



## TECH FIRMS VIE FOR CONTRACT, TAP INTO CITY

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ST. PETERSBURG - More than 50 tech firm hopefuls packed a city of St. Petersburg pre-request for proposal conference on Oct. 29.

The business Holy Grail is a \$4.6-million Enterprise Resource Planning system and implementation services budget, excluding hardware, part of the city's Information Technology Strategic Plan.

It's winner take all for this contract with one company, which could partner with others, submitting the bid. City officials want to integrate multiple applications and databases.

"No" was the one-word response when attendees asked if minority firms, state negotiated agreement pricing schedules or HubZone-certified companies would receive any preference.

Bill Foster, St. Petersburg city councilman, encourages partnerships involving local companies.

"Anytime we can benefit local businesses, I think it's a plus," he said. "As far as criteria in RFPs, that's not something we really look at. The primary considerations are past performance, past delivery of goods and services, and the bottom line. Our job is to spend the tax dollars wisely."

Potential out-of-area competitors at the conference were: Lawson Software Inc, headquartered in Minneapolis with offices in Atlanta; Boulder, Colo.-based Solbourne Computer Inc.; ea Consulting Inc. in Folsom, Calif., and representatives from tech giant Hewlett-Packard Co.

So as the process proceeds and local and state-based companies watch contracts head out of the area, the city of St. Petersburg will face scrutiny, along with other Florida government agencies, as state-based technology companies and their backers seek government contracts.

Tampa Bay area technology companies at the St. Petersburg gathering included The Max Group Inc. in Tampa and K.Tek Systems Inc. in Clearwater.

Randy Wadle, president and chief executive officer at NetWise Technology Inc. in St. Petersburg was absent. St. Petersburg Mayor Rick Baker called Wadle a friend and "key adviser" during an April interview with The Business Journal Serving Greater Tampa Bay.

NetWise decided not to participate in the ERP meeting but supports the city's efforts and the ERP bid process, Wadle said.

"I think they need to look at it from a competitive perspective and all things being equal, I think it would be great if a local company could get it," he said. "But the city is looking at a high-dollar, high-complexity project."

If something goes wrong, the taxpayers could be on the city's case, said Wadle.

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"I think they need to look at local proposals, but there's a lot at stake from their perspective," he said. "They really need to choose the best response."

### **A broader perspective.**

Meanwhile, technology contracts at the state level continue to receive close attention, following Enterprise Florida's Oct. 16 announcement that the state-supported agency would spend \$1.45 million promoting Florida as the technology "Innovation Hub of the Americas."

The Miami Herald recently reported that Neil Bush, brother of Gov. Jeb Bush, operates Ignite Inc., a Texas-based technology company aligning itself to bid on a Florida Department of Education software contract.

In September, the State Technology Office granted a \$2.9-million contract to STI Knowledge Inc. in Atlanta to build an enterprise help desk to support state agencies. Two Tampa Bay area companies, Enterprise Management Solutions Inc. and Blue Ocean Software Inc. made the top five bidders list. Mountain View, Calif.-based Intuit Inc. acquired Blue Ocean in August.

Advantages come to the state when it contracts with a local company, but that shouldn't be the basis for a decision, said David Weiss, Blue Ocean's president and chief operating officer.

Product functionality and price also are considerations, he said.

"I think we did a good job getting visibility (during the help desk contract selection process)," said Weiss. "It's a significant statement, I don't think it's because we were a local company. The solution we offer for a help desk is the market leader. I think we were given the ability to participate because we were the market leader in that space."

State Technology Office public records dealing with the Resonate Inc. bid finalists and contract value were requested by The Business Journal three weeks ago but not provided by Carla Gaskin, the technology office's communications director. Resonate, a publicly traded company headquartered in Sunnyvale, Calif., provides software support to the state's official MyFlorida.com Web portal.

"It was done in a prior administration so the information is not as accessible as the STI Knowledge contract information was," Gaskin said of the public records. And Convergys Corp., headquartered in Cincinnati with sites in Orlando and Jacksonville, received a seven-year, \$280-million contract in August from the state Department of Management Services to provide human resources services. Epix Holdings Corp., headquartered in Tampa, made the final bid list.

### **Pushing in-state**

There could be opportunities for Tampa Bay area companies to connect to the St. Petersburg ERP bid backbone, said Drew Hegarty, account executive at Ciber Inc., headquartered in Greenwood Village, Colo., with offices in Tampa.

Hegarty represented Ciber at the pre-proposal conference. He said the major software vendors appeared to be open to partnering with other system integrators and smaller software vendors for bid submissions.

As for accessing approved vendor lists for local, state and national technology contracts, it's more a matter of paperwork, time frames and procurement processes than difficulty, said Hegarty.

The paperwork greeting contract seekers at the St. Petersburg gathering measured about 1-inch thick.

"The first thing organizations like ourselves and other national companies do is get on what's called a state term contract," he said. "It can take three to six months depending on what's going on."

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