INTERNET ACCESS AND DATA TRANSMISSION SERVICES
Request for Proposal Number #ESCNJ 23/24-19
RFP TERM: 1/19/24 through 1/18/27
New Jersey Digital Readiness for Learning and Assessment Program (NJDRLAP)

EVALUATIONS

The Educational Services Commission of New Jersey (ESCNJ), serving as lead agency for this initiative, conducted a request for proposals (RFP) using the competitive contracting process with prior approval from the New Jersey Division of Local Government Services. The ESCNJ received six responses to this RFP, all of which were deemed responsive and evaluated.

Evaluation Committee
The ESCNJ evaluated the responses for legal and technical compliance using an Evaluation Committee and the services of Dellicker Strategies, LLC. The Evaluation Committee was appointed in accordance with Section 2.6.1 of the RFP to follow objective and standardized procedures in selecting the successful providers. Members of the committee included Anthony La Marco, ESCNJ School Business Administrator/Board Secretary (Chairman); Robert Reinke, I.T. Coordinator, ESCNJ; and Michael Gritz, Assistant Director of Technology.

Dellicker Strategies provided technical and pricing analysis of the proposals for the benefit of the Evaluation Committee. In addition, the ESCNJ uses the services of E-Rate Central to ensure compliance with all E-rate provisions associated with this procurement.

After reviewing the proposals, committee members completed a consolidated scoring matrix for each respondent in accordance with the Evaluation and Ranking Methodology section of the RFP. The ESCNJ Business Administrator, serving as the issuing officer, compiled the scores and consulted with Dellicker Strategies and E-Rate Central on any remaining issues that might affect the award.

RFP Structure

The RFP is organized into three primary categories:

Category A: Bundled Dedicated Internet Access
This category refers to bundled Internet access (port and transport) awarded by region according to specified criteria. The schools in Category A require certain services delivered to particular locations as determined by surveys submitted to ESCNJ and existing arrangements with current providers.

Regional groupings contain 518 school districts (or school entities) organized as follows:

- Northwestern Region A: Sussex and Warren (28)
- Northeastern Region B: Bergen, Morris, and Passaic (134)
- Metro Region C: Essex, Hudson, and Union (77)
- Central Region D: Middlesex, Monmouth, and Somerset (85)
- Southern Region E: Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Hunterdon, Mercer, Ocean, and Salem (194)

For Category A, the "lowest-priced" offering is defined as the lowest total cost for the base proposal by region, full term, adjusted for any omitted schools. Per the RFP, this calculation may include multiple providers if a combined offering can deliver the best value to members. The Evaluation Committee evaluated the provider Base Proposals to make the awards.

Category B: Bundled Intra-District Wide Area Network Services
This category is for school districts with multiple campus locations such as outlying elementary schools or middle schools that need to be connected via high-speed telecom services for data exchange. It contains 72 districts that submitted specific service requirements to connect up to 325 total locations. In accordance with the RFP, the ESCNJ reviewed Category B proposals as district-by-district bundles, determining the lowest-priced proposals for each district. The Evaluation Committee evaluated the Base Proposals in accordance with the RFP.

Category C: Independent Services
In Category C, services are sold individually and member-by-member, not in bundled groups as in Category A/B. Services in Category C are: Dedicated Internet Access, Intra-District WAN (data transmission services), Hybrid-SD WAN services, and Non-dedicated Internet access. Any ESCNJ current or future member or associate member, including those also listed in Category A or B, may purchase services from Category C. The Evaluation Committee selected one provider for each school district (or school entity) for each service. District jurisdictions also serve as boundaries for offering Category C services to municipal (non-K-12) ESCNJ members. To determine the lowest-priced offerings for Category C, the ESCNJ considered the average unit price from among the most popular term and bandwidth combinations for each service and jurisdiction, as described in the RFP.

To support this procurement, the ESCNJ filed two separate E-rate applications on behalf of its eligible members. The specific, grouped services in Categories A/B are represented by FCC 470 # 210001792. The independent services in Category C are included in FCC 470 # 210001793.

All categories of this RFP explicitly allow buyers to change/upgrade services after the initial purchase order, in accordance with the RFP. For all services in this RFP, the ESCNJ has made one exclusive award per service category: Cat A bundled Internet (specified); Cat B bundled intra-district WAN (specified); and Cat C independent Internet, intra-district WAN, hybrid/SD WAN and non-dedicated Internet. The following is a summary of the responses and Evaluation Committee recommendations:

1. Lightpath
   Composite Score: 86
   Lightpath had no material flaws in its response and demonstrated the technical ability to provide the services requested. The company referenced their extensive regional fiber network and their substantial portfolio of existing K-12 and municipal customers across New Jersey. Lightpath already provides Internet and intra-district WAN services to many ESCNJ members, especially in Northern and Central New Jersey. Lightpath was among the lowest-priced providers, especially at popular service levels, and offered services in all categories.

2. Cherry Road Technologies
   Composite Score: 77
   Cherry Road had no material flaws in its response and demonstrated the technical ability to provide the services requested. The company describes itself as a consulting firm, even though it offers telecommunications services through its backbone partner, GTT Telecom. The company offers services throughout the State of New Jersey in each category of service except SD WAN by leasing transport from third-party providers. Their pricing contains estimates for taxes and fees instead of calculated rates. Many offerings contain a non-recurring cost for service installation, although the up-front fees are relatively low.

3. Comcast Business Communications LLC
   Composite Score: 90

Comcast had no material flaws in its response and demonstrated the technical ability to provide the requested services. The company's proposal offers highly flexible service combinations, flexible terms and multiple options. Comcast currently serves many of the districts named in this RFP, especially in the northeastern, eastern and southern regions. Comcast delivers services using its own fiber network throughout the service territory. Comcast's proposal was the lowest-priced offering for most Internet and intra-district WAN scenarios with the most coverage of any provider.

4. Data Network Solutions (DNS)
   Composite Score: 78
   DNS had no material flaws in its response and demonstrated the technical ability to provide the requested services. Their proposal is for all requested components of Category C. Dedicated Internet access would be provided via reseller agreements. The intra-district WAN offering is via wireless telecommunications, but DNS cannot guarantee availability of the service at the pricing proposed to all the sites identified. DNS proposed non-dedicated Internet access service but did not specify where it is available, making it unworkable to award those services. DNS currently serves several districts named in this RFP and operates across New Jersey.

5. Planet Networks
   Composite Score: 83
   Planet Networks had no material flaws in its response and demonstrated the technical ability to provide the requested services. Planet Networks is a New Jersey-based telecom company and internet service provider that continues to build facilities across the state, especially in hard-to-serve areas. Planet Network responded to all categories of the RFP in Mercer, Sussex and Warren Counties with customized private fiber to each proposed customer. The company's proposal is not the lowest-priced, but it does offer a high quality technical design.

6. Xtel Communications, Inc.
   Composite Score: 87
   Xtel had no material flaws in its response and demonstrated the technical ability to provide the requested services. Xtel focused on Category A Internet access for this RFP, delivering low-cost solutions and reliable service. The company uses extensive third-party agreements with facilities-based providers to deliver flexible and affordable service options to all regions of New Jersey. Xtel already serves several schools in this RFP and the company continues to expand its K-12 and municipal customer base across the state of New Jersey.

Conclusion: Six respondents were determined to have both the ability to provide various levels of service as outlined in their responses and were deemed responsive and compliant. The final recommendations are based on what we believe provides the highest level of service at the best price.

Recommendations
Based on the evaluations, it is recommended that awards be made to the following respondents based on the attached award summary for a three-year term from 1/19/24 through 1/18/27, with the option to extend for one two-year term or two one-year term, as permitted by NJ law. Details are included in the attached spreadsheets. For each service, awards are for any eligible combination proposed (e.g. base and alternate, if offered). Awards also include add-ons within the category, for example variations with additional security support (e.g. DDoS protections). For Category C offerings, vendors may offer the awarded services to any municipal (non-K-12) ESCNJ member located within the official boundaries of the awarded district. All awarded vendors are identified in the 2023 Consolidated Awards document. For specific pricing, refer to the applicable vendor pricing spreadsheets.

For Category A, regional bundled Dedicated Internet Access awards by vendor are as follows:

A. Northwestern Region A: Sussex and Warren- Planet Networks (28)
B. Northeastern Region B: Bergen, Morris, and Passaic- Lightpath (87) and Xtel (44) with Comcast (2) and Planet Networks (1)
C. Metro Region C: Essex, Hudson, and Union- Comcast (65) with Xtel (6) Lightpath (5) and Cherry Road (1)
D. Central Region D: Middlesex, Monmouth, and Somerset- Comcast (46) Lightpath (22) and Xtel (15) with Cherry Road (2)
E. Southern Region E: Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Hunterdon, Mercer, Ocean, and Salem- Comcast (189) with Lightpath (3) Xtel (1) and Cherry Road (1)

Refer to the Consolidated Awards document for Category B and Category C Awards.

The vendor breakout of awards is as follows. Refer to the spreadsheets for details.

Lightpath

● Cat A Bundled Dedicated Internet Access (117); Cat B Bundled Intra-District Wide Area Network Services (8); Cat C Independent Services- Dedicated Internet (173); Cat C Independent Services- Intra-District WANs (173) and Cat C Independent Services- Hybrid/SD WANs (174)

Cherry Road

● Cat A Bundled Dedicated Internet Access (4) Cat C Non-Dedicated Internet Access (233)

Comcast

● Cat A Bundled Dedicated Internet Access (302); Cat B Bundled Intra-District Wide Area Network Services (67); Cat C Independent Services- Dedicated Internet (430); Cat C Independent Services- Intra-District WANs (602) and Cat C Independent Services- Hybrid/SD WANs (533) and Cat C Non-Dedicated Internet Access (574)

Data Network Solutions

● Cat C Independent Services- Internet (69) and Cat C Independent Services- Hybrid/SD WANs (68)

Planet Networks

● Cat A Bundled Dedicated Internet Access (29); Cat B Bundled Intra-District Wide Area Network (1); Cat C Independent Services- Dedicated Internet (32); Cat C Independent Services- Intra-District WANs (32) and Cat C Independent Services- Hybrid/SD WANs (32)

Xtel

● Cat A Bundled Dedicated Internet Access (66) and Cat B Bundled Intra-District Wide Area Network Services (1).

The ESCNJ wishes to thank all the school districts and municipalities who contributed to this effort, along with all the service providers who worked hard to deliver proposals.