Questions and Responses

(Initial Q&R – 9/17/2021)

Question 1 – With the current COVID situation and knowing that DOE is in a maximum telework environment, can the Government confirm that currently all staff under the existing MESA award are teleworking or are any required to be on-site?

Response – At the present time, while NETL is in a maximum telework posture, all MESA staff are teleworking and none are required to be on-site.

Question 2 – Can Offerors submit relevant experience and past performance for subcontractors who are not considered or identified as “major or critical subcontractors”?

Response – No, the instructions to Offerors clearly indicates that relevant experience and past performance are from the Offeror (including team members that make up a Joint Venture as the Offeror) and its major or critical subcontractors.

Question 3 – If a major or critical subcontractor will be performing on a subcontract type that is not a cost reimbursement type vehicle, are they still required to submit costing information as indicated in the Instruction to Offeror’s Cost Proposal?

Response – Yes, for adequate evaluation purposes all major or critical subcontractors are required to provide costing information at the same level of the Offeror as indicated in the Instructions to Offeror.

Question 4 – Can the Government provide information on site location for each Labor Category FTE?

Response – It is up to the Offeror to determine the best location for its staff and how it will ensure that adequate staffing is available for meeting the requirements of the PWS at each of the NETL locations. The Government will not dictate a required location for each Labor Category.

Questions and Responses

(Amendment 2 Q&R – 10/13/2021)

(Amendment 4 Q&R – 10/22/2021: Question 6 only has been updated)

Question 5 – The Government received numerous comments resubmitted from the Draft RFP posed as questions to make changes to the RFP. Including items such as suggestions related to handling of EPACT requirements; providing offerors with locations for proposed employees in historical information; considerations of COVID assistance in financial review; considerations related to JV partners responsibilities; and suggestions on customizing the RFP to a particular interest.

Response – All suggestions and comments received during the Draft RFP were considered in terms of making improvements to the RFP. These items were considered at that time and in some cases resulted in changes to the final RFP. If an item or item(s) did not result in changes to the final RFP then it was not determined to have merit to warrant a change. Since this appears to be simply a resubmission of the complete listing of items already considered during the Draft RFP they are not being responded to individually as many are no longer valid comments or questions. It is suggested that each organization complete a review of the final RFP and limit questions to that final document or amendments issued from that final RFP.

Question 6 – Can the Government confirm that “contractor team arrangement, as used in this solicitation refers to the first part of the definition in FAR Part 9.601 and not a normal prime/subcontractor arrangement?

Response –The term contractor team arrangement, as used in this RFP, refers to FAR Part 9.601 which under section (1) refers to two or more companies form a partnership or joint venture to act as a potential prime contractor and under section (2) where it includes a more traditional prime/subcontractor arrangement that might include a mentor/protege relationship, or a team made up from the prime and major or critical subcontractors (as defined in the RFP).

A prime/subcontractor relationship does not automatically make it a Contractor Teaming Arrangement, it depends on how the Offeror is proposing (as a team or a traditional prime/subcontractor).

Question 7 – Can the Government confirm under which file in Volume 1 that the signed Performance Guarantee is to be submitted. It appears as though it is asked for in File 6, Administrative Discussion but also is referenced in File 4, Financial Responsibility.

Response – The signed Performance Guarantee is to be submitted in Volume 1 File 6. The reference in File 4 relates to financial information that would be required to be submitted from the other entities that make up the teaming arrangement and a reminder that if you are including their financial information that you would also need to submit the Performance Guarantee.

Question 8 – Contracts of a size, scope and complexity; as requested in Volume 2, File 6; would typically require many subcontractors and specialty contractors to perform them. This makes including all the names and phone numbers extensive for inclusion in box 10 of Exhibit E. Can the Government confirm that the inclusion of names and phone numbers in that Exhibit E should be limited to major or critical subcontracts (as defined in this solicitation)?

Response – Exhibit E is a single page form (as included in the solicitation). Since the page limitation for this Exhibit E is two-pages that should provide more than enough expansion space to include the list of subcontractors used in the referenced contract.

Question 9 – With the wide change in compensation that the labor force is experiencing recently due to inflation, COVID, and labor shortages; would the Government consider a plug number for the rate of escalation? If not, how should an offeror address these changes and remain inline with the Government projections and cost realism expectations?

Response – The Government will not provide a plug number for the rate of escalation. As for reasonableness of the proposed escalation amount, the Government looks at information readily available for public information such as those published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics when making its cost realism review. An offeror is required to describe how it arrived at its rate of escalation which is also reviewed for reasonableness when completing the cost realism evaluation.

Question 10 – 952.226-72 Energy Policy Act Subcontracting Goals and Reporting Requirements (JUN 1996) requires the Contractor to report on an annual Government FY basis, its progress against the goals. This reporting requirement is not included in the Reporting Requirements Checklist. Will the Reporting Requirements Checklist be amended to reflect this report?

Response – While the report discussed in 952.226-72 is required to be submitted, the Reporting Requirements Checklist will not be amended to reflect this specific report.

Question 11 – Will the Government provide historical work locations by labor category in the Position Qualifications

Response – It is up to the Offeror to appropriately staff in the geographic location that suites the work best.

Question 12 – If the managing venturer in a Joint Venture or Partnership does not have an acceptable/approved accounting system, would the Government require documentation to be submitted such as a SF 1408 that would provide attestation of a higher level of capability and assurance of good stewardship beyond "identify and track costs"?

Response – The Offeror either needs to provide certification of an approved accounting system or documentation demonstrating fiscal responsibility that could be reviewed for potential approval of its accounting system. It is up to the Offeror how they present fiscal responsibility for tracking costs.

Question 13 – If the managing venturer in a Joint Venture or Partnership does not have an acceptable/approved accounting system, will NETL allow the accumulation of these costs in an acceptable/approved accounting system of one of the minority JV partners and cost basis invoices issued by the JV, or shall the managing partner's labor and costs be billed on a T&M basis until such time as its internal system is acceptable/approved?

Response – The Offeror must provide an approved accounting system or the information necessary to review the system to determine financial responsibility. This is a cost reimbursement contract and T&M will not be utilized.

Question 14 – While NETL has provided historical FTE allocation by labor category, NETL has not provided an overall DPLH or DPLH by labor category, nor has NETL provided any information about how existing staff execute against PWS areas. Was DPLH information inadvertently omitted or does NETL wish Offerors to develop their staffing plans without this information.

Response – NETL expects Offerors to review the PWS and develop staffing plan in accordance with their plan on executing the PWS.

Question 15 – If Offerors are including existing company publications outlining compensation policies and benefits, should those items be included as attachments to File 3 or as separate documents?

 Response – These documents need to be added as part of File 3.

Question 16 – Section L related to Relevant Past Performance (File 6) require the Offeror and all major or critical subcontractors to provide no more than three contracts as past performance. Additionally, section M states that all partner companies on past performance contracts will be equally credited for past performance information. Can the government confirm that teaming agreements as defined by FAR 9.601(2) are included in the three past performance references?

Response – Yes, teaming arrangements in included in the three past performance references.

Question 17 – Will the Government consider providing further historical staffing information from the incumbent contractor such as work locations, number of staff working on-site during COVID restrictions, and labor category by PWS area?

Response – This RFP is a new requirement and while there are some similarities to the prior contract there are also considerable differences. Historical information is provided that is considered a benefit to potential interested parties. However, it is dependent upon each offeror to propose staffing consistent with its technical approach to meeting the requirements including placement of staff across the NETL sites. Staff on-site during COVID restrictions vary based on mission-essential and mission-critical needs and may not be the same as applied to the current contract. As seen in this RFP there are considerable changes to on-site staffing that are to be addressed by the proposing organization.

Question 18 – Can the solicitation name, volume number/name, page number, and offer date be included in the margins?

Response – L.7 Proposal Preparation Instructions – General (h)(4) and (5) provide the instructions for use of information in the margins.

Question 19 – In the Fill-in of Contract Clauses attachment, several clauses are included for the EPACT goals. These fill-ins are typically done by the Government. Can you confirm that you want offerors to fill-in these goals as part of the proposal? Are these goals to be proposed by the prime or subcontractors?

Response – The EPACT goals and EPACT subcontracting goals are expected to be proposed by the prime organization for consideration by the Government. The Offeror should complete the fill-in with its proposed goals for each category.

Question 20 – Are major or critical subcontractors required to be part of the award fee pool or can they work under firm-fixed price (FFP) or time and materials (T&M) subcontracts?

Response – It is up to the proposing organization to determine the type of subcontract that a proposed major or critical subcontractor would be being proposed. The cost exhibits and cost discussion would need to clearly articulate how the entities are proposed and whether their proposed costs were included in the award fee pool or not.

Question 21 – Will the Government provide a Word version of the SF-33?

Response – A Word version of the SF-33 is provided with this amendment.

Question 22 – Will Offerors who do not have an approved accounting system be scored negatively in the evaluation of cost realism?

Response – As indicated in the RFP, the cost proposal shall not be point scored. The Government will conduct a cost realism evaluation of the Offerors proposal based on its submitted information and approach and the review of individual elements of its cost proposal.

Question 23 – Will the Government provide a plug number for training?

Response – Training is specific to an Offeror’s technical approach and plan related to its staff. As such it is expected that training cost will vary depending on the proposed approach and is the responsibility of the Offeror to identify its plan and costs for training needs.

Questions and Responses

(Amendment 3 Q&R – 10/19/2021)

Question 24 – Can the Government confirm that the inclusion of names and phone numbers for major or critical partner/subcontractor or consultants is sufficient to meet the requirement with additional detail that clarifies the total number of other partners/subcontracts for Exhibit E Past Performance Reference Information Form?

Response – This question was already responded to above in Question #8. Box 10 can be expanded to include all entities and still not exceed the page limitation.

Question 25 – Traditionally, we place the solicitation number, volume number, name, and offer date in the margins of each page of the volume. Can the Government clarify where this information should be included?

Response – As indicated in the RFP, Section L.7 (h)(4) and (5), the information identified above, solicitation number, name of Offeror, page number and any restriction on disclosure and use of data are to be in the top or bottom margin. This section depicts the only information to be placed in those areas. In addition, Cover Pages are required throughout the various volumes that require this and additional information.

Question 26 – There are data validation lists included in the provided cost exhibits, are these to be populated or removed? Can lines or rows be added to meet an offeror’s disclosed practices?

Response – A revised cost exhibit has been provided with the data validation areas removed. Please note that the Cost Exhibit is editable by Offerors to add rows and information as needed but you are not to adjust or remove the row headers that have been included.

Question 26 – The response is comprised of three Volumes and 16 individual files. Is it the Government’s intent that each Volume is *zipped* to include the Volume-specific files OR is the Government intending to receive 16 individual files?

Response – The Government is not requiring each Volume be provided as a zip file. Section L.6 Unnecessarily Elaborate Proposals and File Size Limitations discusses the use of zip files.

Question 27 – Under “Proposal Specifications” on page 289 is instruction to “provide a cross reference matrix which correlates the proposal by page and paragraph number to…” Which Volume(s) and/or File(s) should this matrix be presented?

Response – The same referenced section states where to include the cross reference matrix, “The cross reference matrix shall be inserted immediately following the table of contents of the corresponding volume of the offeror’s proposal”.

Question 28 – Throughout Section L of Amendment 0001 there are multiple references to the inclusion of a Cover Sheet and/or a Cover Page. In addition, a Table of Contents is referenced within each Volume but not specified in the File Structure. Can the industry include a Cover Sheet/Cover Page and a Table of Contents within each of the 16 individual files?

Response – The RFP instructions indicate when a Cover Sheet or Cover Page is required. In certain sections, it indicates that it should be submitted as part of the file.

Question 29 – Can CPARS be used in lieu of the past performance reference sheet?

Response – The past performance reference sheet is required to be submitted. CPARs reports are not required to be submitted as the Government has access to the database to retrieve those directly.

Question 30 – Are the functional areas identified in the PWS all the functional areas that are included in this contract, or will others be provided? And, can the Government identify how much support was previously required for these functional areas?

Response – The PWS is the scope required for this contract. Any future functional areas would be incorporated through a modification, if they were later identified during the life of the contract. The Government has provided historical information that can be used as a guide (not a requirement) for viewing past levels of support required.

Question 31 – In support of contract transition there is a statement about discussing the rationale for proposed travel. Is the Government expecting a separate discussion on travel apart from transition?

Response – The RFP includes areas where travel is required to be discussed and a rationale for such travel should be provided in those instances.

Question 32 – Would the Government considering changing the reduction for change in Key Personnel?

Response – The reductions were identified based on the importance of the position. The Government has identified that a waiver request can be submitted for instances outside the control of the contractor.

Question 33 – For personnel who are planned to work full time remote and are not working on a Government location should they be assigned a primary Government location in the pricing exhibit?

Response – One of the site allocations included in the cost exhibit is Off-site. However, as indicated all labor should be considered as being included in the NETL specific overhead pool.

Question 34 – Will the Government consider an extension to allow entities time to digest the responses to questions?

Response – The Government does not believe an extension is warranted at this time.

Question 35 – Section 1.5.2.3 Outreach: part a: The PWS states that the HR Outreach selections to be completed by “E+60”. Is this referring to the number of days or weeks for these Outreach items to be completed? Please confirm the terms of this identifier as 60 days or 60 months.

Response – 60 days.

Question 36 – Will the Government provide personnel previously associated with this contract for support of a transition.

Response – Transition is the responsibility of the contractor. The Government will have CORs and others who will be engaged in transition but will not be performing those for the contractor. Transition will be done while the out-going contractor continues performance. Once transition is complete the out-going contractor will no longer be providing support and the incoming contractor will assume full operational status.

Question 37 – Systems requirements, such as accounting, procurement and property systems. If the entity does not have currently approved Government systems will the Government accept information in lieu of an approved system?

Response – The RFP in volume I states the instructions for what must be provided in lieu of evidence of a Government approved system.

Question 38 – Are labor costs limited in the amount of FTE/PTEs to be proposed?

Response – No, each offeror is required to propose the staffing level necessary to fulfill its proposed approach to performing the work.

Question 39 – Is there a timeline for when transition is required to be complete? Will the contractor be provided a ramp-up time period prior to the start of the contract?

Response – The RFP states that transition is expected to be complete in 90-days. The transition period is the ramp-up period for assuming full contract responsibilities.

Question 40 – Are security clearances required at start of contract? Is the contractor responsible for obtaining security clearances prior to work starting?

Response – Security clearances are not required at the start of the contract. However, it is expected that during the life of the contract there will be classified work performed. The contractor is responsible for getting clearances for its personnel (as needed). The company should include its cage number as part of its proposal showing that FOCI has been obtained at the company level.

Question 41 – If additional scope is identified during the life of the contract, will the Government consider additional program efficiencies related to that work?

Response – If additional scope is identified during the life of the contract it will be done through a contract modification and the contractor will have an opportunity to propose efficiencies related to additional scope.

Question 42 – What restrictions are in place to modifying the current organizational structure to be efficient? For example, are there political appointees in place that are non-negotiable regarding retainment of support? Will the contractor get support in the organization and management efforts from federal staff?

Response – NETL is a Government-Owned-Government-Operated National Laboratory. This contract is for support to the federal staff who operate the facility. It is not for facility Management and Operations (M&O). The federal organization will not be impacted by support under this contract.

Question 42 – Can you define more the details of “Federal Mandatory Training”? Is this training required for all personnel on this contract?

Response – The Federal Mandatory Training is training required for anyone issued a badge or site access under this contract. It is computer-based training done on Government time through the provided Learning Nucleus (or other Government training system). It is designed for knowledge required for anyone who is working or has access to the site (beyond visitors).