

Minutes from the Pre-Proposal Conferences conducted
August 30 & 31, 2011 at U.S. Embassy Ottawa, Room 210
RFQ No. SCA52511Q0015
Multi-Protocol Label Switching (MPLS) for U.S. Mission Canada

Introduction

The pre-proposal conference was conducted to provide potential offerors the opportunity to ask questions and request clarifications regarding the solicitation. U.S. Embassy and contractor representatives introduced themselves prior to the start of the question and answer session. Questions submitted before the pre-proposal conferences were also discussed during the meeting. Minutes of the meeting will be recorded along with all questions and answers. A copy will be distributed to each offeror and posted on the U.S. Embassy internet website. A meeting was held on August 30th, 2011 and a video conference session was held on August 31, 2011. Additional questions after the pre-proposal conference should be submitted no later than COB September 9, 2011. The U.S. Embassy will not conduct any meeting or video conference after these pre-proposal conferences. Proposals are due on September 12, 2011, no later than 4:00 P.M.

Questions and Answers

The following questions were raised during the meeting and answers are being provided:

- 1) Q: Is there a weighing factor given to Cost vs. Technical Merit, if so can you outline that for us?

A: Yes. All proposals will be evaluated based on price and technical merits. Award will be made to the lowest priced technically acceptable offeror. Evaluation criteria for contract award are outlined under Section 4 of the RFQ.

- 2) Q: There is an outlined due date of Sept. 12, 2011, 4PM. Is this for quote only? Assuming the Offeror is compliant with the outlined RFQ, would the submission of a quote be sufficient for this date or is a full response required?

A: A complete proposal should be submitted for this solicitation. To be considered complete and in compliance with the requirements of the solicitation, each proposal should include both prices required under Section 1.II and technical documents required under Section 3.

- 3) Q: Is there an opportunity when the U.S. Embassy will negotiate prices with the offeror after receipt of proposals?

A: Yes. The U.S. Embassy will determine if offeror's initial proposal meets the solicitation requirements. If the proposal is determined within the competitive range, the Government may conduct written negotiations with the offeror through a request for revision of the final quotation.

- 4) Q: I understand your proposed phased approach to growth on the MPLS. Data being the primary factor at the beginning, however, you talk about video and voice as well. Are the bandwidth requirements outlined in the RFQ sufficient for all 3 platforms or are these bandwidth requirements for data only at this time with the ability to be scalable as you bring on voice and video?

A: Our estimate is the bandwidth is sufficient based on our current configuration and the number of PRIs at each location.

- 5) Q: You have outlined 8 locations in the RFQ. We understand no MPLS exists today, however, who is the current provider for your network and data infrastructure?

A: The U.S. Embassy has multiple service providers. The current situation no longer meets Mission Canada's requirements; information related to the current service is not relevant to the new requirements outlined in this solicitation.

- 6) Q: Is it possible to request for the number of users at each site and number of simultaneous call requirement?

A: The number of users at each site will be provided. Offerors are requested to provide their own estimates of the simultaneous call requirements, accompanied by relevant pricing structures.

- 7) Q: Is it acceptable for the offerors to provide services in increments that would be different from what is outlined in the RFQ?

A: Yes. The service levels outlined in the RFQ set the minimum requirements. Each acceptable proposal must address the required pricing structure and technical requirements. Each service provider is unique in terms of the structure of their product or the pricing structure embedded in their invoicing system. The US Embassy would like to avoid incurring additional costs resulting from changes the offeror needs to incorporate into the marketing structure of their proposed solutions. The goal is to also eliminate any extra costs resulting from the modifications required for invoicing systems. All offerors are encouraged to include addenda detailing their pricing structure, which will be evaluated by the TEP. Each offeror is required to extract information from their unique schedule of pricing and complete all fields in the pricing clause. This will ensure fair comparison of cost elements amongst the proposals received from various sources.

- 8) Q: How many DIDs and main numbers does U.S. Embassy have? Can this information be provided to the offerors?

A: Yes. Information will be provided by email to the prospective offerors.

- 9) Q: Technical Evaluation Panel would like to know what will be the deployment timeline after the contract award?

A: All prospective offerors have stated that, assuming that a 100 Mb connection is available at every location, deployment can be completed within 60 days. In case any additional infrastructure is required, the term of deployment may increase up to 180 days, depending on the level of infrastructure available in different locations.

10) Q: Is it possible to extend the proposal submission due date?

A: No. The contract award deadline is September 30, 2011, and current submission deadline of September 12, 2011 may not be postponed to permit evaluation and discussion of offers received.

11) Q: The requirements provided within the RFP documents lists the State Department locations throughout Canada requiring private MPLS services. Please clarify if there are also requirements for private MPLS services to connect US Mission Canada to any of the State Department locations in the USA?

A: There is currently no requirement to connect the US Embassy cloud with other locations in the USA, however, the need for such requirement may be established in the future.

12) Q: Please provide additional information regarding the ability to access the public Internet. Is it expected that the vendor is to provide this functionality along with the private MPLS network? Additional details regarding the security requirements for accessing the public Internet is required as well as the required bandwidth capacity to the Public Internet.

A: The current VPN runs over the public Internet. This VPN also currently connects each site with Ottawa and Washington DC; the VPN should continue to function within the MPLS cloud as well as provide a method to reach Washington DC via public Internet. Ottawa's VPN is 10MB and all the other sites are 3MB.

13) Q: MPLS services are expected to be terminated at each State Department location using a Customer Edge (CE) device such as a router or switch. Does the State Department require the contractor to provide and manage the CE device at each location? If the answer is yes, what levels of service is required - i.e. Installation, Configuration, Maintenance, Management?

A: Due to possible life-cycle possible problems, we request that the vendor manage the CE. Please see page 14.

14) Q: The RFP requests the vendor to provide/provision and install Mitel MCD 3300 controllers. Is the selected vendor also required to provide ongoing maintenance and management? Can the vendor propose an alternate hardware solution as long as it meets the requirements to serve as an interface to the existing PBX infrastructure?

A: Prospective quoters can deviate from the requirement to install Mitel MCD 3300 controllers and offer alternative solutions outlining how they will meet the technical requirements of the RFQ.

15) Q: The network solution requires an understanding of the expected voice loading to ensure traffic priority is given to voice marked as Expedited Forwarding (EF). Please provide the expected maximum number of simultaneous voice calls at each location that are to be routed via the MPLS network.

A: The US Embassy does not have information about the projected number of simultaneous calls. Each prospective quoter is expected to propose a solution based on prevailing industry practice.

- 16) Q: Off-Net voice calls will be routed via the MPLS network to an IP trunking gateway. Please provide the estimated number of simultaneous voice calls expected that will be routed to the IP trunking gateway for off-net calling.

A: The U.S. Embassy is unable to provide the estimated number of simultaneous calls. The IP trunking functionality should allow for a voice call to be routed within the MPLS amongst all locations across Canada and "exit" the cloud as a local call in the respective location. For example, a phone call from U.S. Embassy in Ottawa to a hotel in Vancouver should be routed within the cloud between the US Embassy in Ottawa and the Consulate General in Vancouver and exit the cloud using the PBX switch in Vancouver as if it were a local call using the vendor's VOIP capabilities and not through a PRI. All international calls initiated in any of the locations shall exit the cloud through the vendor's VOIP system at the appropriate location without being routed amongst locations within the cloud.

- 17) Q: Can the State Department provide additional details regarding the need for temporary/additional services including how quickly these temporary/additional services must be provisioned and typical time period of use?
Is it correct to assume that at the end of this temporary time period service would need to be reverted back to the original prescribed bandwidth?

A: Temporary additional services refer to the capability of MPLS to exceed the allocated bandwidth when all voice, data and video capacities are utilized to their full extent. MPLS shall accommodate unforeseen increase in the volume of communication activities and provide voice, data and video users with temporary additional communication resources at a predictable additional cost. For the purpose of this solicitation this temporary additional service is defined as the "burst mode." The burst mode must provide for both "horizontal" as well as "vertical" flexibility, meaning that the allocated bandwidth allows for borrowing unused portions of voice, data and video components within the established MPLS bandwidth at no additional cost and before the automated burst mode would allow for exceeding the regular bandwidth and incur additional charges.

Additional information can be found in Section 1.E and Attachment 1, Section 1.3, bullet 9 of RFQ package.

- 18) Q: Clarification is requested for the "minimum amount equivalent to 1GB". Can the State Department define what is the expected bandwidth required for temporary services to each listed location.

A: Reference to 1GB bandwidth is a typo in the solicitation package. The minimum required capacity is 85 MB.

- 19) Q: Clarification is requested for the “Price Currency” of the pricing schedule.
Will the State Dept accept the price proposal in US Dollars?
Will State Dept accept the invoices for the services in US Dollars?

A: All offers must be submitted in Canadian currency for the purpose of fair comparison. Prospective Quoters have to assume the risks associated with changes in the currency exchange rate. Acceptability of invoices in US dollars is an accounting issue and will be made in the event that the contract is awarded to a US- based service provider.

- 20) Q: Clarification is requested for the pricing schedule and HW/SW required delivering MPLS service. Will the State Dept take ownership of the required equipment?

A: Yes. All equipment must be new and covered by the standard manufacturer’s warranty. The offerors are welcome to provide information regarding early equipment upgrade options.

- 21) Q: Clarification is requested for the pricing schedule, related to network connectivity CLIN.

Can vendors provide breakdown of services listed under particular CLINs? And can the vendor include optional services.

A: Yes. Assuming that abbreviation CLIN stands for the Contract Line Item Number, all prospective quoters are welcome to expand the line items and provide clarifications and/or breakdown of services pertaining to a particular line item in a format of a sub-paragraph.

- 22) Q: Clarification is requested for the pricing schedule, related to Temporary Additional Service, and not to exceed CAD\$5,000.00 for the year.

A: The amount for temporary additional services is an estimate only used to assess the scale of acquisition and ensure compliance with the Federal Acquisition Regulation. The service providers have no obligation to monitor the maximum amount and must not modify the level of services without a specific order for any additional service(s) signed by a Contracting Officer.

- 23) Q: What is your standard installation?

A: Line can accommodate up to 100MB but may be modified in 10MB increments.

- 24) Q: Do you intend to maintain the existing equipment?

A: Yes. All prospective offerors are welcome to provide additional equipment maintenance options in a format of an addendum.

25) Q: If the offer is not 100% accurate or technically acceptable, would the U.S. Government step into negotiations for the purpose to obtain additional information and make the offer technically acceptable.

A: The U.S. Government reserves the right to conduct written negotiations, however, evaluation of quotes and award of the contract is made to the lowest priced technically acceptable offer. Therefore, as long as the Government receives one technically acceptable offer prior to the established deadline, the offer is considered lowest priced technically acceptable which may prevent the Government from entering into negotiations with alternative offerors despite more advantageous pricing structures.

26) Q. Can the prospective quoters see the breakdown of voice-data-video communication requirements?

A: No. The U.S. Government does not have this information. Prospective offerors should provide a solution based on the number of voice and data users and in accordance with prevailing industry practices.

27) Q. Must services be delivered through a fiber connection for all locations?

A: Yes.

28) Can the U.S. Government award a contract to multiple parties based on the costs per location.

A: No. The Government will not award a contract to half a company or to multiple service providers. One of the key requirements is the reliability of services and the contract will be awarded to only one service provider.

29) Q. Is Washington an MPLS site?

A: Yes. However, no MPLS to MPLS connection to Washington is required at this time. Connection to Washington DC is to be accomplished through VPN connected to MPLS. VPN Tunneling with Washington is required for each location. VPN Encryption is required. Each location within MPLS cloud already has the encryption box and only requires routing to the other boxes and Washington DC.

30) Q. How should the MPLS be connected to internet?

A: The service provider is required to establish a dedicated MPLS cloud for U.S. Mission locations across Canada (without sharing traffic with any other party) and provide secure access to the internet. The capacities of the MPLS must not interfere with the VPN. The MPLS must use separate capacity from the connection used for access to internet. MPLS shall be 100% dedicated to the users of the cloud with no "competition" with external Internet users. As stated on page 8, Internet access must be done with a secure connection, limited to the device requesting access via MAC address and without firewall interruption.

31) Q. What is the future of PRIs currently used by U.S. Government?

A: The goal is to eliminate PRI connections and replace them with the MPLS cloud.

32) Q. What is the normal portion of bandwidth allocated to a voice call?

A: 90Kb/call, no less than 60Kb/call compressed – industry standard.

33) Would the U.S. Government provide advance notice about the anticipated increase in activities requiring additional bandwidth (burst)?

A: The Government may inform the service provider about upcoming scheduled events requiring additional bandwidth, however, the automated burst functionality is required in order to handle unplanned increases in the level of services.

34) Q. Is the service provider required to install and manage equipment or only install it?

A: The service provider is required to install and manage the MPLS equipment.

35) Q. Should the industry standard change and require upgrade to the level of service, would the Government consider early upgrade of MPLS equipment?

A: The Government may consider early equipment upgrade based on the input from the Technical Evaluation Panel and in accordance with terms and conditions outlined in the Technological Refreshment clause of the contract.

36) Is the government planning to keep currently used equipment?

A: Yes.

37) What is the deadline for questions?

A: The Government will not hold additional meetings. All questions shall be submitted in writing before 5pm September 9, 2011.

Conclusion

The conference concluded and attendees were thanked for their presence and expression of interest in serving the U.S. Government. The meeting was adjourned.

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