

## JUSTIFICATION FOR AN EXCEPTION TO FAIR OPPORTUNITY

1. Contracting Activity: Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)  
Office of Procurement and Logistics  
Technology Acquisition Center  
23 Christopher Way  
Eatontown, NJ 07724
2. Description of Action: The proposed action is for a brand name firm-fixed-priced delivery order, issued under the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Solutions for Enterprise-Wide Procurement (SEWP) V Government-Wide Acquisition Contract (GWAC) in order to refresh the current VA Cisco Multilayer Director Switch (MDS) Storage Area Network (SAN) switching infrastructure. This procurement shall include brand name Cisco hardware and internal operating software at two data centers.
3. Description of the Supplies or Services: VA, Office of Information and Technology, Information Technology Operations and Services, Service Operations, Infrastructure Operations (IO), Network Operations has a requirement for Cisco MDS 9148S switches (Qty 22), including related requirements for transceiver modules, accessory kits, power cords and MDS 9100 supervisor/fabric 5 Nexus Operating system Software release 8.1(1). The hardware and no-charge internal operating software are required to replace existing Cisco switches that are End-of-Life (EOL)/ End-of Service (EOS) and used for storage connectivity supporting the National Cemetery Administration (NCA). The period of performance shall consist of delivery of the required switches within 60 calendar days after award.
4. Statutory Authority: The statutory authority permitting an exception to fair opportunity is Section 41 U.S.C. 4106(c)(2) as implemented by Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) 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. Rationale Supporting Use of Authority Cited Above: Based on extensive market research, as described in section 8 of this document, it was determined that limited competition is available among authorized resellers for the brand required. This acquisition is for brand name Cisco MDS 9148S switches and related equipment/ software. The purpose of this procurement is to replace Cisco switches that are EOL/EOS within the current NCA Cisco switch infrastructure which currently consists exclusively of Cisco network equipment.

Currently the EOL/EOS Cisco fiber storage switches (to be replaced) are used to maintain connectivity/communication between IBM server/mainframes running Cisco AIX software and Cisco Unified Computing System (UCS) chassis to their respective drive storage arrays. The Cisco brand fiber storage switches are required to: (1) communicate with the existing Cisco UCS chassis and its respective storage arrays, and existing IBM mainframes and their associated storage and tape back-up arrays, in use at two data centers: the Quantico Information Technology Center (QITC) and the Culpeper disaster recovery site (Culpeper); (2) prevent downtime and ensuring a

seamless configuration transition at each site; and (3) allow seamless redundant continuous data backup and intercommunication between QITC and Culpeper.

Other brands such as Brocade and Juniper are not interchangeable and will not communicate with our existing Cisco UCS fiber interconnect switches that are part of the Cisco UCS chassis and IBM mainframe deployments at QITC and Culpeper. This is because (1) the UCS fiber interconnect switch configurations are completely different from the Brocade/Juniper fiber storage switch configurations, and (2) the UCS chassis will not work without communicating with UCS fiber interconnect switches that must communicate with replacement fiber storage switches using certain Cisco protocols.

At minimum, due to VA's current infrastructure, the replacement fiber storage switches are required to use two proprietary Cisco protocols: N Port Identifier Virtualization (NPIV) and Cisco Terminal Access Controller Access-Control System Plus (TACACS+). Current MDS fiber storage switches are used by both data centers to communicate between fiber interconnect switches and MDS fiber storage switches. In addition, the fiber storage switches must use the Cisco Terminal Access Controller Access-Control System Plus (TACACS+) protocol for authorization, authentication and auditing for technicians to access MDS fiber storage switches via Access Control System servers.

Juniper fiber storage switches are unable to use the Cisco NPIV and TACACS+ protocols. Brocade fiber storage switches can use NPIV but are unable to use TACACS+ without disabling Federal Information Processing Standard (FIPS) compliant mode for algorithm encryption, required by the Government. The Cisco 9148S brand name switches are the only fiber storage switches that meet all of the Government's requirements including compatibility, operability, interchangeability and uninterrupted connectivity. No hardware provider other than Cisco, through its authorized resellers, is capable of providing the required switches that are compatible with the existing switch infrastructure or to replace the current Cisco switches in use in a Cisco infrastructure. Therefore, other fiber storage switches cannot be used to replace current Cisco DS-C9148D switches that are EOL and EOS, and no other solution is interoperable or compatible with the existing Cisco infrastructure.

6. Efforts to Obtain Competition: Market research was conducted, details of which are in the market research section of this justification. This effort did not yield any additional sources that could meet the Government's requirements. It was determined, however, that limited competition is viable among authorized resellers for these brand name items that hold current NASA SEWP V GWACs. In accordance with FAR 16.505(a)(4)(iii)(A), this justification will be posted with the solicitation on the NASA SEWP V website.
7. Actions to Increase Competition: In order to remove or overcome barriers to competition in future acquisitions for this requirement, the agency will continue to perform market research to ascertain if there are changes in the marketplace that would enable future actions to be competed. Specifically, IO will continue to monitor market trends, new/emerging products, looking for compatible and more advanced technologies to meet VA needs.
8. Market Research: Government technical experts conducted market research from

August 2017 to December 2017, which consisted of reviewing similar products to ascertain if these items could meet VA's requirements. Specifically, the Government's technical experts conducted web-based research of industry websites, technical specifications and analysis of switch product offerings. This included a review of similar products offered by Juniper and Brocade. This review demonstrated that other Original Equipment Manufacturers do not provide the protocol capabilities required and are therefore not interchangeable with current Cisco switches used to connect to Cisco UCS chassis, and do not communicate with the existing Cisco UCS chassis and storage switch infrastructure, currently in use within the QITC and Culpeper fiber storage switch infrastructure. Based on the above, only the Cisco brand fiber storage switches met all of the Government's requirements.

Additional market research was conducted January 2018, by using the NASA SEWP V GWAC Market Research Tool. This tool yielded 15 contract holders of which 10 are Group B(2) Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (SDVOSB) offering Cisco brand name products. There is a reasonable expectation that limited competition exists on the NASA SEWP V GWAC amongst Group B(2) SDVOSB concerns for the Cisco MDS 9148S switches required.

9. Other Facts: None.