

Questions and Answers from Mini-bid Training Sessions

February 20 & 21, 2020

Please Note: Questions asked by participants during training sessions. Answers provided by DPI E-rate team (Mike Ramsey, Jeannene Hurley, Rebecca Martin, Roxie Miller)

1. How can we guarantee that their lowest price for a small district is similar to a large district?

A: Because the percentage is so low, 35-45%, that is what we can get anytime of the day. In the past it was nice that the SMC was leveraging the power of bulk purchasing.

The 35% is what the OEM offers, the VAR will give an additional percent.

It was a level playing field - 59% off list. Every district got that. Giving the VAR more room is great but 35% seems too low - a default price may be even better.

This year is one thing - only 20% of total - more worried about next year. We will make it work this year, but it was nicer last time.

A: In an early sampling of the resellers, they are seeing all of these quote requests as “jump balls” and they know they are competing with the other vendors. They are motivated to offer the lowest price they can. DPI will be watching the 471 filings and conducting analysis by vendor (which we weren’t able to do easily in the past) on pricing. +mike

2. So, if we need a switch, we need to email every possible vendor on the list that sells switches?

A: Yes, request bids from at least every vendor listed for switches. However, if you are also seeking installation and/or configuration, you may want to request quotes from all of the vendors, as there may be a vendor that isn’t listed under a hardware manufacturer’s bid that would be able to provide that installation service. Copy and paste all addresses in an email. Use the body of the email or attach your Bill Of Materials (BOM).

Important to point out - don’t assume the OEMs increased or decreased pricing to resellers based on the reseller percentages. Make no assumptions on increases or decreases from prior years. Wait and see what prices you get back from the resellers. You may get a range of prices.

3. I joined late, so you may have already answered this question: If I've already filed a 470, I can still do a mini-bid and "apply" DPI's matching funds when I file the 471, correct?

A: Projects involving public schools (PSUs) must use NCDPI 470/Contract to be eligible for School Connectivity Funds associated with the non-discount share for E-rate approved Category 2 applications. There is no way to “apply” DPI funds on the 471.

4. Could "North Carolina based company" be valid criteria?

A: We have seen this before on BMIC or MIBS items - we will get back on this one.

A: ABSOLUTELY. In the mini-bid spreadsheet, you can replace the “single vendor” category with this, or add it as an additional criteria. +mike.

5. Need to clarify the vendors---Send to all vendors even if they don't carry the brand?
A: If you are seeking clarification from a vendor that sent you a quote, send it to the specific vendor. The question to ask yourself "am I being fair to all vendors?"
+mike
6. How many quotes/vendors must we solicit to comply with the 2020 E-Rate rules and complete a mini-bid?.... All vendors on the sheet, or all relevant vendors for the equipment you're seeking... or simply a minimum number?
A: Leads back to Number 5. Vendors have 3 days to respond, either with a bid or no bid.
A: E-rate rules require you to evaluate all vendors on a Master Contract that can provide the desired goods/services. To meet this requirement, the applicant sends a quote request to all vendors and they have three days to respond. Then the applicant completes a mini-bid evaluation based on the responses from the quote request. +mike
7. If we are getting quotes for switches, can we just send quote requests to the vendors listed under the "LAN Switch Providers" under the "By Product Type" tab? Or do we have to include every vendor?
A: Leads back to #5.
Router - Layer 3 switch
LAN Switch - Layer 2 switch
A: E-rate rules require you to evaluate all vendors on a Master Contract that can provide the desired goods/services. If you are only seeking bids for switches, you may simply send the quote request to those switch vendors. However, if you are also seeking installation and/or configuration, you may want to request quotes from all of the vendors, as there may be a vendor that isn't listed under a hardware manufacturer's bid that would be able to provide that installation service. +mike
8. I thought erate had a fair pricing rule, or is that just for cat 1 and not cat 2?
A: This is called the "Lowest Corresponding Price" (LCP) requirement and it applies to all categories. For more information, see:
<https://www.usac.org/e-rate/service-providers/step-2-responding-to-bids/lowest-responding-price/> **+mike**
9. What's the main benefit to using this versus having our consultant put out standard 470 forms for everything?
A: If using your own 470, you will not be eligible for the NCDPI allocation for the local portion (what E-rate doesn't pay). You will be required to pay the non-discount from your own local funds.
A: There are several benefits to using the NCDPI contracts. Using these contracts, you know that they are legally sound, will be defended by the state, and meet all state laws and E-rate competitive bidding requirements. The state has the combined purchasing power to leverage the best discounts. Lastly, NCDPI can only provide the non-discount portion to you through these contracts. +mike
10. Is this generally cheaper due to state-wide buying power?
A: Generally, yes.

11. My director may know this (I'm the IT head), but do we get School Connectivity funding as a library?

A: No, unfortunately, public libraries are not eligible for funds from NCDPI.

12. Do we think that vendors are going to be able to adequately respond to all LEAs within a three-day window. I have never gotten a large scale quote back from multiple vendors in that timeline.

A: The three-day (business days) requirement exists for the Applicant's benefit. If the Applicant desires, they may specify a greater timeline to respond. Also, when meeting with the vendors, DPI directed them "if you need more time, reach out directly to the applicant and communicate that ASAP." As the applicant, specify your response deadline expectations in each communication with vendors.

13. But any vendor responding outside the 3-day window can be excluded from consideration?

A: Yes, as long as you are consistent. When you close your window, you can't accept any further quotes. As the applicant, specify your response deadline expectations in each communication with vendors.

14. In the past we used the DPI contract for non-erate purchases. With this model will that be the same?

A: In the IFB, page 6:

1.7 Nothing in this IFB or any resulting contracts shall prohibit an awarded Vendor, in its sole discretion, from offering the Products and Services under this contract to a PSU/Library separate and distinct from any E-rate filings."

It is the vendor's choice in if/how they respond and the discounts offered (some OEM discounts are for E-rate only use). If you are exercising this option, you only follow your local procurement rules as to the number of vendors to get quotes from. +mike

15. Since we do not know exact costs, can we change quantities after receiving the bids?

A: Yes, you will have to. After making adjustments, send a BAFO email to each vendor (see Q21 for more on BAFO).

16. Deadline to send emails?

A: March 15 would be suggested, just in case there are questions.

17. I am with a library. Not having heard anything prior to this morning, I put in a 470 yesterday. Can I choose to use mine or the DPI 470? Do I have to do this if my 470 gets responses? Thanks.

A: You may choose which 470 to use, but do document your thought process to explain to the auditors why you chose one 470 over the other. As a library, DPI funding isn't available, so get your best offer. You can also cancel or not award your 470. +mike

18. Most vendors have deal registration with an OEM to offer the largest possible discount. What prevents a vendor from registering deals ahead of your request for a quote, therefore cutting out a vendor you may prefer?

A: In your mini-bid criteria, Vendor Experience, can typically adjust this. This scenario shouldn't be realized, but let us know if you see it. +mike

19. Can we get quotes for a quantity of 1. Then after we do the mini-bid, contact the winning bidder to get them to update a quote with a higher quantity?

A: Technically, yes, but the preferred method would be to ask for what you might need and revise down, just in case the quantity affects the quote.

20. After receiving bids, we notice the cost is higher than expected. If we have to ask for a second quote, what is the window for the vendor to respond?

A: As the applicant, specify your response deadline expectations in each communication with vendors.

21. If we need another quote to change quantities, does that have to go to everyone again, or can we decide vendor based on quote and then just request new quote from chosen vendor?

A: This is called a "Best and Final Offer" request (BAFO). We would recommend sending a BAFO to your top scoring vendors, but there is no requirement to send it to all. +mike

22. For structured cabling, what is a reasonable timeframe for expecting service providers to conduct a walkthrough? 3 days for a quote, of course, right... but logistics to coordinate, maybe a week?

A: In the IFB, page 5, 1.5.ii states:

- 1. An initial quote will be made to the PSU/Library no later than three (3) business days, unless otherwise stated by the PSU/Library.**
- 2. For projects requiring a site-visit, the vendor or third party must contact the PSU/Library within two (2) business days to establish the appointment and must provide an initial quote within five (5) business days after the site-visit, unless a separate schedule is established by the PSU/Library.**

As the applicant, specify your response deadline expectations in each communication with vendors.

23. Are mini bids available for libraries?

A: Libraries should follow this same guidance if you want to use the State Master Contracts. Libraries may use their own 470/RFP evaluation process, or adapt this process for their use.

24. Do we have to do separate mini-bid and separate requests for Aps, switches, etc. or can they be included on the same request/mini-bid?

A: On the quote request, ask for everything. They will reply according to what they can supply. When you do the mini-bid, and they are the one-stop shop, keep your criteria, although it could be hard to evaluate (apples to apples vs apples to oranges). Depending on the quotes that come back, you may need multiple mini-bids. Do what makes sense for your situation, documenting as you go each

decision you make. If you can do it in one, great. If not, simply note “due to the complexity of received quotes, the evaluation team separated the quotes by category and evaluated separately.”

25. For Vendor Experience on Evaluation Factors- if I am a new school, can I use my past experience at a previous school or does it only apply to the experience at new school?

A: Vendor experience includes all of your sources, personal as well as reviews/references (formal and informal) and is not limited to time or location.

+mike

26. What if no one bids?

A: It is likely that your request did not get delivered by your email system. The market is too competitive right now for vendors to not respond. +mike

27. 3 day timeline is in the RFP and Contracts. What if needing revisions to bids and it takes longer than the 3 day window? In other words you get bid responses on day 3, but then you have to tweak the type of rail kit that comes with a UPS and the revised quote comes on day 4 .

A: The 3 day requirement is for the initial quote response by a vendor, but the applicant can always adjust this. As the applicant, specify your response deadline expectations in each communication with vendors.

28. Our true budget won't match up with our request to vendors for items since we don't know how much items cost. Is it okay to move forward with the vendor with the highest score on the mini-bid spreadsheet and revise the quantities later before we complete the 471?

A: Yes.

29. Are we confident that the non-discount portion will be allocated for 2020-2021?

What does the magic 8 ball say? LOL!! I love you!!! lol.....So can i get my question answered....™ -

A: 100% confident that DPI has the same amount of funding as last year. The question is, if due to the FCC allowing carry-over of unused budget from the last five years, the resulting requests are significantly higher than the past, there may be a challenge. DPI has formally requested one-time funds from the legislature to cover this contingency (and has had a few positive meetings to lobby our case), but as the General Assembly doesn't come back until after the filing window, we can't announce conclusively. +mike

30. I have a question - I notice that UPSs are listed. Does that mean we can use the contract for UPSs now and receive a non-discount portion from the state?

A: Yes.

31. Can we call out a specific brand and model on the quote request email, or just brand? Including 'or equivalent'

A: You will use a similar document as the earlier mini-bid process where you talked about your Scope of Work, or Project Description.

32. I am only able to use specific models, in the past called out by part number, for example AIR-AP3802I-B-K9 for a specific cisco WAP. So I make the mini bid process arrive at that result? Or can I just ask for that part number?

A: I will need back up on this answer, but if you specify a part number you must also use the words "or equivalent."

Perfect, thanks

33. Are we allowed to use erate funding for security, such as cameras?

A. No. Security cameras are ineligible. In fact, if you connect an ineligible security camera into an eligible switch, you need to cost allocation the port on that switch the camera is plugged into. Firewall is eligible as part of C2 and you will see the vendors on the list.

34. Do we need site visits for structured cabling? How does that timeline play out?

A. Unfortunately, the clock is ticking - less than 5 weeks left. You will have to hustle to get your vendors out for the walk through. You can negotiate the quote response date.

35. Sorry if I missed this...when does the filing window close?

A: Wednesday, March 25 @ 11:59 PM EDT.

36. Can I ask for network management? Tried to buy 10 hours of service with A3 - I need someone other than MCNC.

A: BMIC is covered under the SMC. Structure your quote request to contain each piece of equipment, the make and the model. Determine how many hours each month you will need, etc.

37. BMIC Services are only for the current year?

A: Although the SMCs are set up for multi year, you will ask for and receive BMIC and MIBS service one year at a time. Where it gets tricky is if *you* want a multi year agreement - the vendor will want all the years of service up front but USAC will pay the annual cost each year (1/5 for a five-year).

38. Why is it advantageous to go with the state contract versus going solo?

A: There are several benefits to using the NCDPI contracts. Using these contracts, you know that they are legally sound, will be defended by the state, and meet all state laws and E-rate competitive bidding requirements. The state has the combined purchasing power to leverage the best discounts. Lastly, NCDPI can only provide the non-discount portion to schools and school districts (not libraries) through these contracts. +mike

39. What is the 470 number?

A: 200000716

40. Timeline for bids or approximate dates to get things accomplished to make it to the March 25 deadline?

A: Right away. 33 days left till March 25, 2020 11:59pm EDT.

