

Greater Lowell Regional Emergency Communication Center Feasibility Study RFP

Responses to Questions Received as of 11/05/09

1. The RFP indicates that the Working Group completed some work under the FY 2009 District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) program.
 - a. **Should any of their work be used or considered in this study? This is particularly useful to know so that proposers do not include work that may have already been completed by the Working Group.**

Using a relatively small amount of funding provided to NMCOG through the state's District Local Technical Assistance Program (DLTA), the 911 Working Group has principally focused on establishing whether there is mutual interest among the NMCOG communities in undertaking a feasibility analysis for an RECC or regional PSAP. Once this fact was established, the group then outlined the issues that would need to be investigated in the feasibility analysis, and agreed to apply for grant monies from the State 911 Office to fund this effort.

- b. **Are the results of their work available for review prior to the submission of proposals?**

The grant application submitted to the State 911 Office and this RFP are the only written documents that are available. Both documents can be found on NMCOG's website at www.nmcoq.org.

2. **Please define the level of specificity you wish with respect to the question: "How does the current 911 system for police/fire dispatch services work in each NMCOG community across the region?"**
 - a. **Are you concerned with equipment, or operations, within or without the dispatch center?**

The selected consultant is expected to outline how each of the nine communities currently handles all calls made to 911 in terms of dispatching fire, police and EMS services. Procedural issues, protocol and equipment are all important issues that should be investigated and addressed in order to establish the baseline conditions and better understand the changes that would be needed in transitioning to a regional model.

- b. **Do you want a general view or detailed description of full end-to-end operations in each community?**

As described in the response to the question above, the focus should be on how dispatch services for fire, police and EMS are provided currently within each of the nine communities. Sufficient detail should be presented to provide the communities with the information necessary to understand the changes that would be required in transitioning to a regional system.

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- 3. Please expand on your expectation for breadth of answer to the question: “How well do the fire and police departments work together within each community in addressing 9-1-1 and dispatch issues?”**

Presently, some of our member communities have separate police and fire dispatchers. In other communities, there is one dispatcher handling police, fire and EMS dispatching. There has been concern expressed by those communities that have separate dispatchers that police and fire departments have different protocol, codes, and operating procedures and that combining these services into one dispatch entity will be problematic. The study should outline whether the current systems within each community could be improved to allow for better coordination between police and fire.

- a. In particular, what metrics or criteria should be used in evaluating “how well?”**

The consultant is expected to determine the best metrics or criteria based on your professional experience in undertaking similar projects.

- 4. The fourth question asked in Section 1.1 addresses cost of a regionalized paradigm, but does not provide details on what that model would look like.**

- a. Is the COG interested in different models and how many models should be evaluated?**

The RFP asks that the consultant outline two models: one for creating an RECC and another for creating a Regional PSAP. The specifics of these models are to be determined by the consultant based on what the consultant believes would work best for the NMCOG region. The costs for implementing the regional models, and for operating and maintaining each of the two alternatives should be detailed, as described in the RFP.

- 5. How many of the nine communities included in the study have collective bargaining agreements in place?**

This is an issue that the consultant is expected to research. However, NMCOG staff believes that all nine communities have collective bargaining agreements in place.

- 6. Under Task A the consultant is required to “Examine the current dispatch facilities in the nine member municipalities, and validate or invalidate the need for new physical plant for all purposes, including examination of potential for increased opportunities for cost-sharing in future technologies and dispatch equipment.”**

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- a. **Does the NMCOG intend for the consultant to include a spatial examination of the dispatch center or is the intent of this task to focus on the dispatch systems and technologies only?**

The consultant is expected to determine if the current dispatch system, including the physical facility, technology, and equipment is meeting the community's needs and is compliant with standards. There is also an interest in determining whether any of the existing centers could be expanded to serve as the RECC or back-up center. Some of the region's communities have made significant investments in their public safety facilities in recent years, and the preference would be to build upon those investments, if possible.

7. Task A: Existing Conditions –

- a. **Are automated call accounting systems available in all PSAPs?**

All PSAPs use Magic software for 911 calls, which has the ability to generate reports. The 2008 911 call volumes by community can be found on the state's website at http://www.mass.gov/Eeops/docs/setb/2008_Call_Volume.pdf.

In addition, each community may have 4-8 lines recording other calls that come in.

- b. **What criteria should be used for the assessment, or does the COG simply want some sort of description and comment?**

Information regarding the call volumes for police, fire and EMS in each municipality should be provided, based on data reported by each community. Information regarding average response times should be compiled. The point of gathering this information is to document whether communities can expect to see a change in average response times with an RECC or regional PSAP, and to understand the call volumes that would likely be handled by a regional system.

8. Task B requires the consultant to “Analyze the public safety operational preparedness and response under a regionalized system, in terms of the benefits and disadvantages. This analysis should include an assessment of response times within each municipality under a RECC/Regional PSAP.”

- a. **It appears to be asking the consultant to analyze the response time of emergency responders (e.g., time that it takes an emergency responder to arrive at the scene from the time the dispatcher transmits the call) in the nine communities. Is it the NMCOG's intent that the consultant will examine potential efficiencies in the dispatch time (e.g., time from when the 9-1-1 call is received in the RECC to the time that it is ready to be dispatched to emergency responders)?**

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Yes. There has been much discussion among the working group regarding the possibility of call stacking with a regional dispatch system, thereby delaying response times.

9. In the 7th bullet under Task B, the consultant is required to “Analyze the capacity for coordination of local police, fire, and EMS resources, including response to routine events and major disasters.”

- a. Will the NMCOG clarify the meaning of capacity for coordination of local police, fire, and EMS resources? How do these agencies currently coordinate these resources?**

We are asking the consultant to assess how our communities are now coordinating police, fire and EMS resources to determine if there is potential to increase efficiencies and coordination through an RECC or regional PSAP. The consultant is expected to compare what is now in place with the coordination that would occur with a regional call center, and to assess whether there are opportunities for improved efficiency or level(s) of service. For example, in the event of a major fire within a community, would having a RECC in place provide additional resources and a higher level of service, given that multiple dispatchers would be available to handle the surge in calls?

10. Under Task B, Analyze how a RECC/Regional PSAP would affect the array of services provided to dispatch entities and the ability to respond to 911 calls.

- a. Are they asking for an analysis of first responder configuration?**

The response to this question is similar to those above. We are looking for the consultant to outline how a 911 call will be handled at the RECC or regional PSAP, and to quantify the anticipated response times, etc. Quality of service is important to our local communities, as well as the cost of service delivery. In our suburban communities, dispatchers are often tasked with job duties that are outside the role of dispatcher. For example, some of the dispatchers serve as the Police Department receptionist and deal directly with citizens.

11. Under Task B, “Identify the need for and possible location of a backup communications center, should the main site fail for any reason.”

- a. What criteria would the COG accept as reasonable for the consultant to make such a site selection?**

As mentioned previously, the communities would like to build upon what is already in place, if possible. A back-up communications center needs to be identified, particularly in the event of a major telecommunications failure, which has happened in at least one of our communities recently.

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12. Under Task B, “Identify any infrastructure that will be needed to communicate with a regional dispatch system relative to municipal fire alarm telegraph dispatch systems, ADT-type residential notification systems, etc.”

a. Will the COG supply the technical specifications for the “fire alarm telegraph dispatch systems”?

NMCOG does not have access to this information. The consultant may have to collect the data or obtain the information directly from the communities.

13. What specific information can the COG give us on salient characteristics, demographics and geography that we can use?

A wide variety of demographic information is available on NMCOG’s website at www.nmcoq.org. There is a link to Census data provided on the website, and you may also want to refer to some of the documents, such as the Greater Lowell Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Update for 2008, which contains data compiled from 2007 U.S. Census Bureau estimates.

14. Regarding the comprehensive review of the human resources dimensions of the COG’s participating entities, is the basic information readily available in one central repository to facilitate review or will we have to survey all the municipalities to acquire it.

You will need to acquire this information directly from the communities.

15. What would constitute a 9-1-1 surge in the COG’s opinion?

A 911 surge would consist of any significant event which precipitates an unusually high volume of calls. This surge could be the result of a natural disaster, a fire, an explosion, etc.

16. The analysis of the capacity for coordination of [assets] for a major disaster will entail many other constituencies---such an analysis is fairly large, could the COG be more specific as to the extent of the desired analysis?

We are only asking that you address the dispatch services and coordination with first responders. We are not asking that you evaluate the entire CEMP Plan for a municipality.

17. What constitutes a “demonstration” that a satisfactory arrangement can be achieved, other than the presence of other regionalize centers?

The communities are interested in knowing whether the establishment of an RECC or regional PSAP is cost-effective, efficient, and politically feasible. The final report should provide the data

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needed for each community to make an informed decision as to whether regionalizing 911 call dispatch services makes sense for their particular community.

- 18. Section 3.1 (B) references funding provided through a \$100,000 grant, and Section 5.0 Evaluation criteria for the Fee indicates evaluation based on the budget available. Is the budget limited to \$100K? If not, please provide the total budget.**

The total budget for this project is \$100,000. We are asking that you provide this service on a cost- competitive basis.

- 19. Task A 2nd bullet – is the reference to “physical plant” related to HVAC, etc?**

We are asking that you consider the local facilities with an eye toward providing efficient 911 dispatch services. Is the facility adequate to meet the dispatching needs of the community? Is the equipment adequate or is there enough work space for the dispatcher? We are not interested in other building issues such as HVACs or the condition of prisoner holding cells, etc

- 20. Task B 2nd last bullet – assess possibility of incorporating a 3-1-1 center – This could significantly increase scope depending on the number of agencies to be examined. We may want to ask a clarifying question on this (how many agencies in total would participate in the 3-1-1 center?) or possibly propose it as an option.**

None of our member communities currently has a 311 center. We are interested in learning whether or not it would be feasible to incorporate a 311 center within the 911 center. Obviously, there would be added capital and operational costs that would be incurred in delivering this service. We are looking to quantify these additional costs and to understand how such a system might work. At this point, we would envision all nine communities participating. Currently, the offices of the City/Town Clerks, City and Town Managers, and Chief Elected officials are primarily fulfilling this role.

- 21. Task B last bullet – Outline the impact of a regional PSAP on community policing, and the level and quality of service to residents**

- a. This could only be performed at a high level based on general information and information provided through discussions. Please provide clarification and assumptions.**

Members of the 911 Working Group have expressed concern that the establishment of an RECC or regional PSAP will reduce their interaction with the community, thereby negatively impacting their community policing programs. We are asking the consultant to document whether this concern is valid, based on the experience of other communities that are part of a regional call center. There is also concern that regional dispatchers will not be as familiar with individual residents of the community who are frequent users of the 911 system, due to medical or personal issues, thereby, reducing the quality of service that these individuals receive.

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- 22. On page 7 of the RFP, section 3.1B states: “The Proposal shall also include the rate schedule(s) for all personnel working on the contract.” Could you please clarify what is meant by “rate schedule”? Is it simply the hourly rate of each of the persons proposed for the effort?**

Yes, the hourly salary rate of each person working on the contract should be provided.

- 23. What is the actual number of existing PSAPs to be included in the study? Is it possible to receive a complete listing of the existing PSAPs, Sheriff’s Departments, police departments, and fire dispatch agencies, etc. that are included in the study?**

There are nine communities within the study area. Some have consolidated police and fire dispatch services, others do not. There is no county government in place in Middlesex County at this time, so 911 calls are not routed through the Sheriff’s office. NMCOG staff is not aware of a written list of PSAPs that could be provided.

- 24. Under Section 3.2, Task B, Bullet One: Does the NMCOG have a Regional PSAP or Emergency Dispatch Center they would specifically like considered for the evaluation?**

NMCOG has no pre-determined regional dispatch facilities in mind. However, there is a regional dispatch center that has been operating on Cape Cod for some time, and another is being established in Essex County through the Sheriff’s Department.