security guidelines as stated in OMB Circular A-130. There is no specific NLRB security policy manual.

There currently is no requirement for physical security such as locking down the equipment. We are in the process of developing a more comprehensive process for asset management. We welcome recommendations. Any vendor successful in acquiring a contract for this initiative will be required to participate in the development of the processes, and will be responsible for executing the asset management program.

5) **End- User Support - Page 5, first paragraph, states that " ? highly qualified hardware repair technicians to support the various configurations deployed throughout the country." Will the contractor's proposed service technicians be required to be certified for work on all of the NLRB's computer hardware platforms?**

Answer:

The intent is not to be limiting by saying we require all technicians to be certified in all of NLRB's platforms. Experience has shown that certification does not automatically mean that an individual has the requisite skills necessary to do the job required. This is often times demonstrated when we work with a technician at the manufacturer's site, and they provide inaccurate diagnoses and solutions. However, industry pushes the certifications, and in many cases the manufacturers' of the products require such certifications in order for an individual/company to work on their equipment or even qualify to acquire parts.

[Examples: Certified Compaq technicians are required to work on all Compaq network servers. Desktop repair technicians must be certified PC repair technicians and have experience working on Gateway and Dell PCs, Toshiba and Dell laptops, HP and Xerox printers).]

Warranties often create confusion regarding the requirements for maintenance. If a vendor can work within the warranties and provide the support within the requirements, then we encourage you to do so, but the warranties cannot override the requirements. NLRB's objective is to have a contractor with the resources available to keep our

equipment running, while maintaining a high percentage of customer satisfaction. We do not believe there is a single answer or solution to maintaining the current environment at NLRB. The agency is in an aggressive modernization effort that we believe will facilitate standardization and removal of obsolete equipment. As a result of the variables associated with the technical environment, office locations and sizes, and end-user competency levels, we welcome industry's knowledge, experience, and recommendations on how we should best go about providing sound solutions in maintaining our hardware and software, ensure customer satisfaction, and have the solution(s) be cost effective. We are asking you to provide us with solutions that work.

May 14, 1999
Posting of Questions and Answers in Response to the Project Agreement for NLRB Solicitation Number 00-IT-SBA-0001

1) **What does the term "will be conducted with those firms in the transitional phase of the 8(a) program" mean?**

Answer:

Those 8(a) firms who are in the last five years of the program are considered to be in the transitional phase of the program. Any firm questioning what phase of the program they are in should contact the SBA for verification.

2) **Is there a required due date for Step 2 of Phase I (offeror initial submissions) and will the required documents be made available in Word and Excel formats at your web site?**

Answer:

Step 2 of Phase I states: "Offerors who wish to respond to the government's needs as outlined in this Project Agreement will be requested to submit all documents as defined in Section XI (Summary). Offerors will also be requested to submit statutorily required Representations and Certifications for review by the Government." (page 8)

Section XI. Summary states: "Offerors shall be responsible for accessing the web page (http://www.nlrb.gov/proc/it/ities) for any changes to this Project Agreement. All changes shall be posted at this location." (page 10)

"The Project Agreement and all attachments were created either in Microsoft Word or Excel for Office '97." (page 10)

" In summary, offerors are required to submit the following in response to the Project Agreement (See Section XII for Format of Offerors Responses to Project Agreement):" (page 11)

Section XII. Format of Offeror Responses to Project Agreement states: "...All documents shall be received no later than 3:00 p.m., local time, June 11, 1999, in the National Labor Relations Board, Office of Contract and Procurement, Suite 6100, to the attention of Paula Roy...." (page 13)

The Project Agreement and all associated documents were created in Word or Excel for Office '97, and are in PDF format on the web site. Acrobat has been made available for your access to the documents.

3) **Is there an incumbent for this requirement? If the answer is yes, please identify the incumbent and indicate if the incumbent is eligible to bid on this requirement as a "prime".**

Answer:

Yes, there is an incumbent, and they will be eligible to bid on this requirement.

4) **What are the timelines for the various milestone events? For example, what is the submission date for the completed Project Agreement?**

Answer:

The completion date for the "responses" to the Project Agreement is found in Section XII. Format of Offeror Responses to Project Agreement which states: "...All documents shall be received no later than 3:00 p.m., local time, June 11, 1999, in the National Labor Relations Board, Office of Contract and Procurement, Suite 6100, to the attention of Paula Roy...." (page 13)

Section VII. Milestones states: "...A Statement of Need (SON) containing target milestones will be issued to those Offerors, after the initial down-select, whose approaches and cost estimates are considered to be both economically viable and technically capable of meeting the mission objective in response to the Project Agreement." (page 7)

5) **Why is the procurement restricted to 8(a) firms in the transition phase of the SBA Program? 8(a) firms in the SBA Mentor-Protégé Program should be allowed to compete for this procurement.**

Answer:

Given the timeline and availability of resources to conduct this acquisition, it is necessary for the Project Team to consider what is a manageable size competition. The intent of conducting the competition with those firms only in the transitional phase is to promote a healthy competition while not jeopardizing the ability for the Government's resources to complete this process and meet the mission.