

## ***Enhancing Competition and Collaboration through Electronic Requests for Information (RFIs) at the U.S. Department of the Interior***

### ***Introduction: The Electronic Request for Information***

The National Business Center (NBC) of the U.S. Department of the Interior designed a Web-based, electronic Request for Information (RFI) to gather valuable information for developing a strategy for replacing and integrating Interior financial management systems.

The electronic RFI, consistent with the Steering Committee's vision and the goals of the Joint Financial Management Improvement Project (JFMIP), asked vendors in the marketplace to provide information and demonstrations on the following, commercially available, financial management systems: core financial, acquisition, personal property/fleet management, travel, budget, financial assistance, real property, and enterprise knowledge management (reports). They were to answer all questions electronically.

By doing this, DOI was able to reach a large group of vendors and invite them to easily provide information. Vendors praised the effort, saying it required a reduced level of effort to provide better information in a more timely fashion.

The specific objectives of the RFI were to determine if Commercial Off-The-Shelf (COTS) software is available to meet the DOI financial management needs; determine estimated costs of potential COTS solutions; determine the timeframe required to replace the existing financial management systems; determine the estimated costs associated with integrating the COTS product with legacy systems; and determine if outsourcing services are available to meet the operational needs of the Department for financial management.

### ***A Team Approach at Interior***

April to June 2000:

Participation by a large number of functional experts in financial management areas contributed greatly to the success of the RFI project. Functional Teams of experts from all across the Department were identified. These experts developed lists of questions and demonstrations that were used in the RFI to solicit information from the vendor community. The National Business Center (NBC) of the Department consolidated the questions and demonstration topics into a final Request for Information.

### ***The RFI was on the Web for live review and response***

NBC then designed a Web site that contained all instructions, text, questions, forms, and demonstration tasks for the use and completion by participating vendors.

The specific objectives of the RFI Web site were to provide a central repository of information for the vendors to review the DOI requirements outlined in the RFI; provide

a central means for the vendors to submit responses to the RFI and to change pertinent information until the responses were due; provide a central site for the government reviewers to receive information on the demonstrations to be conducted as well as to review the vendor responses; and provide a central repository for the summary reports from the government reviewers on each system demonstrated, as well as the vendor responses to questions submitted at the demonstrations.

### ***Components of the Electronic RFI***

The RFI was comprised of the following matrixes:

#### **Technical Questions:**

The RFI requested responses concerning functionality based on whether the "functionality is available in COTS now" or "functionality planned for COTS" pertaining to the software offered. Tabs indicated the various Financial Management Systems software requested under the RFI.

#### **Cost Questions:**

The RFI requested responses estimating costs for licenses to the software; implementation of modules; maintenance; training; and technical support. There were three columns to be completed, low range, expected cost, and high range.

#### **Time Questions:**

The RFI requested responses indicating the time frame for delivery of the software, implementation of modules, data conversion, and training.

#### **Planned Implementation Architecture Narrative:**

Vendors provided a narrative that recommends how the DOI should implement the system(s) offered.

#### **Future Planned Technology Narrative:**

Vendors provided a narrative outlining future planned technology changes to their proprietary software.

#### **Outsourcing Questions:**

If applicable, vendors provided proprietary responses to outsourcing capabilities.

#### **Integration Questions:**

If applicable, vendors provided proprietary responses on the integration capabilities of the systems offered.

#### **Vendor References:**

Vendors were to provide a list of five companies/Federal agencies where system(s) are implemented.

## ***System Demonstrations, the Live Component***

To complete the RFI process, the DOI invited selected vendors to demonstrate the components of the financial management system offered. Based upon the vendor responses received, the vendors were expected to comply with the required timeframe for demonstrating detailed scripts provided by the government. The government established a schedule for demonstrating the software at the vendor site, when possible. Vendors were expected to provide the appropriate data for the demonstrations, and the demonstrations were conducted at no cost to the Government. Scripts for each system were posted to the Web site for the vendors to download.

### ***Vendor Selection***

Several dozen vendors responded to the RFI. The NBC reviewed the responses for completeness and functionality based on the technical responses. As a result of the review, some vendors were invited to demonstrate their software.

### ***Demonstrations***

Face-to-face demonstrations were conducted in accordance with the RFI. Vendors were allotted approximately 20 hours in which to demonstrate all system capabilities. Vendors were expected to use appropriate data for demonstrations, and the vendors defined the sequences of the demonstrations.

### ***Online and Live Participation by Vendors***

July to September 2000:

Vendors were invited to participate in the RFI. More than sixty vendors responded, and seven vendors actually participated in demonstrations. Vendors responded to RFI questions electronically, using the RFI Web site. Vendors then prepared to conduct demonstrations as requested by the RFI.

### ***Demonstrations: Seen by Government Teams, Performed by Vendors***

October to December 2000:

The Functional Teams, the NBC, the FMSMP Steering Committee, and selected other DOI individuals worked through weeks of demonstrations by vendors. Vendors were allotted specific times for each type of subsystem being demonstrated, and witnesses to the vendor demonstrations completed worksheets. Team Leaders consolidated, and scored the worksheets and wrote summaries for their areas of functional expertise. This information has been forwarded to the Steering Committee for its consideration and future action.

### ***Positive Results of Performing an Electronic Request for Information***

The electronic RFI proved to be a great success. It provided a single place for Government functional experts and team leaders to collect and consolidate their questions and findings. It provided a single mechanism for rapid dissemination of the RFI itself and for collecting the responses from vendors. The design of the Web questions and answer forms kept the size and kinds of answers to questions uniform across vendors.

The electronic RFI developed at the U.S. Department of Interior is designed so that it could become a standard component of eGovernment across the Federal Government.