

PB-1 We request clarification of a specific aspect of the above solicitation. In the combined synopsis/solicitation, it states: "Only the most highly eligible selected in Phase One will be eligible to participate in Phase Two; all others will be disqualified from further participation in the competition (except that disqualified offerors may be proposed as subcontractors or teaming partners of offerors deemed qualified in Phase One). Please clarify if this means that a company seeking to be a subcontractor has to respond to Phase One on April 15th in order to subcontract under a qualified prime offeror in Phase Two. Thanks in advance for your prompt response.

A company does not have to respond to Phase One in order to be a subcontractor to a qualified prime offeror in Phase Two.

PB-2 We assume that we do not need to price hardware and software that will be resident at the VDC for the purpose of the ROM, is this accurate?

FSA has requested that offerors provide a ROM of the amount of all costs that are likely to be associated with their unique, proposed conceptual approach and their work or products that support that approach. If use of the VDC were proposed, they would not include costs of a VDC solution, but would include a description of the conceptual support that the proposed approach might entail. The ROM format provided is a sample for your reference. FSA will review ROM costs to ensure they are reasonably consistent with the offeror's proposed conceptual approach, and reflect the entire scope of the effort to meet the FEBI requirements. It is anticipated that offerors will list their assumptions as it pertains to cost.

PB-3 We assume postage will be furnished by FSA. Is this accurate?

See Answer to PB-4 below.

PB-4 Of the 58 million annual documents/publications mailed (Phase One solicitation, ROM sample), approximately what percentage are preprinted documents that will be supplied by FSA and need to be stored by the contractor?

FSA has requested that offerors provide a ROM of the amount of all costs that are likely to be associated with their unique, proposed conceptual approach. The ROM format provided is a sample for your reference. FSA will review ROM costs to ensure they are reasonably consistent with the offeror's proposed conceptual approach and reflect the entire scope of the effort required to meet the FEBI requirements. It is anticipated that offerors will list their assumptions as it pertains to cost.

PB-5 Is there any chance of extending the April 15th deadline? We are a small business interested in helping write the proposal?

No. Even though FSA is encouraging small business participation in this solicitation, the deadline for Phase One proposal submission and small business comments remains April 15, 2004. We anticipate being able to publish a tentative schedule for the small business solicitation(s) sometime after we receive the small business comments on April 15, 2004.

PB-6 What is the middleware currently in use?

IBM MQ Series

PB-7 Is the expectation that new processes will be established, technology recommendations made and accepted and program implementation of those received?

The expectation is that the business objectives each offeror will provide with their proposed FEBI solution will provide a unique means of meeting and measuring the FEBI business objectives set forth in the SOO.

- PB-8 What level of funding commitment exists? Are contractors expected to support IT investment?
There are funds available to support the FEBI contract award. It is anticipated that the new FEBI solution will significantly reduce the FSA's current contract costs of approximately \$111.5 million and increase value. Phase One proposals should include ROM and assumptions to support the offeror's solution.
- PB-9 For Phase One, is it required to include past performance information of subcontractors and small businesses?
Past performance information should include references for similar efforts that directly relate to the breadth of the effort. It may include data on other divisions, critical subcontractors or teaming partners if it is anticipated that they will have a significant influence on your performance.
- PB-10 If you are a current subcontractor on another Department of Education contract, e.g., CSB, does that create a conflict of interest for FEBI?
No.
- PB-11 By Work Breakdown Structure (WBS), do you mean a full WBS and dictionary (in accordance with DOD standards, for instance), or are you referring essentially to the task break down comprising the left column of a project schedule?
It is anticipated that the Phase Two RFP will require a WBS in sufficient detail to assure FSA that the vendor understands the problem and offers a viable solution.
- PB-12 Is it correct to assume that the Phase One competition is to down select potential prime contractors only, not to identify all firms that may participate, as subcontractors, in FEBI?
Yes, the assumption is correct - Phase One competition is a down select process of potential prime contractors.
- PB-13 How many vendors will be selected for Phase Two?
There is no pre-determined number.
- PB-14 Will the Phase One selection be posted on the FEBI website?
Yes, the Phase One selection will be posted on the FEBI website.
- PB-15 Can a small business bid both on the part of the work designated as small business set-asides and be a member of a prime contractors' team?
Yes.
- PB-16 Would your organization consider providing additional time for submission of Phase One? This would facilitate small business as well as larger participation in general. A three-week response for such a large requirement does not provide adequate time for architecting and proposing an appropriate solution.
No. The current acquisition milestones are critical to the award of the contract on or before September 30, 2004.
- PB-17 What is the small business size standard for the FEBI procurement?
The small business size standard for FEBI is \$21 million. However, the size standard for subcontracts will be determined by the prime based on the type of work being subcontracted.
- PB-18 What sorts of comments from small businesses are of interest? Capabilities? Opinions about whether particular aspects of the work should be set-aside? Approaches that we would bring to bear whether doing the work as a set-aside or a member of a prime contractor team?
We are interested in comments on the number of small business solicitations and the appropriate combination of services. But, all comments will be appreciated. We are not looking for capability statements at this time.

- PB-19 Will you look to consider increased small business prime awards in Phase Two if you do not achieve your 23% goal of small business participation in Phase One?
The Department's overall goal is 23%. We expect a significant portion of FEBI will be subcontracted; however, we will not require that 23% of the FEBI contract to be subcontracts. Reminder: Small business participation is a critical evaluation factor.
- PB-20 Who is the incumbent Central Processing System (CPS) contractor?
NCS Pearson-Government Solutions is the current CPS contractor.
- PB-21 Should we assume there will be an IRS match by the time the FEBI contract is awarded?
Legislation is pending regarding establishment of the IRS match. The particulars of how the match would work will not be established until the legislation is enacted. We are not expecting the offerors to detail their proposal regarding the IRS match, but to address the issue of the likelihood of a match and their solution's flexibility to accommodate large changes such as the IRS match.
- PB-22 Will EDEExpress be phased out completely?
We anticipate that we will continue to support functionality in EDEExpress, but are not specifying the form that that support might take. The offerors may propose solutions.
- PB-23 If you are a small business looking at the April 15th deadline-what do you need to provide beyond general comments?
Nothing else beyond the comments described in the Phase One solicitation is required at this time.
- PB-24 Can you expand on the Web Design or re-design component?
Please refer to the Data Strategy-Web Usage Document posted on the FEBI website.
- PB-25 What area of this FEBI design do you perceive to be most challenging?
This question is unclear. Please restate the question and request a response via febi.competition@ed.gov.
- PB-26 What software/hardware standards does FEBI have to use, e.g., Microsoft or SUN, database, e-mail, etc.?
Please refer to the FSA Technology Handbook that is posted on the FEBI website for guidance (referenced in Appendix B of the SOO).
- PB-27 Would you explain the format of the bid information on the CD ROM?
As stated in the solicitation, "Electronic documents must be in a format readable by Microsoft Office applications (e.g., MS-Word or Excel) or in PDF format." In addition, the solicitation instructions specify that: "The proposal responses should be organized in separate sections: Past Performance and Organizational Experience, Conceptual Approach and Rough Order of Magnitude Cost."
- PB-28 What is the FSAIC customer satisfaction mechanism?
The FSAIC uses telephone surveys.
- PB-29 Will promissory notes (printing, mailing, processing) be a part of FEBI?
Yes, processing of promissory notes is a part of FEBI. However, a decision is pending regarding the printing and mailing of promissory notes. Based on the small business comments, these business processes (i.e., printing and mailing) may be a part of the small business set-aside solicitation(s), especially the printing and mailing of individual promissory notes (system-generated printing).
- PB-30 What specific constraints exist to our solution/offerings, (i.e. technology, existing applications, etc.)?
The constraints are the business requirements stated in the SOO, and the guidance provided in the FSA IT Handbook.

- PB-31 What are the top three priorities of the FEBI objectives?
All of the FEBI objectives, as described in the SOO, are considered equally important. FSA has not prioritized the objectives.
- PB-32 Please discuss the market research process for FSA. How long did it take? What organizations and contractors were involved?
The purpose of the FEBI market research effort was not to identify potential contractors but to inform FSA of best practices by ascertaining the availability of commercial and non-developmental items that meet the need and identifying standard commercial practices. For FSA's market research emphasis was placed on best practices and innovative delivery methods for the specific functional areas included in the initiative. In some cases the organizations selected were providers of services and in other areas, users of services. Not all providers of services involved in FEBI's market research provide those services to the Government. Market research for FEBI was performed over a 4-month timeframe. A market research team was assembled and their initial task was to define the FEBI market research objectives in the areas of application, origination and disbursement, customer service and shared services. Through web surveillance and review of industry tools (e.g. Standard & Poor, The Gartner Group, etc.), the team identified over 100 companies of which we developed profiles for 51 organizations: 33 providers, 18 users, 41 commercial sector companies and 27 organizations that operate in commercial and/or government. The team developed a prioritization and selected 21 organizations that represented a usable dispersion across the business process areas. The FEBI core team made a decision to include the current legacy partners in the pool and required that they bring other relevant corporate experience to bear during the FEBI market research sessions. Of the 21 organizations contacted, market research sessions were conducted with the following: ACS, Accenture, EDS, Pearson Government Solutions, Raytheon, Countrywide, Bank of North Dakota, Sallie Mae, APAC, AT&T, U.S. Mint, Veterans Benefit Affairs, Bank One, TIAA-CREF, and IBM.
- PB-33 Does ED anticipate subcontracting in Phase Two for independent verification and validation?
During Phase II, FSA will evaluate vendor proposals utilizing independent verification and validation (IV&V) methodology, but that functionality is not included in the current FEBI initiative.