

FirstNet SPOC discussions hinging on final RFP

Fierce Wireless Tech By Nicole Blanchard

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Representatives from the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) Single Points of Contact, or SPOC, group met near the organization's tech headquarters in Boulder, Colo., last week in a discussion that acting Chief Technology Officer Jeff Bratcher said focused on "education and understanding" in lieu of a final Request for Proposals.

Bratcher said the 56 representatives (one from each state, as well as territories and Washington, D.C.) updated FirstNet's tech team on individual progress toward an LTE network. For the SPOCs, that meant communication with local legislators and first responders, though Bratcher said no decisions can be made without the release of FirstNet's final RFP, due by the end of this year.

"What we said was [that] we're not leaving the rural guys out of this," he said, addressing a concern that several states' first responders have raised to their SPOC representatives.

"The focus is on continued education and collecting more state input," he added.

In addition, FirstNet has begun talking with stakeholders about the importance of cyber security in the first responder network, with Bratcher calling it a "critical" element of technology for moving the network forward. State input and needs are expected in April, when the SPOC group will meet again for a six-month check-in.

While Bratcher offered few other details on last week's discussions, he said he expects input to come in heavily from the SPOC representatives in the following session, as the completed RFP will mean carrier partner options will be on the table. This will allow the SPOCs to report back with state stakeholders' thoughts on whether to utilize FirstNet's technology or build out their own compliant networks.

Though decision-making is slow going for SPOCs as they wait for the RFP to clear, Bratcher said the technology office is working to update and better define its equipment in order to speed the process along post-RFP. To that end, the tech office plans to rename its mobile communications units, or MCUs, in order to differentiate new options from existing ones.

"We're going to call it a VNS, a vehicular networks system," said Bratcher, pointing out the disparity between VNS and current MCU options. "That's going to be something like adding band 14 on a police car, fire truck, ambulance, what have you."

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