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January 3, 2012

To: Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, Chairman
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

From: William T Fujioka
Chief Executive Officer

REPORT BACK ON OPTIONS FOR BROADCASTING BOARD MEETINGS AND THE REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS PROCESS

On November 22, 2011, on motion by Supervisor Antonovich, your Board directed the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to review the current contract for broadcasting the weekly Board of Supervisors' meetings and report back in 30 days on the following:

1) Options for an RFP process to utilize the County Channel to broadcast the weekly Board of Supervisors' meetings as well as other important County events;

2) Pros and cons on all available options that would combine both efforts above, as well as keeping them separate; and

3) The current delays with the Request for Proposals (RFP) process for the contract for broadcasting the weekly Board of Supervisors' meetings.

Background

In February 1995, the Board of Supervisors (Board) approved the execution of an agreement with Network Television Time (NTT), to provide the County with a production system for videotaping the hearings and meetings of the Board. Since that time, a number of amendments have been made to the NTT contract, leveraging their expertise and familiarity with the County's video broadcast operations.

In 2002, NTT was asked to provide additional services related to the implementation of a video-transcript project that was approved by the Board.

In 2003, the Board approved NTT's engineering and installation of a fiber-optic video cable and video distribution system to provide the media with the capability of plugging their cameras into the Board meeting from either the Boardroom dais or from outside the building where the television news media park their trucks, simultaneous, live, closed-captioning of the Board meetings, simultaneous Spanish-language translation of the Board meetings, and the establishment of preliminary and certified transcripts of the Board meetings. Also in 2003, the Board approved the purchase of equipment to transition the broadcast control room to a digital infrastructure because of a federally imposed mandate. NTT was responsible for the engineering and installation of the equipment purchased.

In December 2003, an RFP was issued for all services that were being provided to the County under the existing NTT contract. A number of complications arose during the RFP process and a protest was filed and investigated. In 2004, the RFP was abandoned and the services with NTT were continued under the existing terms.

Also in 2004, the Board requested that the NTT contract be amended to permit NTT to install a plasma screen in the Board hearing room so that the public can better view the proceedings and Board voting on non-consent agenda items.

In November 2007, an amendment was approved by the Board to name a new CEO Project Administrator to oversee the NTT contract and a new Board Executive Officer as the Project Director on the NTT contract. During that same period, the County embarked on the remote video conferencing project, which resulted in the live participation of constituents during Board meetings, remotely from the Lancaster Public Library. Subsequent to that time, the limited resources available have been focused on the launch and implementation of the County's first-ever government programming channel the "LA County Channel."

Discussion

1) Options for an RFP process to utilize the County Channel to broadcast the weekly Board of Supervisors' meetings as well as other important County events

Since the initial issuance of a contract for audio/video production coverage of the Board of Supervisors meetings in 1995, multiple Board-requested service enhancements have been implemented. As a result, the seamless integration of the following components

now being provided by the current Contractor (NTT) will have to be required to ensure uninterrupted delivery of these essential services:

Key Components of Current Services Provided:

A. Live video coverage of Board meetings
B. Preparation of on-screen graphics including agenda items
C. Master video of the meeting plus video copy to KLCS for rebroadcast
D. Transcripts of meetings: preliminary & corrected transcripts
E. Closed captioning of the broadcast and display board in Board Room during the meeting
F. Simultaneous Spanish language translation
G. Telephone call-in line of live Board meeting, in English and Spanish
H. Maintenance of the "Hollywood Hub" connection for broadcasters' pick-up of the meeting
I. Preparation and integration of the web stream for the video & corrected transcript
J. Overall engineering, integration, service and maintenance of complex systems and equipment, hardware and software.

The County Channel carries the Board meetings live and repeated throughout the programming week. Additionally, the Board meetings are carried on LA36, the City of Santa Monica's channel dedicated to the County, and on broadcast channel KLCS. Given the fledgling status of the County Channel and limited staffing (only 1 full-time employee), it is not advisable to add the operation of the Board meetings to the existing staff portfolio. However, the ability to oversee, make use of the County-owned equipment for other County programming, and have unfettered access to related resources, is essential. Any new or amended contract should include such provisions.

Broadcasting Technology Replacement & Upgrade Needed:

As referenced in the background and chronology above, the current equipment used to produce the Board of Supervisors meetings is aged. The majority of the equipment was put into service in 2003 and is past its useful life. Frequent equipment failures have been occurring and many components are no longer under warranty or supported by the manufacturers. This equipment is an integral part of the services delivered under the existing contract. Therefore, it is recommended that a project to upgrade the existing Broadcast Technology be designed into the RFP for overall services. This will allow the County to ensure that the Contractor who provides these essential services to the County, is directly involved in and accountable for the process of equipment selection and integration issues, since they will be responsible for the service and maintenance of these systems.

2) Pros and cons on all available options that would combine both efforts above, as well as keeping them separate. The following options were considered and discussed among staff of the CEO and Board Executive Office:

Options:

1. Prepare an RFP with all current components.

Pro: Would maintain the status quo and ensure seamless operation.

Con: Would not provide for urgently needed system upgrades and technology replacements.

2. Prepare an RFP with all current components; include provision for County CEO staff to be trained in the use of the meeting broadcast operations (camera operation, director role, etc.).

Pro: Would maintain and expand upon the status quo to ensure seamless operation and would provide an opportunity for trained County staff to use its facilities for purposes beyond the Board meetings.

Con: Could over-extend the single position currently assigned to the County Channel and dilute focus on other essential County Channel operations.

3. Have Board Executive Office separately oversee Transcripts and Captioning

Pro: Would likely achieve greater cost-efficiencies by directly and competitively securing a vendor to provide transcripts and closed captioning, instead of using a subcontractor or subordinate personnel, which typically the contractor passes-through to the County in the form of additional administrative overhead.

Con: Segments essential core services that need to be coordinated in their delivery and timing; and would shift the burden of coordination of services from a single consolidated vendor to the County, requiring the County to oversee multiple vendors. This could add greater internal administrative costs for the County and might increase the likelihood of disputes between vendors in the event of service delivery issues. The Board Executive Office does not support this Option.

4. Prepare separate RFPs to be issued and due simultaneously in the following areas:
    - Video broadcast, rebroadcast & master copies to KLCS, including related graphics and agenda items on screen
    - Transcripts and captioning services
    - Spanish-language translation services
    - System installation, integration, maintenance and service

Pro: Would likely achieve greater cost-efficiencies by directly and competitively securing separate subject area-expert vendors, instead of using a subcontractor or subordinate personnel, which typically the contractor passes-through to the County in the form of additional administrative overhead.

Con: Segments essential core services that need to be coordinated in their execution, delivery and timing; and would shift the burden of coordination of services from a single consolidated vendor to the County, requiring the County to oversee multiple vendors. This could add greater internal administrative costs for the County and might increase finger-pointing between vendors in the event of service delivery issues. The Board Executive Office does not support this Option.

5. Prepare an RFP per Options #1 or #2 above, and hire an additional full-time videographer/photographer dedicated for the County Channel and Board meetings.

Pro: Would maintain the status quo and ensure seamless operation plus provide the County Channel and Board meetings with the additional support of urgently needed personnel to expand and enhance coverage and use of County resources.

Con: Would increase the County's cost for the added personnel.

6. Integrate the Board Broadcasting technology replacement and upgrade project into the RFP.

Pro: Would ensure that the existing Broadcast Technology and upgrades/replacement are designed into the RFP for overall service coordination. This would increase the likelihood of a well-coordinated services and successful network integration, and would give the County a single entity to hold responsible for installation, service delivery, coordination and maintenance of these systems. Also, this would give the County the ability to cost-effectively address the problem of antiquated systems and equipment that currently are out-of-warranty, no longer supported by manufacturers, and/or otherwise costlier to repair than replace.

Con: Technology replacement and upgrades will be a costly investment.

3) The current delays with the Request for Proposals (RFP) process for the contract for broadcasting the weekly Board of Supervisors' meetings

The CEO has consulted with the Executive Office and ISD to consider the best, most efficient and effective process, particularly in light of the limited window of opportunity in which any transition and upgrade could occur (i.e., during a 2-3 week break in the Board's regular meeting schedule, which typically only occurs in December). The existing contract has many components and there are complex inter-relationships between the components. Additionally, there is significant need for comprehensive broadcasting technology replacement and upgrade of existing equipment. After analysis of the County's need, and in consultation with the Board's Executive Office, it is recommended that the issuance of a RFP should include both the provision of the existing services, and the proposer's involvement in the design and engineering of the planned broadcasting technology replacement and upgrade. This is advisable because whoever receives the contract award will be responsible for the support and maintenance of the new or upgraded equipment and systems.

Further, because of the complexity of this RFP, expert assistance in contracting, engineering, and technology need to be secured, in order to successfully update the contract and technology.

Recommendations

To ensure a contracting process that maximizes and enhances the County's investment in these Board meeting broadcast related services and minimizes the disruption of any transition or system upgrade, the following is recommended:

A. Secure expert assistance in contracting, engineering and technology, in order to successfully update the contract and technology, given the limited window of opportunity in which to transition and upgrade the services, equipment and facilities to be specified in the RFP.

B. Prepare a consolidated RFP that includes the suite of services currently provided as well as the replacement/upgrade of the existing Broadcast Technology to be designed, installed, operated and maintained. (Options #1 and #6).

C. Establish a timeline that identifies all components in the RFP, contractor transition and equipment upgrade.

D. Hire an additional full-time videographer/photographer dedicated for the County Chanel and Board meetings, and ensure access to the County-owned equipment and facilities related to the Board meetings broadcast, whenever needed. (Option #5)

If you have any questions, please contact me or your staff may contact Susan Herman, Senior Manager, at 213-974-6807 or sherman@ceo.lacounty.gov.

WTF:RA:SH
FT:JR

c: Executive Office, Board of Supervisors
County Counsel