Public Safety Interoperable Communications Grant Program

Spring 2011

PSIC Quarterly Newsletter

Funding America's First Responders

The Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) Grant Program is a $1 billion grant program jointly administered by the U.S. Department of Commerce (DoC) National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Grant Programs Directorate (GPD). PSIC awards are assisting public safety agencies in the acquisition of, planning and coordination of, deployment of, and training for the use of interoperable communications systems.

PSIC HOT TOPIC

PSIC Extension Requests Due April 15, 2011

In February, the PSIC Program Office released guidance that outlined the process to request an extension. If interested, the State Administrative Agency (SAA) may submit an extension request to receive additional time to complete program requirements, expend funds, and complete grant closeout activities.

To request an extension, the SAA should submit a brief narrative of no more than three typed pages. The narrative should describe the following:

- Challenges that have caused delays in the implementation and/or completion of PSIC Investments
- Plan to address the issue(s) causing the delays, and the plan to complete the Investments within budget and before the new proposed deadline
- Updated project schedule (including milestones) indicating when your agency plans to complete the steps of the unfinished Investments
- Additional information supporting the need for an extension

The SAA should send the request via email to PSIC@dhs.gov by April 15, 2011, for consideration.

As a reminder, the extension will not result in additional funding for PSIC Investments. Any unexpended PSIC funds must be returned to the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

RESILIENT COMMUNICATIONS CAPABILITIES REPORT REVEALS STR INCREASE NATIONWIDE

The PSIC Grant Program released the Resilient Communications Capabilities Report on the NTIA PSIC website in April 2011. This report analyzes the use of funding allocated for strategic technology reserves (STR). The Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007, as amended, directed the PSIC Grant Program to target the need for resilient communications equipment. Specifically, Congress apportioned $75 million (of the nearly $1 billion PSIC funds available) for States and territories to establish their STRs.

The PSIC-funded STR solutions provide States and territories with the ability to recover quickly from major system-debilitating incidents and to resume communications by pre-positioning interoperable communications equipment for immediate deployment in an emergency situation or disaster.

Highlighting key technology and equipment trends and the existing STR capabilities, the Resilient Communications Capabilities Report identifies the common STR characteristics across the Nation. Additionally, it provides a detailed overview of each State and territory's STR Investment.

Most STRs include both mobile deployable elements, including radio caches, mobile gateways, and mobile deployable infrastructure, as well as advanced technology characteristics, incorporating Project 25, Internet Protocol, and satellite technologies into those deployable elements to expand functionality.

Grantees have already deployed these reserves to respond to local incidents. For example, when Hurricane Earl struck the east coast in 2010, North Carolina deployed its PSIC-funded STR radio equipment trailers to Currituck and Carteret Counties to aid public safety and support evacuations.

These 14-foot utility trailers contained Pelican cases for 80 radios that were programmed for the counties' radio system frequency bands. The trailers also include rack chargers, a portable generator, and a workbench with basic tools. North Carolina's STR enabled interoperability and supported the State's evacuation efforts throughout the hurricane.

"The PSIC grant has allowed North Carolina to grow its STR program via the purchase of equipment staged strategically throughout the State for maximum benefit in times of need."

—Tanya Luter
Project Manager, North Carolina's Voice Interoperability Plan for Emergency Responders

During the H1N1 pandemic in 2009, the Rhode Island Department of Health Operations Center, which was located in a building's basement, had trouble communicating with its employees located at various vaccine distribution points.

PSIC GRANTEE PULSE CHECKS

Over the past six months, the PSIC Grant Program has been conducting "pulse checks"—informal conversations—with grantees to learn more about their project implementation status, any issues they have run into, and how the PSIC Program Office can help the grantees successfully complete their Investments as the September 30, 2011 deadline nears. If you haven't participated in a PSIC pulse check yet and are interested in having this informal discussion with the Program Office, please contact PSIC@dhs.gov.

To help the Center, the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency distributed its PSIC-funded radio cache to the State's Department of Health. The STR was integral to the Incident Command Structure at the distribution locations. Effective communications during Rhode Island's vaccine distribution effort contributed to Rhode Island having the highest H1N1 vaccination rate in the country.

For the full Resilient Communications Capabilities Report and more information on other PSIC success stories, please visit the NTIA PSIC website at http://www.ntia.doc.gov/psic or contact us at PSIC@dhs.gov.

STR Highlights

Purchased communication capabilities vehicles equipped with modern satellite data and voice communications, and strategically located them throughout the State to ensure a response time of four hours or less to any point in Nevada.

Purchased 175 P25 radios that are compatible with the existing statewide communications network to support public safety agencies across the State in the event of a communications site failure or a major incident.

Purchased 800 MHz radios for eight State agencies that previously relied on cellular and Very High Frequency radios for day-to-day operations, thereby providing interoperability with the State's 800 MHz system and improving local and regional communications capabilities.

STAY CONNECTED WITH PSIC

- PSIC Grantee Success Stories and Lessons Learned are available at http://www.ntia.doc.gov/psic/news.html.
- Please direct any PSIC Grant Program questions or feedback to PSIC@dhs.gov.