

JUSTIFICATION
FOR AN EXCEPTION TO FAIR OPPORTUNITY

1. **Contracting Activity:** Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
Office of Acquisition Operations
Technology Acquisition Center
23 Christopher Way
Eatontown, NJ 07724

2. Title of Acquisition: F5 Load Balancers Annual Hardware Maintenance and Support

This requirement will be accomplished via:

☒ New Purchase Order

Purchase Order will be:

☒ Firm Fixed Price

Type of Funds (e.g. Supply Fund, Franchise Fund, IT, etc.):

☒ IT Funds (FCP: 4211)

3. **Description of Supplies or Services.**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Office of Information and Technology (OIT), Enterprise Systems Engineering (ESE), Office of the Director requires the renewal of annual maintenance and support for F5 BigIP Global Traffic Manager (GTM) and Local Traffic Manager (LTM) hardware located at both Hines, Illinois and Martinsburg, West Virginia Data Centers. The LTM is for local-to-local failover at the data center. The GTM is for site-to-site failover between data centers. This load balancing hardware provides network connectivity and support for Veterans Personal Funds System (VPFS), Patient Advocate Tracking (PATs), Blind Rehabilitation, and Emergency Department Information System (EDIS), as well as future systems residing in Martinsburg, WV and Hines, IL.

Detailed description of the software listed below:

Part Number	Description	QTY
F5-BSMB-CYSH	Maintenance and Support Only– F5 Global Traffic Manager located in Martinsburg, WV	1
F5-QTET-QGMV	Maintenance and Support Only – F5 Global Traffic Manager located in Hines, IL	1
F5-EYRB-UGWN	Maintenance and Support Only – F5 Local Traffic Manager located in Martinsburg, WV	1

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F5-XGEN-AKYZ	Maintenance and Support Only – F5 Local Traffic Manager located in Martinsburg, WV	1
F5-MJUH-ZQXT	Maintenance and Support Only – F5 Local Traffic Manager located in Hines, IL	1
F5-MSQN-QQLS	Maintenance and Support Only – F5 Local Traffic Manager located in Hines, IL	1
SEWPZ	SEWP Surcharge	1

The period of performance will be August 4, 2014 through August 3, 2015.

4. Authority Cited.

[X] Other: FAR Authority 16.505(b)(2)(i)(B)

The statutory authority permitting an exception to fair opportunity is Section 41 U.S.C. 4106(c)(2) as implemented by the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) Subpart 16.505(b)(2)(i)(B), entitled "Only one awardee is capable of providing the supplies or services required at the level of quality required because the supplies or services ordered are unique or highly specialized."

5. Reason for Authority Cited.

Based on extensive market research, as described in paragraph 8 of this document, it was determined that limited competition is available for the aforementioned brand name services.

The currently deployed F5 BigIP hardware utilizes network traffic shaping technology across disparate datacenters. The load balancers support user load capabilities of VA's network, support of the VPFS, PATS, Blind Rehab, EDIS, and other patient related applications to improve the user experience, and prevent server overload if there are excessive users on the system at one time. VA currently utilizes this network traffic shaping in many different production environments across the nation. This system is managed in ESE Enterprise Health Solutions by ESE staff and benefits VA storage systems and ESE systems engineering design and core services activities.

The F5 BigIP hardware and its operating system (OS) are brand name products with specific firmware/microcode that is only compatible with F5 BigIP hardware maintenance support. F5 BigIP hardware and application software communicates (reads & writes data) through the F5 BigIP OS (and Firmware/Microcode), which are proprietary code. In addition, F5 was contacted on April 22, 2014 to inquire if they would sell their technical data package (firmware/microcode) for the F5 BigIP hardware and operating system to the Government. F5 responded that they are unwilling to sell their ownership of proprietary solutions to the Government. No other brand name

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OS (including Firmware/Microcode) will be interoperable or compatible with the currently fielded F5 BigIP hardware.

Only F5 BigIP brand hardware and software maintenance support will satisfy VA requirements, as the systems requiring maintenance are all F5 BigIP brand. Alternative products would compromise the integrity of the end product, increase testing, and could potentially necessitate further manual review. This would cause additional time delays and accrue additional costs.

6. Efforts to Obtain Competition.

Market research was conducted, details of which are in the market research section of this document. Although the Government is limiting competition as a result of specifying a brand name, there are multiple authorized resellers of the brand name services on the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Solutions for Enterprise-Wide Procurement (SEWP) IV Government-Wide Acquisition Contract (GWAC). In accordance with FAR 5.301 and 16.505(b)(2)(ii)(D), this action will not be synopsisized at award on the Federal Business Opportunity Page (FBO) due to the dollar threshold.

7. Actions to Increase Competition.

In order to remove or overcome barriers to competition in future acquisitions for this requirement, the Government will continue to conduct market research to ascertain if there are changes in the market place that would enable future actions to be fully competed.

8. Market Research.

Coyote Point Load Balancers, Barracuda Load Balancers, KEMP LoadMaster Load Balancers, and Cisco Application Control Systems load balancing services were reviewed and none of these manufacturers' hardware and software support is capable, functional, and interchangeable with the existing ESE infrastructure. The inclusion of support services other than F5 BigIP brand would prevent the VA ESE from optimizing its current architecture. In order to procure another brand name support services, the currently deployed F5 BigIP software and/or hardware would have to be replaced. This presents an unacceptable level of costs and risk of data integrity.

Market research conducted via a Request for Information (RFI) posted on NASA SEWP on February 5, 2014. On February 24, 2014, the following six responses were received: one from Group A (Value Added Resellers and Computer Original Equipment Manufacturers), one from Group B (Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (SDVOSB)), two from Group C (Small Business), and two from Group D (Value Added Resellers). Additional market research was conducted in February 2014 utilizing the NASA SEWP IV Product Verification and

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Manufacturer Lookup tools. The market research indicated that there are over 35 existing contracts and multiple vendors that currently hold F5 Networks Inc. contracts including five vendors in Group B.

9. Interested Sources.

[X] No other source has expressed written interest in supplying this item.