

Fort Wayne bidding process met with controversy

Posted At : November 21, 2011 10:13 AM | Posted By : Joanna Salini

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Proposals were received from several agencies in response to Fort Wayne, Indiana's solicitation for a new emergency communications system for its police, fire, and paramedics agencies. After the bidding process was complete, Motorola was found to have submitted the only complete bid for the system.

The city of Fort Wayne along with Allen County encompass the Multi-Agency Communications Partnership (MACP) responsible for releasing the [request for proposals \(RFP\)](#) that has created backlash from participating vendors, most notably Raytheon.

Raytheon Network Centric Systems submitted a letter on October 26 claiming Fort Wayne's bidding process was unfair, not subject to competition, and that the specifications were biased and catered toward Motorola. The core of the argument comes from the need for compatibility between the requested P25 radio system and the current SmartNet system provided by Motorola. The county's SmartNet system is an 800MHz trunked radio system used by all public service entities. The specifications for the new radio system required interoperability and full integration with the existing Motorola SmartNet system, but the city stated it is willing to consider other solutions.

Others have joined Raytheon in voicing their concern about the unfair bidding process and are arguing that because specifications are company-specific, they will cost taxpayers millions of unnecessary dollars. The city estimates the project could cost up to \$24 million, but a representative from RELM Wireless Corporation, another bidder on the project, said the city could save between \$2.8 million and \$6.3 million by considering another solution.

This story is not so unfamiliar. Earlier in 2011, Raytheon and Motorola were at odds when Raytheon was selected for a \$700 million contract to build out the Los Angeles Regional Interoperable Communications System ([LA-RICS](#)). During negotiations with Raytheon, Motorola issued a protest against the award and claimed the county had distributed proprietary information, which caused the project to ultimately be rebid.

Analyst's Take

It is not uncommon for procurement practices to be challenged, especially with \$24 million on the line. In the case of Fort Wayne, the city could be searching for its own ways to save money. By integrating the new radio system with the current SmartNet system, although seemingly biased, the city avoids having to replace the county's entire communications system. Although this project is much smaller in scope than LA-RICS, Motorola and Raytheon once again prove to be the front runners for communications system contracts.

It is important for vendors to make sure they address their proposals in such a way to meet a city, county or state's current needs. Vendors should always be aware of existing systems and technologies and propose a viable solution to work with those components, or structure their proposals to offer something better. Vendors should also familiarize themselves with different protest rules and regulations in case bidding procedures are challenged. In addition, vendors should learn how to appeal an award in the event the resulting contract is protested.